

Policy Pack

ABSTRACT

There is an emerging genre of learning games which has been used to facilitate increased participation in policy decision making in the UK and Europe.

Policy Pack involves students applying core concepts of the policy process to the development of a teaching tool on a contemporary public issue.

KEYWORDS

Public policy; policy cycle; public dialogue; globalisation; learning game

CONTACT

*Dr Betsi Beem
University of Sydney
b.beem@usyd.edu.au*

DESCRIPTION

The aim of the Department of Government and International Relations' Policy Analysis unit is to allow students to examine the nature of public policy and the processes which shape its content. It deals with definitions of policy, approaches to analysing public policy and the main building blocks of the policy process: actors, institutions, and policy instruments. Students also examine key stages of the public policy process with examples drawn from Australia and a range of countries throughout the world.

Students apply this learning to authentic contexts by developing a "policy pack" to facilitate public dialogue and learning about a specific policy issue.

AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

- ❖ Students enrolled in Policy Analysis offered in the Department of Government and International Relations, Faculty of Arts
- ❖ Builds on their first year studies in Government and International Relations, by offering a clear focus on public policies as a vital component of the wider discipline of government and international relations
- ❖ Second/Third year students



LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

This learning design aims to encourage students to develop University of Sydney Graduate Attributes, specifically:

- ❖ Comprehensively communicate the key facts and issues (Research and Inquiry)
- ❖ Accurately identify the key stakeholders/advocacy groups and ways that they have identified the problem (Research and Inquiry)
- ❖ Properly identify the prominent alternatives that were part of the debates (Research and Inquiry)
- ❖ Thoroughly consider the ethical implications and risks (social or otherwise) of various alternatives (Ethical and Professional)
- ❖ Correctly convey the existing regulatory/legislative context (Research and Inquiry)
- ❖ Accurately reflect the consequences of this issue (change-no change) on a range of social factors (Ethical and Professional)
- ❖ Succinctly communicate how representative individuals are affected by this issue in a way that reveals the tensions or dilemmas policy options may pose (Research and Inquiry)
- ❖ Resourcefully package/present your project (Communication)
- ❖ Professionally facilitate the playing of the game by a peer group (Communication)
- ❖ Correctly and fully identify the sources of information to academic standards (Ethical and Professional)

TIME AND SETTING

It is recommended that a period of six to eight weeks be allowed for the development of the policy pack including an introductory session and debrief.

The approach allows for students across a number of disciplines to apply concepts and theories of policy making to the analysis and evaluation of contemporary public issues. It also demands that they develop coherent arguments in explaining political phenomena that are critical and theoretically based within an ethically based framework.

RESOURCES

Students were introduced to the concept of facilitating public dialog and learning about specific policy issues by playing an existing Democs™ game that was developed to examine genetically modified foods in the UK. This was the basis upon which students were asked to develop their own policy pack with the support of lectures, tutorials and online discussion.

ASSESSMENT

Instead of presenting a research paper, students, working in groups, were asked to develop five physical components of a policy pack which included a briefing paper, fact cards, issue cards, story cards, and policy options which were considered as a unit for assessment purposes. In addition, the teamwork process and facilitation of the final game were also included in the assessment criteria. The assessment task was worth 30% of the final mark.

STUDENTS ENGAGE IN THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES

The approach, based on Democs (**deliberative meeting of citizens**) is part card game, part policy-making tool that enables small groups of people to engage with complex public policy issues.

It helps people find out about a topic, express their views, seek common ground with the other participants, and state their preferred policy position from a given choice of four. They can also add their own policy positions.

Key outcome

- ❖ Develop a teaching tool which demonstrates the application of concepts from this unit to a contemporary public issue

Students form policy teams

- ❖ Allocate tasks among the group members
- ❖ Keep on track with outside research
- ❖ Meeting deadlines

Develop a policy pack

- ❖ Must consist of a briefing paper, fact cards, issue cards, story cards and policy options

Test drive policy pack with peers

- ❖ Trial run for changes, additions, modifications

Launch pack with another peer group

- ❖ Final pack is launched to a peer group

FACILITATOR ISSUES

The approach did require careful scaffolding of the activity and negotiation with each group on the contemporary issue on which the policy pack was to be developed. The expectation that groups, on completing the policy pack, would have to do a 'test drive' with other students meant that fine tuning could take place prior to the official launch of the pack with another cohort of students. In effect, the role then changed from one of student to teacher, as the group was responsible for the content delivery of the unit at that point. Facilitators also provided support online.

REUSABILITY

Yes, the approach taken was based on one which involved a number of ethical science scenarios eg GM food, Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis, Stem cell research, Over the counter genetic testing kits, Nanotechnology, Single vs Multiple vaccinations, Animal experimentation. Students developed their own learning games to address a variety of contemporary social issues such as: Housing Policy in New South Wales, Brownfields redevelopment in Sydney's Homebush Bay area, Methamphetamine distribution and use in Australia, Domestic Violence in Australia, Citizenship testing in the UK, Airline security, etc.

REFERENCES AND LINKS

New economics: <http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/democs.aspx>

Play decide: http://www.playdecide.org/decide_content.html