FSPP 580  
Values, Ethics, and Public Policy  
Winter 2023

Prof. David Thacher, dthacher@umich.edu (Office hours Mon./Wed. 10:00-11:00, 4122 Weill)  
GSI Abby Johnson, abmj@umich.edu (Office hours TBA, 3208 Weill)

Course Description and Objectives. The task of policy analysis is sometimes viewed as a technician’s task—a matter of using analytical tools to figure out the most effective way to achieve policy goals. That is certainly an essential part of policy analysis, but it is important to be aware of what it leaves out. It leaves out any attempt to say which goals public policy should try to serve in the first place. To care about public policy is to care about whether policies are good or bad. But good or bad in what sense, in what respects, according to what perspectives or values? These questions are not answered once and for all when nations are founded. They are a constant part of public policymaking, and finding better ways to answer them is often the most important thing anyone can do to improve public policy. Sometimes, of course, we can trace the failures of public policy to failures of technique—to our inability to identify effective ways of pursuing policy goals that no one doubts are the right ones. But often the failures of public policy result from something more fundamental—from our inability to identify what the goals of public policy should be in the first place, or from the incomplete or inadequate ways in which we have understood them. These failures arise when we have paid too little attention to values like justice, rights, and equality, or when we have failed to understand those complex and contested ideals in appropriate ways.

Values, Ethics and Public Policy focuses on some of the many ways in which these political and moral values come into play in public policy. The course will develop your abilities to think in a reflective and sophisticated way about the moral and ethical dimensions of public policy and articulate the ethical aspects of available policy alternatives, both verbally and in writing. It will introduce you to a variety of moral frameworks that are frequently relevant to contemporary policy debates. The course is divided into four sections. Section one briefly introduces some challenges and possibilities for reasoning and debate about moral issues. Section two then introduces five core values that play a role in many policy contexts—individual welfare, rights, liberty, justice, and accountability. In our exploration of each value, we will study conceptual frameworks and debates associated with it, as well as the implications it has for current policy debates (the “…in practice” sessions). Section three turns our attention to several current debates about morally complex policy problems; in each session, we will aim to understand the moral considerations that public policy needs to grapple with and the policy options that best respect those considerations. Section four explores several moral dilemmas that policy practitioners may encounter in the course of their careers (such as how to respond to organizational expectations that conflict with their own personal moral values).

Canvas Site and Reading Materials. The Canvas site will be your chief resource for each class session. Each session’s Canvas “module” contains all of the materials you will need for that session. At the top of each module you will find a written overview of the session, which will
outline the questions and themes you should keep in mind as you engage with the material. Below that, you will find links to the readings, lectures, and discussion board for that session.

**Class Participation.** Class participation, including your discussion posts, is worth 25% of your grade. Participation consists of active engagement during our class meetings and regular contributions to the Canvas discussion board. To prepare for these discussions, students will be expected to complete the readings and view any relevant lecture material prior to class. Please read the “Class Discussions” document carefully for details and guidelines (available in the “logistics” module on Canvas). As that document explains in more detail, you should generally write a brief post to the class discussion board every session by 10AM the day of class at least once per week. More specifically:

- You do not need to post during part 1 of the course
- During part 2 of the course, you should post once to each “...in Practice” session (January 18 & 25; February 1, 8 & 20)
- During parts 3 and 4 of the course, you should post once a week (i.e. either on Monday or Wednesday each week from March 6 through April 12)

**Writing Assignments.** The course requirements include three writing assignments, due on February 21, March 31, and April 21 by 11:59 PM. Each assignment will be worth 25% of your grade. As in all university classes, use proper citation in all your written work; plagiarism can be cause for expulsion. If you have any questions about what plagiarism is (in brief: acknowledge all your sources and enclose all words that aren’t yours in quotation marks), see http://www.lib.umich.edu/academic-integrity.

For further information about academic expectations, accommodations, and resources for student-well being and mental health in this class and elsewhere in the Ford School, please visit http://fordschool.umich.edu/academics/expectations. Because of the nature of the topics we discuss in this course and the way we will discuss them, the Ford School’s Statement on Inclusivity merits especially close attention. The diverse perspectives and experiences that you and your classmates bring to class are an invaluable resource for our discussions and your learning. Be open to and respectful of the contributions that others make.

**Ford School Inclusivity Statement:** Members of the Ford School community represent a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives. We are committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. While working together to build this community we ask all members to:

- share their unique experiences, values and beliefs
- be open to the views of others
- honor the uniqueness of their colleagues
- appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other in this community
- value one another’s opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal or professional nature
- use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in Ford classes and across the UM community
Ford School Public Health Protection Policy: In order to participate in any in-person aspects of this course—including meeting with other students to study or work on a team project—you must follow all the public health safety measures and policies put in place by the State of Michigan, Washtenaw County, the University of Michigan, and the Ford School. Up to date information on U-M policies can be found here. It is expected that you will protect and enhance the health of everyone in the Ford School community by staying home and following self-isolation guidelines if you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing: The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. We acknowledge that a variety of issues, both those relating to the pandemic and other issues such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, can directly impact students’ academic performance and overall wellbeing. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available.

You may access counselors and urgent services at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) and/or University Health Service (UHS). Students may also use the Crisis Text Line (text '4UMICH' to 741741) to be connected to a trained crisis volunteer. You can find additional resources both on and off campus through the University Health Service and through CAPS.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you believe you need an accommodation for a disability, please reach out to U-M Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office to help determine appropriate academic accommodations and how to communicate about your accommodations with your professors. Any information you provide will be treated as private and confidential.

Academic Integrity: The Ford School academic community, like all communities, functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. We hold all members of our community to high standards of scholarship and integrity. To accomplish its mission of providing an optimal educational environment and developing leaders of society, the Ford School promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct. Academic dishonesty may be understood as any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community. Plagiarism involves representing the words, ideas, or work of others as one’s own in writing or presentations, and failing to give full and proper credit to the original source. Conduct, without regard to motive, that violates the academic integrity and ethical standards will result in serious consequences and disciplinary action. The Ford School's policy of academic integrity can be found in the MPP/MPA, BA, and PhD Program handbooks. Additional information regarding academic dishonesty, plagiarism and
misconduct and their consequences is available at:  http://www.rackham.umich.edu/current-students/policies/academic-policies/section11#112

Use of Technology: Students should follow instructions from their instructor as to acceptable use of technology in the classroom, including laptops, in each course. All course materials (including slides, assignments, handouts, pre-recorded lectures or recordings of class) are to be considered confidential material and are not to be shared in full or part with anyone outside of the course participants. Likewise, your own personal recording (audio or video) of your classes or office hour sessions is allowed only with the express written permission of your instructor. If you wish to post course materials or photographs/videos of classmates or your instructor to third-party sites (e.g. social media), you must first have informed consent. Without explicit permission from the instructor and in some cases your classmates, the public distribution or posting of any photos, audio/video recordings or pre-recordings from class, discussion section or office hours, even if you have permission to record, is not allowed and could be considered academic misconduct.

Please review additional information and policies regarding academic expectations and resources at the Ford School of Public Policy at:  https://intranet.fordschool.umich.edu/academic-expectations2

1. Introduction

January 4  
Introduction to the course

January 9  
Thinking about Ethics


2. Moral Frameworks

January 11  
Utilitarianism


January 16  No Class – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

January 18  Utilitarianism in Practice


January 23  Rights


Positive Rights

January 25  

**Rights in Practice**

*Rights in Domestic Policy*


*Optional*: John Witt. “Scrambling the New Sanitationist Synthesis: Civil Liberties and Public Health in the Age of COVID-19” [excerpt], University of Chicago Legal Forum 2021, pp. 277-8,

*International Human Rights*


January 30  

**Liberty**

*Liberal Ideals*


*The End of Liberalism?*

February 1  **Liberty in Practice**

News reports on smoking ban in U.S. public housing on Canvas


February 6  **Justice**


February 8  **Justice in Practice**


Olatunde Johnson. “AFFH and the Challenge of Reparations in the Administrative State”, *The Regulatory Review*, October 26, 2020 and news articles about AFFH on Canvas

Oxford Univ. press, 2009), pp. 41-47 and news articles about education finance on Canvas

February 13 First assignment workshop

OMB, Circular A-4, pp. 1-3, 9-12, 18-24.


February 15 Accountability


February 20 Accountability in Practice


February 22 Benefit-Cost Analysis

Review readings for February 13 class

February 27 & March 1 No Class – Winter Break
3. Moral Analysis as Policy Analysis

March 6

Policy Responses to the Opioid Crisis

Harm Reduction

Safe injection site readings on Canvas


Involuntary Treatment
Katie DeRosa. “B.C. NDP leadership race: Eby pitches involuntary care for severe overdose cases”, Vancouver Sun, August 18, 2022.

Bruce Hobson et. al. “Comment: Medical evidence supports involuntary treatment”, Times Colonist, Sep 16, 2022


Restricting the Supply of Prescription Drugs


March 8

Work Requirements in Social Policy


March 13  Climate Change

*America’s Responsibilities for Climate Change: Trump vs. Biden*

Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord, June 1, 2017


*Moral Frameworks for International Climate Change Policy*


Henry Shue. “Global Environment and International Inequality,” *International Affairs*, vol. 75 (1999), pp. 531-545

March 15  Nurse Home Visitation


Katherine Boo, “Swamp Nurse”, *The New Yorker*, Feb 6, 2006, pp. 54-65


March 20  Policy Responses to Serious Mental Illness

Eric Adams. “Mayor Adams Announces Plan to Provide Care for Individuals Suffering From Untreated Severe Mental Illness Across NYC”, speech delivered on November 29, 2022 (watch or read here).


March 22

**Housing First?**


March 27

**Reparations for Slavery**


William Darity Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen, “Resurrecting the Promise of 40 Acres: The Imperative of Reparations for Black Americans,” Roosevelt Institute, June 2020, pp. 5-14, 28

4. **Moral Dilemmas in Policy Practice**

March 29

**Should I Really Work Here?**


April 3  **Whistleblowing and Leaking**


April 5  **Bureaucratic Resistance**


April 10  **Lying**


“Ethical Problems in Public Careers: Lying” (KSG Case)

April 12  **Ethics for Analysts**

*The Ethics of Data Analysis*


*The Ethics of Data Dissemination*


April 17  **Conclusion**