Learning by doing: Developing an undergraduate policy analysis course

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Agenda

- Delaware’s undergraduate program
- Changing course design over past 5 years
- Current course design
- Lessons learned
- Implications
Delaware’s undergraduate offerings

- BA in Public Policy
- Honors BA in Public Policy
- Minor in Public Policy
- Minor in Public Health
- 4+1 BA in Public Policy +
  - MPA
  - MA in Urban Affairs & Public Policy
  - MA in Historic Preservation
Growth in public policy students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Minors</th>
<th>Majors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2009</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>80</td>
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Delaware’s BA curriculum

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Required Courses</th>
<th>Concentration Courses</th>
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<tr>
<td>110: Changing the World</td>
<td>15 credits in approved courses in:</td>
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<tr>
<td>225: Crafting Public Policy</td>
<td>--Policy Studies (incl. public health)</td>
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<tr>
<td>325: Public Policy Analysis</td>
<td>--Policy Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300: Public Policy Field Experience (internship)</td>
<td>--Urban Policy, Planning, and Historic Preservation</td>
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<tr>
<td>440: Contemporary Issues in Public Policy (senior capstone)</td>
<td>--Public and Non-Profit Administration</td>
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--Public Policy Major is 30 credits out of 124 credits for Bachelor of Arts Degree
--Public Policy Minor is 18 credits; 1st 3 required courses plus 9 credits in concentration courses
Course designs

- **Option 1: Graduate-course model**
  - Bardach text + evaluate professional examples
  - Individual analytical paper in 3 parts
  - 10 students enrolled (spring 2010)
  - Students had trouble learning techniques and completing assignments adequately; needed more guidance on techniques
Course designs (cont’d)

• Option 2: Coplin’s skills-based model
  – Coplin’s text + other short readings
  – 5 modules on student-selected topics, leading to short memo for policy-maker
  – 14, 10, 22 students enrolled
  – Dissatisfaction from students about “copying” Coplin’s course + nickel-and-dime grading scheme
  – Added PBL assignment on pot = successful
Course designs (cont’d)

- **Option 3:** Revising Coplin’s model
  - Shorter assignments on student-selected topics + PBL exercise on assigned topic
  - Enrollments ~30 students
  - Experimenting with texts:
    - Mintrom’s *Contemporary Policy Analysis*
    - Smith’s *Writing Public Policy*
    - Bardach + Coplin books
  - Grading load heavy; students didn’t like books
Course designs (cont’d)

• Option 4: Current design
  – Semester long small group projects on student-selected topics of interest to state of Delaware
    • Client: Governor of Delaware
  – Individual journals to prepare for group work
  – Bardach + Majczrak’s *Methods for Policy Research* = complementary approaches
Sequence of deliverables

1. Personal Journal #1: Topic Research
2. Personal Journal #2: Problem + Context
3. Personal Journal #3: Find People
4. Personal Journal #4: Find Solutions
5. Personal Journal #5: Interview Report + Refined Problem Definition
6. Personal Journal #6: Design Policies
7. Personal Journal #7: Evaluation Tools
8. Personal Journal #8: Implementation

Team Problem Selection

Interview Experts

Team Deliverable #1: Problem Definition; Roster of Advisers

Team Deliverable #2: Documented Research Synthesis

Team Deliverable #3: Persuasive Case for Change
Lessons learned

• Let students pick own “real-world” topics
• Let students find their way: “learn by doing”
  – Give feedback; require revision; learn inductively
• Happy students → happy instructors
• But…
• Grading load is heavy for instructor without TA
• At UD, 30-student sections not profitable
• How bring course “to scale”?
Implications

• Need repository of undergraduate course syllabi
  – APPAM + NASPAA?

• APPAM: code of ethics for policy analysts?
  – Default = ASPA

• How ensure adequate preparation for course and to be engaged citizens?

• Still searching for *the* undergraduate textbook that teaches basic techniques without presuming much prior knowledge or skill
Questions or comments?

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