

Columbia University
School of International & Public Affairs
Fall 2021

Tech & Tactics for Innovative Policymaking

Or how to get things done in government and other risk-averse institutions

Professor: Dr. Alexis Wichowski
Course #: INAF U6209
Session: Thursdays, 6:10-8pm
Location: TBD
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WHAT IT IS

This course will equip the next generation of policymakers with the skills, strategies, and savvy they'll need to secure lasting change in their governments. Building on a foundation that extracts practical guidance from political philosophers and public servants, the course will draw from behind-the-scenes experiences of how policy is developed using technology and tools. It will also provide students with a suite of resources for their own careers with communication, persuasion, and political tactics that will empower them to navigate the complex and frustrating bureaucracies in any government agency or risk-averse institutions.

WHAT WE'LL COVER

The course will start with a macroscopic overview of the political philosophy behind government policy-making, studying what happens inside government by mapping the motivations and forces that drive government decision-making. It will take an overview of what happens outside government, studying the role of external pressures, including party politics, citizen advocacy, private sector interests, and the 24-7 news cycle.

The second half of the semester will focus on hard and soft skills necessary to create, implement, and ensure lasting policy change, including: using technology as a framework for change, applying tools for evidence-based policy making; leveraging crises, willing partners, and targets of opportunity; and how-to sessions ranging from memo-drafting and op-ed writing to persuasive pitches for authority figures to mastering the unspoken rules of bureaucracy navigation.

WHY IT MATTERS

Once in government or any large institution, there's very little practical training offered to those who work there on how to convert innovative ideas into effective, lasting policy. This course will serve as a sort of tech-focused forensic study of political and cultural forces that impact policymaking, training students in the specific, tangible, applicable tools, tricks, and tactics that fuel how things actually get done in government and other risk-averse institutions.

WHY ME

I've served in government for over a decade, both at the federal and city level, at multiple agencies. Starting as a mid-level Program Analyst in the Obama administration's State Department and working my way up to my

current position as Deputy Chief Technology Officer for Innovation for the City of New York, I've learned in the field -- the hard way, through trial and error -- how to write, pitch, persuade, and partner for successful real-world policy outcomes. To share and reflect on what I've learned, I've also been teaching, writing, and presenting about this topic for years, with articles and keynote speeches including "Hack the Bureaucracy: A User's Guide to Getting Things Done In Government," (*GovExec*), "What Government Can & Should Learn from Hacker Culture," (*The Atlantic*), and "'There Are No Hard Problems': Embracing Low- and No-Tech Solutions for Government Innovation" (*Google News Initiative - São Paulo, Brazil*).

COURSE FORMAT

Classes will consist of brief background lectures and in-depth discussions on weekly topics and ongoing research projects. Teams of students will be assigned responsibility for one class over the course of the semester to lead discussions and provide timely examples illustrating practical application of reading topics.

Active participation is required. To participate effectively, students are expected to attend each course, having thoroughly digested the readings and prepared to discuss.

Classes will consist of:

- Short student pitch: 2-minute rapid-fire policy pitches to the "boss" (details provided in 1st class)
- Background lecture
- Breakout sessions
- Discussion

A list of readings can be found below. Readings may be modified with advance notice.

ASSIGNMENTS

You all know how to write academic essays. Let's move on.

The goal for writing assignments in this course is to:

- Give you practice in the kinds of writing that will be useful in your careers
- Make you better writers in general
- (Ideally) get you published

To that end, there are 4 major assignments:

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|---|---|
| - Policy paper -> talking points (~500 words) | convert complex policy document into plain language talking points |
| - Op-ed (~800 words) | opinion piece on key concepts from class |
| - TP presentation + Q&A (~1-3 min) | rapid-fire presentation, Q&A (see assignment #1) |
| - "What Next" policy memo (~3-5K words) | identify a key emerging challenge in government innovation. Write & present a policy memo that presents options for how to deal with it |

The goal for all writing assignments is deepen your understanding of your professional goals in relation to class topics. Rubrics and suggested topics will be provided, but specific topics will be chosen by the student and approved by the professor. Students are encouraged to expand upon one or two themes close to their professional interests for all assignments.

GRADING

Daily participation (rapid-fire pitch, discussion leading, attendance)	30% (10% each)
Policy paper --> TP conversion	15%
Op-ed	10%
TP presentation + Q&A	15% (7.5% each)
“What Next” policy memo / presentation	30% (20%, 10%)

ATTENDANCE, LATENESS, & PARTICIPATION

Class discussions require active participation and thus attendance. Absences will be excused in case of unavoidable conflicts (eg conference attendance, job interviews), medical emergencies, technical issues, and other similar conflicts. Students are expected to make such issues known to the instructor as early as possible. Attendance will be taken at the start of class. If you are not on time, you may be marked absent. Don't be late.

OFFICE HOURS

Office hours are available by request. Every effort will be made to schedule office hours within 48 hours of the request, pending scheduling availability between the student and the professor. All discussions during office hours will remain confidential.

DEADLINES

Deadlines are provided to ensure timely progress and fair standards across the class. Paper extensions will not be granted barring exceptional circumstances. Papers must be uploaded to Courseworks before class begins on date papers are due.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT

The School of International & Public Affairs does not tolerate cheating and/or plagiarism in any form. Those students who violate the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct will be subject to the Dean's Disciplinary Procedures. Read the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct [here](#).

Please familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. The School provides some useful resources online; we strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these various styles before conducting your research – details [here](#). Violations of the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct should be reported to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

COURSE SCHEDULE & READINGS

Articles can be downloaded at awichowski.com or Courseworks.

*Books indicated by ** must be procured by the student.*

CLASS #1: OVERVIEW

What we talk about when we talk about innovation in government. Overview of course syllabus & assignments.

DUE: --

ASSIGNED: (Handout to be provided) Details and dates for student rapid-fire pitches

CLASS #2: FOUNDATIONS

Political philosophy on what it means to govern and be governed, to be a citizen in a democracy, and the core responsibilities of the public servant

**Habermas, J. (1962/1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (Ch. 2, "Social structures of the public sphere, pp. 27-56. Ch. 3, "Political functions of the public sphere," pp. 57-88). Cambridge: MIT Press.

Madison, J. (1788). Federalist No. 39, "[The conformity of the Plan to Republican Principles](#)"

Putnam, J. (2016). "[The tech geeks burden](#)," *TechCrunch*.

Government Digital Service UK - [Service Standards](#)

DUE: Pitches from 3 students

ASSIGNED: (Handout to be provided) Talking points conversion

CLASS #3: GOVERNING IN 2020

How-to guides and personal accounts of how innovative government policy-making actually works; how to navigate and conquer the bureaucracy

**Richard Haas, *The Bureaucratic Entrepreneur*. (Ch1, pp. 1-12 "Finding Your Way"; Ch. 3, pp. 55-79, "North: Those for Whom You Work." Brookings Institution.

O'Reilly, T. (2010). "[Government as a platform](#)" (Ch. 2, pp. 11-39) Open Government, O'Reilly Media

Wichowski, A. (2017). "[Hack the bureaucracy: a user's guide to getting things done in government](#)," *GovExec*

(OPTIONAL) Observatory of Public Sector Innovation. [Embracing Innovation in Government](#)

DUE: Pitches from 3 students; Talking points conversion

ASSIGNED: (Handout provided) "What's next" policy paper how-to & date

CLASS #4: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF POLICYMAKING

Overcoming human obstacles in policymaking. Mapping the motivations and forces that drive government decision-making

****Robert Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice*. Ch 6 pp. 178-202 “Authority”; Ch. 7 pp. 203-232 “Scarcity,” Allyn & Bacon.**

The New America Foundation, [*Getting the Work Done: How Innovation Really Works In Government*](#)

****Joseph Nye, *Soft Power*. Ch. 1 pp. 1-32 “The Changing Nature of Power,” Public Affairs.**

DUE: Pitches from 3 students

ASSIGNED: (Handout to be provided) Final project/presentation how-to & dates

CLASS #5: POLITICS VS DATA

Navigating the need to account for political pressures that ignores the data. Accounting for external pressures, including party politics, citizen advocacy, private sector interests, and the 24-7 news cycle.

Noveck, B. (2010) “[The single point of failure.](#)” (Ch. 4, pp.49-69) *Open Government*, O’Reilly Media

Caimey, P. (2017). “[The politics of evidence-based policy making](#),” Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, Oxford University Press.

Entman, R. & Stonbely, S. (2018). “[Political Scandals as a Democratic Challenge | Blunders, Scandals, and Strategic Communication in U.S. Foreign Policy: Benghazi vs. 9/11.](#)” *International Journal of Communication*, Vol 12.

Bracken, M. (Apr 8, 2019). “[Digital Transformation is a Leadership Problem](#),” Medium.

DUE: Pitches from 3 students

ASSIGNED: (Handout provided) Op-ed writing tips & how-to on pitching media outlets

CLASS #6: EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY MAKING

How to use evidence to strengthen policy making

(2018). “[The Evidence Based Policy Making Resource Center](#),” Pew Charitable Trusts (“Program Assessment,” “Budget Development,” “Implementation Oversight,” “Outcome Monitoring,” “Targeted Evaluation”)

“[Setting goals and developing specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objectives](#),” Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Rooney, J. & Vanden Heuvel, L. (2004). "[Root Cause Analysis for Beginners](#)," *Quality Progress*
Wilson, Bill. "[Root cause analysis articles](#)," (Meaning of Root Cause I & II, Phases of Root Cause Analysis)

DUE: Pitches from 3 students; Op-ed

ASSIGNED: --

CLASS #7: DIGITAL GOVERNMENT & DATA ANALYTICS

Ushering digital transformation into government & incorporating basic data analytics to further policy-making goals

Numanović, A. (2017). "[Data Science: the next frontier for policy making](#)," *Policy Hub*

Gover, J. (2018). "[How to do data analytics in government](#)," *Government Technology*

(Explore) Harvard Kennedy School Ash Innovation Center [Civic Analytics Network Solutions Search](#)

DUE: Pitches from 3 students

ASSIGNED: --

CLASS #8: WORKSHOP – PITCHING, PERSUASION, AND THE ART OF THE MEMO

Memo-drafting and quick pitches to persuade authority figures; mastering the unspoken rules of bureaucracy navigation to ensure your ideas stick

Orwell, G. (1946). "[Politics and the English Language](#)," *Horizons*

**Heath, C. *Made to Stick*. Ch.1, pp. 3-24. "What Sticks," Random House.

(1999). "[How to craft a tight, persuasive memo](#)," *Business Management Daily*

DUE: Pitches from 3 students

ASSIGNED: Prep for Talking Points Presentation

CLASS #9: TALKING POINTS PRESENTATION

DUE: Presentation

ASSIGNED: Readings on guest speakers

CLASS #10: GUEST SPEAKERS FROM THE FIELD

DUE: Questions for guest speakers

ASSIGNED: -

CLASS #11: SO WHAT?

Applying innovation in government lessons to actual work in the field in government and any other change-averse institution

DUE: Pitches from 3 students

Lincoln, A. (1863). [The Gettysburg Address](#)

Obama, B. (2004). [Democratic National Convention Keynote Address](#).

Kalil, Thomas. (2017). “[Policy Entrepreneurship at the White House](#)” *Innovations*, Vol. 11, Number 3/4

ASSIGNED: --

CLASS #12: FINAL PRESENTATIONS

DUE: Final presentations & policy memos (1/2 class)

CLASS #13: FINAL PRESENTATIONS

DUE: Final presentations & policy memos (1/2 class)