BUILDING A POLICY BRIEF
FROM START TO FINISH

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

This project will build over the course of the semester. You will become an expert in a small slice of gender or sexuality policy. While the project is significant and represents a significant part of your grade in the course – it builds over the course of the semester with small projects that will lead you easily to the final outcome. The project comprises of four component parts, which are graded independently of each other. Parts of the project will be done in conjunction with other students, so there will be some level of coordination involved. There will be extensive information about each project component, expectations, and rubrics on Sakai as well as examples on my website.

Group work isn't ideal for a lot of people – but it is also realistic to have to coauthor a project like this. This will be good training for a very realistic task. If you feel strongly that you would like to embark on this journey alone, this is an option. Talk to me about why you would like to do this. You should know that my expectations are the same, whether it be an independent project or a group one.

The project develops over the course of the semester with scaffolded assignments and a series of workshops. You will submit a brainstorming guide, drafted sections of the report, a polished group report, and a group presentation. There will be four workshops: first, a workshop led by our neighborhood librarian on conducting research; a workshop to peer-review the drafted sections; a workshop led by our visual design librarian on the basics of graphic design and infographics; and a workshop to peer review the policy report. In the sections below, you will learn more about each of the assignments.

My website also has dozens of examples of completed policy briefs. Feel free to reach out to a teaching assistant or me for help along the way. I strongly encourage you to review the rubrics for each assignment, which are found at the end of this document.

PART 1: BRAINSTORMING GUIDE
What is a brainstorming guide and why we are doing this?

The purpose of this brainstorming guide is set your group on the track for success. A critical step is to make sure the group allows members to think independently, critically, and to propose alternatives. Ever heard of groupthink? Groupthink occurs when people in a group, in a desire for cohesiveness, minimizes conflict and reaches consensus without critical evaluation.

In the context of group work like this policy report – it means that group might agree to go in one direction (perhaps because it was an early idea) rather than really flesh out other alternative or additional angles. If you haven't thought much about the topic before you first meet as a group, it's easy to go along with other people's ideas for the content, structure, framing, etc. But if everyone does a little pre-thinking on the topic before jumping in, the first group brainstorm will be more productive and comprehensive. The assignment guides you through preliminary research and helps you brainstorm important themes for the report.

While you are doing this – please feel free to do some preliminary googling of the policy issue. Read a few news stories, check out a few think tank websites, etc. Submit your typed responses to this guide in a word document.

Your brainstorming document should address these questions in a few sentences each:
In a few sentences, answer each of these questions about the group's overall topic:
1. What is your group's topic?
2. Why is this an important issue to talk about RIGHT NOW?
3. What are some of the complexities of the issue? How has this issue changed over time?
4. What are a few of the ways in which it affects groups of people differently?

The next section helps imagine your vision for this report:
1. Policy reports have sub-sections that delve into certain aspects of the issue in more depth. For instance, a report on sexual assaults on college campuses might have sections on: scope of the problem, Title IX, frat culture, problems with reporting, retaliation and shame, mental health outcomes, interventions and workshops to help, recommendations for schools to adopt.
2. Thinking through what you know on this topic, what are five potential sections? For each potential section, write sentence or two about why this would be a good contribution.

Making sure your voice is heard:
1. Is there anything you want to make sure the group definitely covers in some way?
2. What do you see as being the most important information to convey in the report?

What do you bring to the table?
1. Are there sections you are dying to write?
2. What are your strengths? Do you like doing editing? Or design? Or formatting?
3. What is your previous knowledge on the topic?

PART 2: DRAFTING REPORT SECTIONS
Now it's time to start building the foundational blocks for the group report!
You have done some independent brainstorming and built a shared vision of your future report. The next step is to start filling out the body of the report. As a group, you should have an idea of the different sections of the report. Some potential sections might include: intro/attention getter, abstract, history of X, the issue of X in XY and Z communities, past policies, proposed policies, conclusion, call to action etc. You won't be calling the sections those by those names (too boring!). Here are some examples of what I mean by sections.

- Say, for instance, that your group is working on the issue of domestic violence. One person may choose to focus on incidence of domestic violence, and another on the extremely high incidence of violence against Native or disabled women, another might focus on the Violence Against Women Act (what it entails, and the controversies associated), another might focus on education and prevention.
- Say another group is working on the pay gap. One person may on the origins of the pay gap, another person on the different laws and court cases that have tried to mitigate, another might focus on partisan differences in approaching this problem, another on proposed policy interventions, and yet another might focus on the differences across racial and ethnic groups.

Once your group determines what content needs to be written, assign those sections to people in your group, being mindful of an equitable distribution of labor. These drafted sections should be peer reviewed by a peer in your report group prior to submitting it for grading.

The purpose of this assignment is twofold. In addition to the goal of filling out the body of the report, this assignment gives you another opportunity for an independently-earned grade. Group work can be a drag, especially when people don't carry their own weight. Having a section of the report written by each person increases accountability, and insulates individuals from group-based grades.

What should I start writing?
Outline
Before you start writing your section, write a brief outline of the report. This doesn't need to be detailed – but it should list the current working list of sections (which might change as you put things together!) and make clear which sections you are drafting. That will help me, the grader, see how your contribution fits in as well as identify any areas that your group may be missing. This outline can be copied and pasted for all members of the group.

Content
Depending on the size of your group, the topic at hand, and the vision of your group – the length of your sections may vary. Presumably, each person will be writing approximately 1/n of the report's content, where n represents the number of people in the group. The final reports should be in the neighborhood of 10-14 pages (not including bibliography, etc.), depending on how many people are in your group, your topic, your design and formatting, etc.

The content should be primarily in paragraph form, though you may also have some parts that are bulleted lists, pop-out text (like a quote or statistic you want to highlight, such as in a sidebar box), tables, figures, etc. You don't need to worry about the formatting of pop-out text, figures and tables. The writing should be fairly refined and polished.

PART 3: POLICY BRIEF
Now it's time to put it all together.
Policy reports are an important form of policy communication. A policy report is a relatively short, to the point, jargon free document written for non-specialists. It presents research or project findings to policy actors, highlighting the relevance of the specific research to policy and offering recommendations for change. The objective of this assignment is for you to teach yourself (and others) more about a social, political, or economic problem that you want to know more about as well as potential <u>policy</u> solutions to that problem.

Developing concise and compelling policy writing skills is important. Policy makers have very limited time to become informed on a wide range of information, and they need to get up to speed on what is going on, what the range of possible policy alternatives are, and what the best policy would be. Interested parties (like activists, interest groups, non-profits, private citizens) have to work hard to get policy makers focused on *their* favored policy. Policymakers are busy, and often do not have time to read full-length academic papers. On average, policy actors spend only 30-60 minutes reading a policy brief,[1] so it is essential for students who are interested

---

[1] Jones and Walsh (2008), 'Policy Briefs as a communication tool for development research', ODI, URL
http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/594.pdf

working in public policy to become effective at communicating in this format that can be quickly consumed. Policy briefs have the potential to reach large audiences through different networks because of their condensed, but eye-catching format. Policy makers do actually pass them along to their colleagues when they perceive them to be important![2]

What I expect from you:
It should be beautiful, compelling, and comprehensive 10-15-page policy report (depending on your topic, design, and the number of group members) based on the sections you drafted in the last step of this project. My website has dozens of examples of completed policy reports from past semesters.

The audience is educated people who are not necessarily informed about this issue. It should have multiple sections that include the origins/history of the problem, nuances of the problem (with an eye towards intersectional implications), policy solutions that could mitigate the problem. You will need additional sections based on your specific topic. The report should be evidence based, and include academic and think-tank based evidence to substantiate your arguments. It should be eye-catching and easy to read. It should include, charts, graphs, bulleted points, tweet-worthy side bars and other images that help the reader to get all of the information they need in a concise format. They should be concise and to the point and provide a substantial body of evidence to support the highlighted points and policy recommendation and/or alternatives. The final version should be a professional quality, and the sort of document that you could provide to a non-profit organization as a writing sample to demonstrate your ability and compelling policy writing. Someone reading your brief should walk away knowing quite a bit about the policy problem as well as how it might be addressed.

PART 4: PRESENTATION
Now it's time to spread the word:
Whether you are a public policy major wanting to go work in the government, someone passionate about advocacy or activism, or planning on getting a job in the private sector – being able to make compelling and effective communication materials is an important skill. Effective policy communication is ultimately what this whole project is about. In this final stage, you will be giving a short presentation and then responding to questions about the project. You should imagine that the audience is made up of stakeholders, policymakers and other activists.

What I expect from you:
During finals week and in lieu of a formal final, your team will present their report to the class. This is written and graded as a co-authored presentation. Your presentation should include all authors and be accompanied with some form of visual aid (PowerPoint, Google Slides, Prezi, Infographic, whatever). Your presentation should introduce the policy problem, get a bit into the complexity of the issue, and end with recommended policies and a call to action. After the presentation, there will be a few minutes for you to respond to questions from the audience.

The specific time window will be determined by the number of groups. The presentations are usually capped at about 10 minutes, with a few extra minutes for the groups with 5+ members.

---

[2] Benyon, Chapy, Gaarder, Masser (2012), 'What Difference Does a Policy Brief Make?', IDS, 3ie, NORAD, URL http://www.3ieimpact.org/en/evaluation/policy-influence/policy/

BRAINSTORMING GUIDE
Grading Rubric

Student's Name: _____

Group Topic: _____

Student's Grade: _____/10

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS - 1 point possible

- Name included
- Save the file as follows "Guide_LastNameFirstInitial"
  - for example, my file would be titled "Guide_KreitzerR.docx"
- Answers all the provided questions

OVERALL TOPIC - 3 points possible

What is your group's topic? Why is this an important issue to talk about RIGHT NOW? What are some of the complexities of the issue? How has this issue changed over time? What are a few of the ways in which it affects groups of people differently?

ENVISIONING THE REPORT - 3 points possible

Thinking through what you know on this topic, what are five potential sections? For each potential section, write sentence or two about why this would be a good contribution.

MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD - 2 points possible

Is there anything you want to make sure the group definitely covers in some way? What do you see as being the most important information to convey in the report?

WHAT ARE YOU BRINGING TO THE TABLE? - 1 point possible

Are there sections you are dying to write? What are your strengths? Do you like doing editing? Or design? Or formatting? What is your previous knowledge on the topic?

EXPLAINING THE POINTS

- Full points: You fully and thoughtfully answered each question. It's clear that you have spent some time thinking and doing preliminary research about this topic.
- Partial points: if you are on the right track but there are places where you could have elaborated a tiny more or would have really benefited from some more basic googling of the topic, or you missed some questions.
- *You can receive ½ points in between these categories*

COMMENTS:

DRAFTING SECTIONS
Grading Rubric

Student's Name: _____

Group Topic: _____

Student's Grade: _____/10

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS - 1 point possible
- Name included
- Save the file as follows "Section_LastNameFirstInitial"
    o for example, my file would be titled "Section_KreitzerR.docx"

OUTLINE OF PROJECT - 2 points possible
- Include an outline with the various section headings so that I can see the overall vision. Collectively the sections build to tell a compelling, complex, and comprehensive narrative.
- It should be clear that the section(s) you are authoring constitute an important contribution to the overall project.

SECTION CONTENT - 5 points possible
- Nuances of the Issue: The section explores an important facet of the issue with nuance and complexity. Where appropriate, it brings an intersectional lens. The section has intellectual depth and substance.
- Use of Literature: The section builds off existing academic literature, resources from think tanks, court reports, new stories, etc. These should be referenced appropriately.
- Where Appropriate, Additional Resources: Depending on your particular section, you may also reference tables, figures, images, and other resources that will enhance the report.

WRITING AND GRAMMAR - 2 points possible
- The writing can be characterized as clear, cogent, fluid; error-free prose.

COMMENTS:

POLICY REPORT
Grading Rubric

Students' Names: _____

Group Topic: _____

Group Grade: _____/100

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS - 5 point possible

- Names of all students on a cover page
- 10-15 pages, not including citations
- Page numbers
- Properly formatted citations list, in whatever style you choose

DEFINING THE POLICY PROBLEM - 25 points possible

Does the report display a firm grasp of the policy issue, in all its complexity? Do the different pieces of the argument interlock in a relatively seamless fashion?

Exemplar Work (A-Range Paper)	Basic Criteria Fulfilled (B-Range Paper)	On the Right Track (C-Range Paper)	Missing Elements (D-Range Paper)
The policy problem is presented in an impactful way. The detail is presented in a way to capture reader's attention, highlight need for policy action, is concise and memorable. Excellent use of sections to explore the different facets of the issue. Collectively the sections build to tell a compelling, complex, and comprehensive narrative.	The policy problem is well defined. There is sufficient detail and nuance to provide context. Judicious use of sections to explore the different facets of the issue.	Policy problem is defined, but lacks the specificity necessary to make the case compelling. Delves into the nuances of some key areas but in insufficient depth.	Policy problem not well explained. Not enough exploring the nuances of the issue, or missing key issues.
22-25 points	20-22 points	17-20 points	15-20 points

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS -25 points possible

Does the writer substantiate their arguments with insights from the relevant literature? Do they address counter-arguments or evidence to the contrary?

Exemplar Work (A-Range Paper)	Basic Criteria Fulfilled (B-Range Paper)	On the Right Track (C-Range Paper)	Missing Elements (D-Range Paper)

The authors provide comprehensive synthesis and trenchant analysis of an abundance of material; the citations provide evidence for the claims made and help move the author's point forward. Citation format is consistent; References section is appropriately organized.	Sound, original, and reasonably thoughtful argument	Inconsistent argument; lots of summary without analysis	Superficial engagement with the policy matter; no analysis
22-25 points	20-22 points	17-20 points	15-20 points

USE OF LITERATURE - 20 points possible

Does the writer substantiate their arguments with insights from the relevant literature? Do they address counter-arguments or evidence to the contrary? Do they have a properly formatted works cited (in any style)?

Exemplar Work (A-Range Paper)	Basic Criteria Fulfilled (B-Range Paper)	On the Right Track (C-Range Paper)	Missing Elements (D-Range Paper)
The components of the report scaffold on one another to build a persuasive argument. The foundation of the report allows the reader to have a full appreciation of the complexities of the problem that needs to be solved as well as the pros and cons of the potential solutions in an "objective" report.	Sound, original, and reasonably thoughtful argument	Inconsistent argument; lots of summary without analysis	Superficial engagement with the policy matter; no analysis
19-20 points	16-18 points	14-15 points	12-13 points

STRUCTURE - 15 points possible

Is the report well organized? Is there a clear structure? Is the formatting complimentary and not distracting?

Exemplar Work (A-Range Paper)	Basic Criteria Fulfilled (B-Range Paper)	On the Right Track (C-Range Paper)	Missing Elements (D-Range Paper)
Attractive and accessible; efficient use of space; use of charts, photos, tables, etc. enhance the authors' central points and highlights the most important information; Author maximizes the content given the 10-15 page limit.	Basic format, including subheadings and highlighted texts; not especially attractive; figures are decorative but not consequential; space not optimized.	Words are on the page, with subheadings	Words. Just lots of words.
13-15 points	12-13 points	10-12 points	9-10 points

WRITING AND LANGUAGE - 10 points possible

Does the writer's choice of words and sentence structure lend itself to the reader's full understanding of the paper?

Exemplar Work (A-Range Paper)	Basic Criteria Fulfilled (B-Range Paper)	On the Right Track (C-Range Paper)	Missing Elements (D-Range Paper)

		Stilted or distracting prose; comprehensible but not fluid; errors that could have been caught by proofreading.	Error-riddled; in any way sloppy; misspellings; poor punctuation; unclear writing
The writing can be characterized as exceptionally clear, cogent, fluid; error-free prose.	Clear, cogent, mistakes are limited		
9-10 points	8 points	7 points	6 points

COMMENTS

PRESENTATION
Grading Rubric

Students' Names: _____

Group Topic: _____

Group Grade: _____/50

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS -
- 10-15 minutes, depending on the number of groups
- Some form of visual aid

ORGANIZATION - 10 points possible
Presentation should be well organized, with sections presented in a clear and logical manner.

Exemplar Work (A-Range Paper)	Basic Criteria Fulfilled (B-Range Paper)	On the Right Track (C-Range Paper)
Has a clear opening statement that catches the audience's interest. The presentation is focused and engaging, and logically organized Summarizes main points throughout, and provides a good "road map" for the audience	Has opening statement relevant to the topic. The presentation is logically organized. Provides an adequate "road map" for the audience.	Has no opening statement. The presentation is not logically organized. Leaves audience unclear about what to expect next
9-10 points	8-9 points	7-8 points

CONTENT - 20 points possible
The presentation should combine findings from both research projects to demonstrate phenomena in the politics of policymaking.

Exemplar Work (A-Range Paper)	Basic Criteria Fulfilled (B-Range Paper)	On the Right Track (C-Range Paper)
Demonstrates substance and depth in a nuanced way. Emphasizes importance of problem in compelling way. Presents a persuasive but objective case for policy recommendation. Seamlessly incorporates the research cases in a way that furthers the argument. Shows mastery of the material and policy expertise.	Demonstrates substance and depth. Discusses importance of problem. Presents policy recommendations that are well supported. Shows policy expertise.	Does not give adequate coverage to the topic. Presents policy recommendation, but support is weak. The material is only surface-level in terms of depth.
18-20 points	16-18 points	14 -16 points

DISCUSSION - 15 points possible
Presenters should be actively engaged with the class, and be well prepared to answer questions on the topic.

Exemplar Work (A-Range Paper)	Basic Criteria Fulfilled (B-Range Paper)	On the Right Track (C-Range Paper)

Demonstrates full knowledge of the policy areas and political phenomena. Explains and elaborates on questions. Easily can relate and interpret important findings.	Shows ease in answering questions, but does not elaborate.	Shows little grasp of information. Has undeveloped, rambling, or unclear answers to questions.
14-15 points	11-13 points	10-11 points

PRESENTATION – 5 points possible
The presenters should effectively and articulately present their arguments. They stayed within the time limit.

Exemplar Work (A-Range Paper)	Basic Criteria Fulfilled (B-Range Paper)	On the Right Track (C-Range Paper)
Group has natural delivery and confidence; projects enthusiasm and interest. Slides are well designed, interesting, and uncluttered. Uses slides effortlessly to enhance the presentation. Ended presentation within time limit.	Has appropriate pace and is easily understood. Slides convey important information (but may be uninteresting or cluttered). Presenters rely on slides to stay on track. Went slightly over time.	The pace of the presentation is too slow or too fast, and the presenters make little eye contact. Slides are messy, or uninformative. Presenters rely heavily on slides and notes. Went way over time.
5 points	4 points	3 points

COMMENTS