

PADP 8680: Advanced Policy Analysis

Assignment notes for 15 minutes In-Class Policy Tool Debrief

For this assignment, you are asked to partner with a classmate to lead a 15 minute in-class discussion regarding a particular “policy tool” as identified within Salamon’s “Tools of Government” book (<http://tinyurl.com/z3b3te7>). There are many other materials related to the tools of governance available at this website that might be relevant both to your in-class discussions and to your final policy tool report. Copies of each chapter are available on the course @eLC page. Note that I am open to tools not included in this book if your team identifies one of interest and clears it with me ahead of time).

During class in Week 4, you will have the opportunity to select discussion topics and identify your partner work groups. Each student is expected to lead two different discussions, one taking place in Week 7 and one in Week 8. Week 7 discussions will relate to “direct” tools of government (e.g., social regulation, economic regulation, direct provision), while Week 8 discussions will concern “indirect” tools (e.g., vouchers, grants, contracts). *You must work with a different partner for each presentation.*

While there is no fixed outline in terms of what your discussion should cover, the following elements need to be present in some fashion and addressed as effectively as you can:

- **The theoretical assumptions of the policy tool.** For instance, what does the tool assume about human behavior? Is the assumed causal link supported by evidence? Is it robust to uncertainty and contextual influences?
- **Implementation challenges and modifications.** How is the tool implemented, and what particular challenges or shortcomings can emerge during implementation? To what extent to practical operationalizations of this tool reflect the canonical design? How is the tool often adapted or modified in practice, and what implications does this have for policy outcomes?
- **Social and political attributes of the tool.** For instance, are there contextual factors that lead this tool to be over- or under-used relative to what a de-contextualized assessment might expect? Does the tool adhere to common norms, or run counter to popular sentiment?
- **Relationship to policy goals.** How does this policy tool navigate equity/efficiency/other policy goals? Is it more closely aligned with some goals rather than others?
- **Performance and Evidence.** How is tool effectiveness typically assessed? Are there particular shortcomings in this regard (e.g., long term vs. short term dynamics? outcomes that are difficult to measure?)? In general, what evidence is there about the tool’s effectiveness?

You will be not be required to turn in any deliverables, but you are welcome (but do not need) to use handouts, presentation slides, group activities, or any other curricula that will help to facilitate a constructive discussion. You should also prepare with your partner a mini “lesson plan” that outlines discussion goals, key points that you would like to raise, and helps to frame how you will lead the discussion (e.g., you might note several key questions that you want to raise with the class).

Some tips on how to lead an in-class discussion:

1. Read the readings for that class very carefully, preferably more than once.
2. Think about what you want to get across to your classmates. What is the most important point in each of the readings? What insights do you have about how the readings relate to each other? Does one reading shed new light on the other? What questions do they raise about each other?
3. Once you have decided *what* you want to convey, think about *how* you want to convey it. Think about what method might get your ideas across best. Do you want to divide the class into small groups for discussion? Can you think of a role playing assignment that would get people to think about different perspectives of an issue? Do you want to give a short introduction and then moderate a large-group discussion?
4. Since you will be leading the discussion with a partner, decide how you want to divide up the tasks involved in leading the discussion. Will one person give the introduction, and the other(s) ask questions? Will you each take charge of parts of the class in small groups, then meet as a whole and discuss comparative conclusions the second half of the class time? Do you want to split up the readings each person is responsible for leading discussion about, or do you want to share responsibility jointly for all of them? (In any case, ALL of the leaders should read and understand ALL of the readings thoroughly.)
5. To be well-organized, know what is going to be said (by you or someone in the discussion group), and in what order. Work from organized notes. Do not rely on flipping through your highlighted readings looking for the interesting parts. But be a little bit flexible and allow a few moments here and there for the unexpected turns mentioned in the last point.
6. Minor recommendations:
 - a. A discussion should build gradually, should move forward from point to point. If you explain your whole interpretation of the readings at the very beginning, there is nowhere to go.
 - b. Try not to answer your own questions before you even ask them. For example, people tend to say something like, "We thought that XXX's analysis really did a bad job of taking race into consideration. What did you think about XXX's use of race?"
 - c. Try not ask "yes" or "no" questions; you want to ask open-ended questions that will get people to share their own ideas about the readings. Questions that begin with "what, why, and how," generally will spark discussion nicely.
 - d. It is a good idea to have a general sense of the points you want to be sure to cover, but don't expect it to follow your map exactly--and don't try to force it to do so. Sometimes the best parts of a discussion are the unexpected turns it takes. Having said that, keep it on course by being well-organized.
 - e. If you find that you cannot fit all of the points you want to make into the discussion, it will not end the world if you omit some of them. More is gained by everyone if you cover the interesting points thoroughly than if you rush through your list of discussion questions.