Fall 2012

Course Syllabus: PPOL-G 780/781: Policy Planning and Program Development (Practicum) I & II

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/michael_johnson/50/
University of Massachusetts Boston
Department of Public Policy and Public Affairs
Public Policy Ph.D Program

PPOL-G 780/781: Policy Planning and Program Development
(Practicum) I & II

Fall 2012 – Spring 2013

I. Course Administration

Course Meetings:
Thursday, 9:30 AM – Noon, Public Policy Classroom (M-3-415)

Professor:
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Office Hours: Tuesday 1 – 2 PM; Wednesday 10 AM – Noon; Thursday 3:30 – 5 PM

Course Description:
General Course Goals

Applied public policy and public affairs research seeks to understand how people, institutions
and social systems work to improve the human condition but also to generate prescriptions to
improve the efficacy of interventions in the real world. Accordingly, doctoral training in applied
public policy and public affairs should address both research, i.e. expanding the storehouse of
human knowledge regarding theory, methods and applications, and practice, i.e. improving
organizational and social outcomes associated with the work of specific government, non-profit
and ‘third-sector’ organizations in the field.

Practicum is an effort to teach doctoral students how to solve problems identified by real-world
‘client’ organizations that generate both practice outcomes, i.e. research reports that are likely to
enable practitioners to improve their planning and operations to materially benefit the lives of
people and their neighborhoods, and research outcomes, i.e. research reports that are potentially
presentable at scholarly conferences and publishable in peer-reviewed academic journals.

This course is, in a sense, a ‘capstone’ to the core curriculum that students complete during their
first two years in the Public Policy Ph.D program. Practicum integrates knowledge about the
theory of public policy, political economy and political institutions in such a way that students
may place the specific problem of a public-sector organization in a larger social context, linking
government and non-governmental actors and the political and social environments in which
they work. It also integrates knowledge about economics, so that students can formulate
conceptual models of markets in which public organizations operate and the preferences,
incentives and impacts, intended and unintended, that characterize the organization and the policies it pursues.

Practicum integrates knowledge about statistics and information technology, allowing students to perform exploratory data analysis and hypothesis testing to determine the extent to which ideas about the efficacy of certain interventions and the impacts of individual, neighborhood and institutional characteristics on observed outcomes are supported by data, as well as providing opportunities for creative storage and display of data using databases, geographic information systems and Internet-enabled applications. Finally, this course integrates concepts of planning and public management, inasmuch as theories about how the client organization works, and insights about the impact of various policies on observed outcomes, must be translated into practical suggestions about how new strategies and policies are to be translated into daily practice in the field.

This course provides students with research skills that will enable them to identify and develop topics for their dissertations (though it is not necessary that the specific topic of this course correspond exactly with any student’s particular dissertation research interests). Relevant skills include: literature reviews, theory-building, data collection and analysis, hypothesis testing, interpretation of analysis results and explanation of policy and practice implications.

This course also builds professional skills that add value both to research and practice: proposal development, public speaking, professional writing, human subjects data collection, and design and development of policies, procedures and applications to enable client representatives to implement project findings.

This course is challenging: it requires students to structure and solve ambiguous and difficult problems, whose form may change over the course of the project. Students will take the lead in problem definition and solution and project management, yet work collaboratively with a client who may not share the same goals and perspectives as the students. The best Practicum experiences are exemplars of community-engaged scholarship, whereby scholars-in-training can build local partnerships and apply advanced theories and methods to generate tangible real-world impacts on people, organizations and communities.

**Specific Course Goals**

This Practicum will achieve the following:

- A full research project (research question, literature review, theoretical framework, research design, data analysis and policy & practice recommendations) devoted to one of the project statements listed above;

- A final report, consisting of an Executive Summary, suitable for public distribution, a Main Body, highlighting analytic methods, evaluation results and recommendations for changes in strategy, policy, procedures, data and applications, and Appendices summarizing data and analyses;

- One or more reports at the level of quality associated with those submitted to academic conferences in public policy, public management, urban affairs, urban and regional planning, community development or other relevant domains, and

- Data stores, both electronic and paper-based, that can be used by the client organization or other researchers.
Project Client

This year’s client is LIFT-Boston, an affiliate of the national LIFT organization, a volunteer-driven social service organization (http://www.liftcommunities.org/). LIFT’s mission is to “combat poverty and expand opportunity for all people in the United States”; its programs combat multi-generational poverty by using volunteers, mostly college students, to work directly with low-income clients. These ‘advocates’ use an empowerment model based on life skills education to connect clients with programs, resources and public aid supports to help them live independently, set and achieve meaningful life goals, and advocate for themselves. LIFT depends crucially on partnerships with social service organizations and government organizations to provide a suite of services to its clients, as advocates are explicitly not social workers.

LIFT measures its success both in terms of outputs (increases in clients served, meetings held, job interviews secured, food stamps & welfare applications filed) and outcomes (increases in tax dollars secured, job interview to placement success, permanent housing). LIFT also sees volunteer engagement with clients and poverty policy generally, and cost-effective service provision as outcome. In this sense LIFT resembles Teach for America in many respects.

LIFT-Boston (http://www.liftcommunities.org/boston) is a local LIFT affiliate with offices in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston as well as Cambridge and Somerville. LIFT-Boston’s clients are disadvantaged: two-thirds are unemployed; more than half live in unstable housing (homeless or non-permanent housing); three-quarters use government assistance as a primary source of income, and almost half are not fluent in English. Clients may establish relationships with LIFT-Boston advocates that are short-term or long-term. Only a relatively small fraction of all LIFT-Boston clients achieve ‘transformational change’ through their engagement with LIFT-Boston.

Potential Projects

Maicharia Weir Lytle, executive director of LIFT-Boston and Timothy Potsaid, program manager and I have identified three candidate projects for this year’s Practicum:

1. **Implementation of LIFT’s strategic plan**

   The LIFT national organization recently completed a strategic plan. This plan lists four priority areas: (1) Evolve program model to achieve transformational results for more clients; (2) Demonstrate the impact of the LIFT approach, using pioneering, mixed-methods approaches to evaluation; (3) Leverage our results and our stories to impact broader perception, policy, and practice, and (4) Strengthen and grow the organization.

   The Practicum team could address the question of how this ambitious plan could be implemented in the Boston region. Specifically: How can this plan, reflecting the perspectives of the national organization, guide the work of local offices such as LIFT-Boston? What does the strategic plan mean for local clients, counselors and the counseling process? How can the strategic plan be implemented in terms of specific programs and initiatives?

2. **Supporting the Circle of Promise**

   LIFT-Boston is a partner with the City of Boston on Circle of Promise (http://www.cityofboston.gov/Circle/), an initiative, inspired by the Harlem Children’s Zone, to provide a wide range of services in a collaborative manner with residents of the city’s most disadvantaged neighborhoods. LIFT-Boston will work with liasons at twelve state-designated...
‘underperforming’ or ‘turn-around’ schools located in South End, Roxbury, Dorchester and Jamaica Plain who will refer the families of identified at-risk students to LIFT-Boston. The goal is to improve student outcomes by working with parents to achieve increased residential stability, economic self-sufficiency and family efficacy.

The Practicum team could identify specific ways in which students are likely to benefit from these interventions, specific types of parents, and parent-identified problems whom LIFT-Boston could focus on to ensure better student outcomes, and perform a preliminary evaluation of LIFT-Boston’s engagement with Circle of Promise.

3. Ensuring success of Financial Opportunity Centers

Financial Opportunity Centers were developed by Local Initiatives Support Corporation in 2004 help low-income families ensure long-term financial stability through employment placement, career improvement, financial counseling and coaching, and public benefits access. LIFT-Boston plans to work with LISC to introduce Financial Opportunity Centers locally, in connection with Circle of Promise. FOCs differ from LIFT’s primary service model in that participants are expected to make a long-term commitment (18 to 24 months) with clear expectations for improved family outcomes. This program is best-suited for clients who are stable, and not in crisis.

The Practicum team could help LIFT-Boston implement the Financial Opportunity Center concept in a way that complements LIFT-Boston’s existing services, and ensures effective client targeting and efficient use of LIFT-Boston’s resources and those of its partners.

All three projects are primarily forward-looking in nature. Project #2, in particular, represents an opportunity for students to engage in program design and evaluation using a variety of data, analytic methods and community engagement strategies. While the Circle of Promise initiative is in its early stages, the general problem is one that our doctoral students are well-positioned to help LIFT-Boston solve. Indeed, Ms. Weir Lytle has advocated that our course focus on the Circle of Promise project.

Respecting the student-engaged, iterative, critical and immersive experience of Practicum, I encourage the class to give strong consideration to Project #2, but use the statements of the first and third problems as ways to start the discussion about the range of methods and research questions that could provide the greatest value to LIFT-Boston.

Course Resources

There is one required text for this course, Bardach’s A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving, Fourth Edition, . I have also identified multiple suggested texts, journals and Web resources. As we learn more about the problem we will solve, our literature review will yield a rich set of readings.

This project will use a wide variety of software appropriate for large-scale interdisciplinary problem solving. Examples of those the team may use include: office productivity (Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint, or their OpenOffice and/or Google Docs equivalents); quantitative data analysis (Microsoft Access or relational database equivalents); qualitative data analysis (Nudist, Atlas/ti or equivalent) statistical analysis (Excel, Stata or equivalent); geographic information systems (ESRI ArcGIS or equivalent) and Web design (Macromedia Contribute and FlashPaper or equivalent).
Depending on student interests, the project may also use more specialized applications such as social networking software (UCINET or equivalent), end-user application development software (Microsoft Visual Basic for Applications or equivalent) or management science software for modeling and optimization (Palisade’s DecisionTools/StatTools suite or equivalent).

The scope of software used for the project is limited only by students’ understanding of client needs and appropriate methodology. Much of this software is available on computers in the Public Policy Department computer lab; other software can be purchased at discounted rates directly from University of Massachusetts Boston (http://www.umb.edu/it/hwsw/software.html), downloaded directly (e.g. UCINET 6 at http://www.analytictech.com/ucinet/ucinet.htm) or used in dedicated computer labs elsewhere at UMass Boston (e.g. ArcGIS, available in computer labs managed by the Department of Earth, Environmental and Oceanic Sciences).

The course will use Web-based course and project-management software. There is a LIFT-Boston project wiki available at http://liftboston.pbworks.com. There is also a Blackboard course website available under the title “Fall 2012 Reg - PPOL-G 780 E 01 Practicum”. All students in the course will have the status of “designers” or equivalent for both sites, so that all can edit online course content.

The project will incur expenses associated with document preparation and distribution, meals and refreshments at client meetings, acquisition of books and articles, transportation costs for client-focused activities, among others. The course will have access to a $1,000 budget through the Department of Public Policy and Public Affairs. It is expected that the team use lowest-cost resources whenever possible. Many services are available through University of Massachusetts Boston, e.g. Quinn Graphics, Catering and Conference Services; however, the team should perform cost comparisons whenever possible to make best use of available funds.

Course Administration

Practicum is a student-driven class. That is, students are expected to self-assign project roles, and self-learn most of the theory required to develop project deliverables. They are also expected to take the lead in project design, implementation and writing. In particular, the professor serves more as an advisor, reader and mentor than a classroom lecturer. However, it may be that the Practicum team decides that certain areas of knowledge crucial for solving a particular problem would benefit from a formal lecture. In that case, I will be glad to prepare lectures on certain key topics, or to identify guest lectures that may do so.

I will, however, require that students complete Bardach’s text in the first month of classes. To start, I will ask that students read the Introduction for the first class on September 6, Part I (The Eightfold Path) for the second class on September 13, Part II (Assembling Evidence) for the third class on September 20, Part III (“Smart (Best) Practices” - Research: Understanding and Making Use of What Look Like Good Ideas from Somewhere Else) for the fourth class on September 27. I also ask that students acquaint themselves with the LIFT and LIFT-Boston web materials for the first class session, which will include a meeting with LIFT-Boston executive director Maicharia Weir Lytle. Many of these web materials have been posted on Blackboard.

The Practicum team may find it useful to meet with the professor for half of the 2 ½-hour weekly class session to present interim deliverables or discuss theory or project management issues with the professor, and then to meet amongst themselves or work independently for the remainder of the class period. It may be necessary for the team to schedule regular meetings outside of the
weekly class period for additional project management, discussion and research. The team may also wish to establish regular meetings with the client.

Key roles for students include: project management, client management, Website/wiki maintenance, data management, analysis, project writing, project presentation development and financial management. These roles may be assigned to individual students, shared collectively or rotated among team members.

Developing a meaningful project deliverable requires multiple rounds of client meeting and presentations. Students may find it useful to plan for four client presentations: a presentation early in the first semester to review problem definition, resources and anticipated deliverables; a presentation late in the first semester to review preliminary analysis results; a presentation early in the second semester to clarify final deliverable requirements and revisions to project scope and resources, and a presentation at the end of the second semester summarizing project findings and soliciting client feedback before presentation of the final deliverables. The Public Policy and Public Affairs community benefits if the final presentation, and perhaps others, are made open to students and faculty for comments and suggestions.

Good research and practice involves performing two difficult tasks: solving the “right” problem, and solving the problem “right”. Expertise external to the client organization can be very helpful in ensuring that both tasks are well-executed. To this end, the team may wish to consider convening an “external advisory board”, a collection of researchers and practitioners with no ties to the client organization who are willing to provide frank and insightful feedback regarding project goals, process and deliverables. In this model, the external advisory board is invited to all client presentations and encouraged to comment on the project. Identifying members of an external advisory board is time-consuming and should be assigned to a specific team member.

As the Practicum project will involve data collection from individuals, the project team will need to receive approval for “human subjects” data collection from University of Massachusetts Boston’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). This involves submission of a project proposal to the IRB (relevant document templates are available at http://www.umb.edu/research/orsp/compliance/irb.html). Before submitting a project proposal to the IRB, students will need to pass an on-line exam for human subjects data collection called the Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI; https://www.citiprogram.org/default.asp).

Client Contact
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Grading Policy:
This two-semester course sequence will result in two types of grades: “Y” for the Fall semester, indicating “in progress”, and a conventional letter grade for the Spring semester.

The grade allocation is as follows:
Quality of collaboration with team members and faculty 30%
Quality of project deliverables 70%
Total 100%

Project deliverables that serve as the basis for grading include: revised project proposal, literature review, data collection and analysis, case studies, policy analysis and drafts of final reports/papers. I expect to receive a detailed progress report at the end of the fall semester that include elements of all of the above deliverable categories, and complete (client-ready, conference- or journal-ready) written deliverables at the end of the spring semester. In particular, I will not consider it acceptable for the team to provide me with a rough or incomplete draft of final deliverables at the end of spring semester with the expectation that I will revise or collate results for presentation to the client or submission to a conference or a journal. Rather, this is the job of the student team, with detailed and timely input and feedback from the professor.

The quality of interaction between an individual and his/her team members is extremely important in a collaborative, unstructured project such as this. Therefore, I will take issues of civility, courtesy and collegiality very seriously. The quality of one’s interactions with one’s peers is as important as the quality of the deliverable. A student who does “A” quality work but who is a disruptive force on the team, or who does not participate with the rest of the team will probably receive a grade less than “A.” Conversely, a student who does only average work but who has consistently tried to enhance the quality of team member interactions, and who has been a “team spirit builder” could very well receive an above-average grade.

Evaluations, while essential for determining students’ grades, as well as assessments of instructor quality, can be difficult to perform. I will provide a mid-semester course evaluation form so that I can learn how to better manage the course and provide supports to students. Students will write brief end-of-semester memos in which they summarize their contributions to the project and their interactions with colleagues. Though I have conducted formal peer evaluations in project courses in the past, I will do so for this course only if there is unanimous consent among all students for a fully-anonymous process.

Readings:


Selections from non-required documents will be listed on the Blackboard course webpage, and many more will be added over the course of the project.

**Lecture and Lab Resources:**

All lectures will take place in the Public Policy and Public Affairs Department classroom, McCormack Hall, third floor, room 415 (M-03-415) unless otherwise indicated in the syllabus. Some meetings may take place at the client site. Other meetings, or portions of class lectures, that require access to software will use the Public Policy and Public Affairs Department computer lab, M-3-414. The Public Policy and Public Affairs computer lab is available for student use 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Access to this lab requires a key code available from the professor.
Web Resources:

This course has a Blackboard course management website containing lectures, readings, assignments, Internet resources and a discussion board for questions of general interest and responses. The instructor will post general questions received by email, and responses to these questions to the Blackboard discussion board.

To access the Blackboard course page:

- Go to https://login.umassonline.net/boston.cfm;
- Enter your UMass Boston email username and password;
- Navigate to the ‘Fall 2012 Reg - PPOL-G 780 E 01 Practicum’ course page.

Wikis are websites that allow for concurrent and dynamic content creation and management. I have found wikis to be useful for Practicum courses in the past. I have set up a wiki for this year’s Practicum course, at http://liftboston.pbworks.com.

Other websites that may have resources relevant to our course content include:


Accommodations:

Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 offers guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students may obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center for Disability Services, M-1-401, 617-287-7430. The student must present these recommendations and discuss them with each professor within a reasonable period, preferably by the end of Drop/Add period.

Written Work:

Students are encouraged to use the American Psychological Association (APA) style standards in their written work. I encourage students to utilize the Graduate Writing Center when necessary. The Center’s website is: http://www.academicsupport.umb.edu/graduatewritingcenter.htm. It is important to seek assistance from the Center earlier, rather than later, in the semester.
**Student Conduct:**

Students are required to adhere to the University of Massachusetts Boston Code of Conduct. The Code is available online at: [http://www.umb.edu/student_services/student_rights/code_conduct.html](http://www.umb.edu/student_services/student_rights/code_conduct.html). Section VI, subsection A of the Code, “Academic Honesty Violations”, states in part, that:

“The University defines violations to include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Submitting as one’s own an author’s published or unpublished work (e.g. material from a journal, Internet site, newspaper, encyclopedia), in whole, in part, or in paraphrase, without fully and properly crediting the author.

2. Submitting as one’s own work or materials obtained from another student, individual, or agency without full and proper attribution.

3. Submitting as one’s own work material that has been produced through unacknowledged or unauthorized collaboration with others.

4. Submitting substantially the same work to more than one course without prior approval from all instructors involved: i.e., dual or multiple submission.”