Abstract
Over the past two decades, public policy professors have been confronted with a choice to teach either from the traditional positivist approach grounded in rationality, objectivity, and economics or from a postpositivist approach grounded in politics, subjectivity, and democracy. Yet, such a choice is both false and limiting. Instead, we argue that it is possible to teach a practical public policy analysis course based on mixed methodologies that stems from both the positivism and postpositivism camps. At the pedagogical center of this approach is the case method. Our approach is grounded in both the belief and experience that the combination of an approach that is pragmatic, yet infused with politics, and a stimulating case also serves to increase student interest. In this article, we present a class-tested case study ready for use by faculty members in courses in public policy analysis, public policy, and, introductory public administration. Along the way, we provide guidance on how to use the case and how it fits into a mixed methodological approach.

Professors of public administration, when asked to teach public policy analysis, seemingly have a choice between two alternative approaches. They can
use the traditional approach, grounded in microeconomics and other quantitative methodologies, found in such excellent texts as Weimer and Vining (2004), Munger (2000), and Dunn (2004); or, they can use a more political and policy process approach, found in such excellent books as Birkland (2005) and Anderson (2006). In fact, Romero’s 2001 article, “The Policy Analysis Course: Toward a Discipline Consensus,” found that the vast majority of policy analysis syllabi used either an “outsider” line of attack based primarily on the stages model of policy theory or a “limited insider” line of attack grounded in welfare economics. Despite a wealth of clever, important, and insightful critiques of the traditional positivist approach, only a small percentage used an “in-depth insider” approach that explored a “broader epistemology” combining political insight, value conflict, subjectivity, and ambiguity with other skill development. This situation revealed a problem that needed to be solved.

In this article we seek to introduce our method of teaching public policy analysis, a middle-way method designed to incorporate the critiques of positivism into it (rather than discard it or ignore the critiques) and to make the alternative approach more significant, applicable, and teachable. We first review some of the debate surrounding both the teaching and practice of policy analysis. We then present the mixed methodology approach, grounded in the development and teaching of cases, that informs our pedagogy as well as the public policy textbook Public Policy Praxis: A Case Approach for Understanding Policy and Analysis (Clemons & McBeth, 2009), which is coauthored by two of the three authors of this article. We provide a new policy analysis case ready for use in the classroom, arguing that the combination of a mixed methodology approach and the case method is extremely valuable, and then conclude by explaining how we would teach this case.

Policy Analysis and the Pedagogical Trade-Offs

Historically, professors of public policy analysis have been confronted with a sort of Hobson’s choice. On one hand, they could teach rational, quantitative-based analysis where rigor is imposed simply by applying the typical positivist techniques of analysis. While this dominant approach certainly has appeal and importance, lost in it is the essence of politics, power, and nonrationality that has dominated the past two decades of public policy literature (e.g., Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Stone, 2002) and that proves very interesting to students. Moreover, as Layzer writes (2006) after discussing the rational-comprehensive model:

Most political scientists eschew this model as a description of reality, however. Contrary to its predictions, policy making is rarely a linear process of identifying problems and devising optimal solutions; instead, solutions often go in search of problems, and decision
makers typically take action only in response to a crisis or some other political opportunity. (p. 60)

Thus, with the rational approach, we are teaching our students to try to impose a rational structure on a political system that is far more dynamic and less orderly than the principles of traditional policy analysis assert.

On the other hand, professors could take the more political approach to analysis, demonstrate its nonrationality, and emphasize the centrality of power and the power of language. Yet, as an exclusive approach, it too has limitations. Students may be trapped in relativism or fail to see how their ability to analyze the political basis of public policy provides them with the necessary analytical skills they need to secure and perform jobs as public administrators and analysts.

The positivist-postpositivist debate that dominated the 1990s literature on policy analysis (e.g., Danziger, 1995; Fischer, 1998; Lynn, 1999a) can be summed quickly. Positivist policy analysis (including rational choice analysis) is grounded in microeconomics, quantitative methods, and rationality. It is a method found in such prominent texts as Dunn (2004) and Weimer and Vining (2004). Postpositivist policy analysis, on the other hand, is grounded more in political science, power, language, and the social construction of reality. The debate between positivist and postpositivist critics raged in the 1990s within academia. We argue in this article that the debate is largely over, and that out of this ivory-tower-based squabble has developed a new type of policy analysis, practical but based in theory, sophisticated yet eminently teachable.

In the late 1990s, Laurence Lynn published an article, “A Place at the Table: Policy Analysis, Its Postpositive Critics, and the Future of Practice” (1999a), in which he argued that postpositivist criticisms of traditional policy analysis were “ideological rather than analytical” and “detached from the inconvenient realities of policy making and management.” Lynn instead presented traditional policy analysis as being “fueled by intuition, argument, and ethical prompting; clearly engaged with the world of political action; and often identified with interests and values otherwise unrepresented at the table.” He then concluded that postpositivists have much work to do before they can be considered relevant to the “practical challenges of democratic governance that arise in the many roles that working policy analysts perform” (Lynn, 1999a, p. 411).

Our approach to policy analysis both agrees and disagrees with him. First, we agree that postpositivists can easily caricature positivism (just as positivists can easily caricature postpositivism). Second, we agree that postpositivism needed to become more practical so it could play a daily role in governance. Third, we also agree that practicing analysts understand subjectivity, values, and interests. But we disagree with the idea that the typical approach to the teaching of policy analysis adequately prepares future analysts for dealing with the subjectivity, values, and interests that are prevalent...
in the field. Thus the pure positivist approach fails to prepare analysts for politics or to facilitate democracy.

A key concern of postpositivist policy analysis (PPA) involves increasing meaningful participation of citizens in the formation of problem definitions, the generation of policy alternatives, and the eventual determination of policy. PPA is highly critical of the proceduralism and legalism of contemporary American democracy and instead attempts to tap into the view of American democracy rooted in Tocqueville and Jefferson. Cunningham and Weschler (2002), writing in Public Administration Review, make the point that public administration education has failed individuals who must deal with the hustle and bustle and complexity of policymaking. In making the case for the education of line managers, they argue:

Effective line managers must pick a technically appropriate and politically feasible solution from an array of policy options, understand social relationships, anticipate and respond to questions extemporaneously, handle emotionally challenging situations with ease, and interpret issues that are just appearing on the agency’s radar screen. Although they are effective in finding win-win solutions to complex problems involving multiple stakeholders and its calming interpersonal conflicts within the organization, line managers may not be able to explain or understand the technical aspects of a program or policy. (pp. 105–106)

Though arguably better for democracy, our approach is primarily driven by the desire to build a practical (not ideological) foundation for policy analysis that—reflecting the best of the discipline—pragmatically combines the best from both positivism and postpositivism. For example, students taught in the positivist-rational approach learn the rational choice model and public choice theory, microeconomic concepts, statistical analysis, discounting, cost-benefit analysis, extrapolation, and other tools. This general approach is useful because it provides a tangible methodology for future analysts, and it may earn them a place at the table. It is also rather easy to teach in the classroom because there are specific steps and methods to learn. While used extensively in public policy education, the positivist method is less dominant in the field, and it is of questionable value for democracy and in the political system where policy is determined. Most often the complex models and mathematics of the positivist approach do not parallel the even more complex world of democratic policymaking. To paraphrase the advice the quintessential realist Hans Morgenthau offers foreign policy analysts, the first lesson students of public policy must learn is complexity (1993, pp. 22, 45).

Most important, many issues policy analysts deal with are political issues that involve normative values. Positivism is most useful when political issues are framed as technical questions such as: “Will removing dams in Eastern Washing-
ton restore salmon runs on the lower Snake River?" It is seldom true that “tech-
nical issues” can be neatly and cleanly separated from normative and political
ones. All analysts, regardless of their positivist or postpositivist orientation, must
struggle with incorporating these values.

Policymaking is political. Thus, narrow training focusing on the positiv-
ist tools alone, and ignoring politics, is not only less interesting but also leaves
the analyst significantly lacking in his or her ability to grasp the complexity of
politics. The positivist approach to policy analysis often emphasizes efficiency
(which is obviously important) at the expense of democracy. The positivist ap-
proach is also tied to bureaucratic decision making with its emphasis on calcul-
ubility, generalizability, stability, rationality, and proceduralism. Peter deLeon
(1997, p. 81) writes that the most important problem with positivism is that it
falsely presents an appearance of “truth.” It does so by assigning numbers to a
variety of decision-making criteria and producing what appear to be definitive
answers to political questions. It does so because of the bureaucratic imperative
to reduce emotional and conflict-ridden political questions to neutral, scientific,
and technical ones. Positivist approaches do invariably have to deal with norma-
tive issues and subjectivity. Dunn (2004, p. 237), for example, recognizes that
cost-benefit analysis stresses efficiency over equity and that the assigning of prices
to nonmarket costs and benefits is highly subjective and “may simply be arbi-
trary expressions of the values of the analysts.” Bureaucracies are structured to
deal with nonpolitical issues and reduce subjectivity and political questions like
equity. Once political questions and issues enter into the bureaucracy—as they
inevitably do—the bureaucracy deals with them by utilizing methods designed to
ensure efficiency, facilitate procedure, and create predictability. As a result, all too
often, stakeholder views and demands are ignored. In the positivist classroom,
such normative and subjective issues are likewise easily set aside in favor of tech-
nique. The positivist method of policy analysis is very much part of bureaucratic
culture and is not going anywhere, anytime soon.

Although significant changes are under way, virtually all the evidence sug-
gests that professors in both graduate and undergraduate classrooms predomi-
nantly continue to teach positivist techniques. For example, Lawlor (1996)
emphasized that

Mainstream policy analysis has not kept pace with advances in relevant
social science. Many curricula and texts seem frozen in intellectual
time, circa 1970, with heavy emphasis on straight cost-benefit analysis,
decision analysis, and public choice. (p. 111)

Fischer (1998) reemphasized the point, arguing that policy analysis class-
rooms are “still dominated by an outmoded conception of scientific epistemol-
ogy, the social and policy sciences ill equip their students (especially doctoral stu-
students) for the world they are sent out to confront” (p. 143). Buttressed by other criticisms, these clarion calls for changes in policy analysis pedagogy rang true.

With those who follow the predominant approach, we heartily applaud efforts to make policymaking more careful, more reasoned, and less haphazard and sloppy. However, we also see the policy process as inherently political, messy, not meticulous, subjective, and not scientific. Still, somewhat ironically, the critique of the postpositivists that positivism was neither realistic nor useful seemed equally applicable to postpositivism. Being relevant is at least as important as being right. Nor was it adequate for positivists to nod their heads toward the extensive and important criticisms and then continue unabated. What was needed, what is needed, is synthesis and praxis.

When policy analysis students enter the real world of politics and policymaking, they find not a tidy and orderly world but a world inhabited by political actors driven by a “win at all cost” attitude. Fox and Miller (1996) first presented these ideas to a mainstream public administration audience with the publication of their book, *Postmodern Public Administration*. The authors did not argue that public administrators should necessarily engage in postmodern decision making; rather, they presented the world in which the administrator practiced as a confusing one full of marketing slogans, symbols, and popular culture. Miller (2002) later followed with *Postmodern Public Policy*, in which he argues that “the public discourse has taken a peculiar shape in the era of mass communication and mass marketing” (p. xi). As Miller argues, public policymaking becomes little more than an exercise in marketing. Thus even decisions involving war, and therefore life and death, are marketed to citizens as “shock and awe,” and “mission accomplished.” It is the world that our students must enter and conduct analysis in, and it is this world that should be the focus of our teaching efforts.

A careful reading of the literature shows that in the last decade, since the first edition of Clemons and McBeth’s *Public Policy Praxis* and its second edition in 2009, the ivory-tower debate was resolved along the lines we advocated. Though classroom lessons may lag behind, today it seems clear that an approach reflecting the settled debate—that is, reflecting the insights and methods from both camps—is best. Thus, we teach policy analysis by a method that encourages students to grapple with ambiguity and complexity by offering six different analytical approaches to policy analysis: the rational approach, the political approach, the pragmatic approach, the postpositivist approach, the democratic approach, and the quantitative approach. Emphasizing mixed methodologies, students are encouraged through the use of cases to synthesize the different models into a workable and practical model of applied policy analysis. In addition to these analytical models, in our courses and text, we provide specific tools of policy analysis, such as stakeholder mapping, report writing, content analysis, group facilitation, narrative analysis, cost-benefit analysis, futuring, and survey analysis. While each case might emphasize a single analytical approach, the incomplete-
ness of the approach soon becomes apparent to the student. For example, a case using the rational approach reveals to the students the strengths of that approach (a methodology) as well as its limitations (how to deal with subjectivity, lack of democracy, etc.). Similarly, a case that uses the postpositivist approach would reveal its strengths and weaknesses. As the class progresses, students learn to incorporate more and more of the analytical approaches to each case. Some cases lend themselves more to one approach or a combination of approaches. Importantly, students learn that there is not necessarily one dominant approach but rather that a mixed and pluralistic approach is best suited to most analysis problems.

Further, students are given the opportunity to try out these analytical models and tools in varied case settings (county, city, federal, urban, and rural) while facing wide-ranging topics (expansion of human services, health care access, economic development, an inner-city drug program, and an environmental controversy) that capture the diversity of public policy and the intergovernmental nature of politics.

We believe that policy analysis requires a combination of knowledge and skills. Students need to learn about the politics of the policy process as well as how to do policy analysis. Along with teaching “how to,” we discuss the limitations of, the practical political problems with, and the ethical problems associated with different techniques and methodologies. Pedagogically, we rely heavily on a case approach. Tactically, we rely on mixed methodologies.

The Case Method and Teaching

Using teaching cases is one, often underused, tool professors have in their pedagogical toolbox; it is useful for stimulating critical thinking (Helms & Biggs, 2007) and achieving (at least simulated) praxis in the classroom. By praxis, we mean simply “theory guided action,” which in turn simply means that we write cases that promote active learning and critical thinking. Furthermore, cases in public administration are seen as essential in developing unique skills needed by administrators in the field (Rivenbark, 2007). We want our students to be able to describe theory as well as apply it and critically analyze it. Many teachers use at least some version of case study analysis. Whether it is telling stories as part of lectures or through formal cases, educators have long realized the magic of a good story line in engaging their students. The teaching case is a story, a narrative if you will, usually based on actual events and told with a definite teaching purpose. It does not have a correct answer or obvious solution, relying instead on the nature of the real world where answers are difficult to come by and solutions are always contested. Students are introduced to the need to think carefully, to listen to the points made by others and to evaluate those arguments, to review alternative courses of action and their efficacy, and to interpret real-world experience.

Harvard Law School is often credited with beginning the case study pedagogy in 1870, and by 1910 most law schools used cases as the dominant peda-
Case study methodology was adopted by the Harvard Business School after World War I, followed by schools of public administration in the 1930s and 1940s. In the years since, case teaching has spread throughout higher education and even to secondary schooling (Lynn, 1999b, pp. 3–15). In fact, good teachers have always used stories, recognizing that they are often more effective for engaging students than are point-by-point arguments and carefully explained conclusions (Noddings, 1997, p. 20). Noddings (1997) identifies five categories of stories: historical and biographical stories, fictional stories, personal stories, humorous stories, and stories of discovery (pp. 20–33). She argues that they contribute to cultural literacy, they enliven a presentation, they help expand interests while helping students connect to other fields, and they relate difficult concepts to problems of everyday living (pp. 20–33).

Stories and case pedagogy have more than mere classroom discussion value. They can also be vehicles for research. While some research cases may have limited pedagogical value because they have already reached conclusions (Lynn, 1999b, pp. 5–16), it is also true that students may be set to work doing the research to write or present a case study that will deepen their skills and understanding. Writing a case is an exercise in storytelling. Cases provide immediacy whether they are presented as discussion prompts in the classroom or as a research and writing assignment. In either circumstance, they are intended to promote active problem solving and enhance critical thinking skills (Millis & Cottell, 1998, p. 159) even as the cases themselves present a political story for analysis. It is at this point that narrative analysis and case study pedagogy intimately connect with one another.

There are different types of cases. Cases can be either fictional or real life. First, fictional cases are often appropriate to illustrate concepts for which a real-life case example is unavailable. Though the cases are fictional, case writers draw upon their experiences and knowledge when writing the case so that realism is at least simulated.

Second, real-life cases are what academics typically think of. In short, the case author carefully documents a real-life example of policy in action. The advantages of real-life cases are that (a) obviously, they provide the student with something that is tangible and real; and (b) the student can see that what is talked about in the classroom applies to what occurs in the normally messy, real world of politics.

Cases may be used to illustrate a process or theory, or they may provide a decision dilemma in the form of a problem to be solved. For example, a case concerning the decision by the United States to invade Iraq in 2003 could be used to illustrate Kingdon’s (1995) multiple streams theory. Such cases are valuable because they help students reinterpret their familiar world in unfamiliar ways. In this example, students would see September 11, as a focusing event, they could analyze changes in the public mood, and they could see policy solu-
tions (often preexisting ones) that have been floating in the political system being “attached” to the newly perceived problem being floated in the political system. Other cases, what we term “problem solving” cases, allow the student to work at solving a problem. For example, students might be presented with a case that presents a unique policy controversy and then asked how they would respond to various directives.

The key to these cases is not to make them easy enough that there is a single, correct answer. Beginning policy analysis students want the answer, but one important lesson from a good case is that complexity and political reality make the answer unavailable. We like dilemmas that present what the public administration ethics literature terms “right versus right” dilemmas (Cooper, 1998). These are the really hard real-life dilemmas. Choices between right versus wrong alternatives are the easy ones to make. But public policy dilemmas that array one set of values against another, and that also require choices from among value-driven alternatives that are all “right” but mutually exclusive, are more like the difficult ones faced by policy analysts in the fabled real world.

We tend to think of cases as being similar to models, wherein the standard of verisimilitude is key. Teaching cases must provide the most important information, including enough background to provide a complete picture of the policy issue and participants, while not providing so much detail that the policy dilemma is made obscure. Effective cases describe circumstances, provide facts, and communicate policy issues in a manner that gives the reader access to the situation as a nearly omniscient observer. Students must know the players and be able to distinguish between major and minor characters, and the case must provide a peek into their strategies, goals, and tactics. The students must get a feel for the differing dimensions of the issues involved. They need to be able to perceive complexity and conflict in the situation. There should be a dilemma, conflict, competing solutions, and a decision to be made under time pressure and in the absence of perfect information.

In the next section, we present a problem-solving case that was initially inspired by several real-life events but is presented as largely fictional (names, new characters, geographic locations, events, and elements of the decision dilemma have been changed or added to the original events). The assignment pulls the student into the case by assigning a fictional role. Cases often represent examples of situations that occur geographically close to their authors and that may also be familiar to students. Accordingly, there is a chance that professors and students from the real geographic location will be defensive, emotional, and uneasy about discussing controversial issues in their hometown. Fictionalizing a real case avoids this. Accordingly there is an advantage in, for example, taking an event that occurs in Portland, Oregon, and moving it to Buffalo, New York. Other advantages also accrue from fictionalizing the case, including the ability to add, or make evident, complexity, balance, and relevance. (Please note that the case as
presented is fully usable—that is, complete, including the assignment, how it can be taught, and a discussion setting forth examples of the types of issues it lends itself to covering.)

**Case: The Flags and the Garbage Can**

October 15 is a beautiful day; the ground is covered with fresh snow from an early fall storm as you drive down the highway and through several mountain passes in your brand-new state automobile. After recently graduating from the Master of Public Administration (MPA) program at Capitol State University, you are now working as a policy analyst for the State Department of Education (DOE) located in Capitol City. You are making a 250-mile trip (a drive time of 3 hours and 53 minutes, according to your Google map search) to the town of Eastview. As you leave the highway, drive into town, and stop and go through the town’s series of stoplights, you are curiously reminded of your favorite scene from the movie *The Milagro Beanfield War* when a state law enforcement bureaucrat played by Christopher Walken intentionally wrecks his new state car in an attempt to “fit in” with local culture. Yet, the locals in Milagro immediately figure out that the car is driven by, as one character says to another, “a cop.” Perhaps the locals already know that you are the newly hired DOE policy analyst—and indeed, as you get out of your car in your professional business clothes, the locals seem to stare at you in wonder.

Your first major assignment is to conduct an analysis for the Eastview School District. Walking up the sidewalk of the School District Building (at three stories, the largest building in the city), you have to question how you ended up with this job. Instead of sitting behind a desk from 9 to 5, you will often have to make overnight trips to communities throughout the state. You wonder why you ever changed your accounting major years ago and how your life might be different if you had not. Yet, you have always liked research and public policy, and you really liked your public policy analysis class at State U. So here you are in a town of 18,400 people in the middle of nowhere, about to engage in your first external assignment.

The assignment, you think, is a fairly technical one; and you always excelled in technique during your graduate program. You enjoy studying politics, but you were always a little uneasy about the role that politics plays in policymaking. Your policy analyst professor at Capitol State U always stressed that politics and technique cannot totally be separated. You understood what the professor meant, but you hope that this first assignment will be more technique and less politics. Your task is to help the Eastview School District plan for an $11 million project to provide a gymnasium, pool, and locker room facilities at Eastview High. This project is needed to provide equal facilities for both boys and girls physical education courses and athletic teams, as required by Title IX of the Civil Rights Act. Eastview has not been in compliance, and the superintendent has been desperate to bring the school in line with the law.
You meet the School District Superintendent, Bob Sharpornot, and begin a discussion about the high school and the district’s needs. Eastview High is a city high school of about 1,400 students in Grades 10–12. The district is considered one of the poorest in the state. As you drive to the high school for a tour, Superintendent Sharpornot tells you that he would appreciate an analysis of public support for new facilities at the high school, some understanding of the costs involved, some options on how to fund things, and so on. You tell him that you would like to conduct a survey of residents as well as conduct a simple cost-benefit analysis of the project. Sharpornot seems impressed, and you smile as you realize that your job (at least) should be fairly easy. You enter the high school’s current gym and quickly notice the retired number 25 jersey of a former Eastview High All-American girl’s basketball player in 1983, along with championship banners from the school’s volleyball teams. You also notice that the gym is small, things are crowded, and the place smells bad. Several physical education classes are being run at the same time, and the team’s baseball team is taking indoor batting practice in a makeshift batting tunnel. You notice the diversity in the student body and observe some apparent self-segregation in student groups. You meet history teacher and Assistant Athletic Director Howard Eaton, a big burly man and former college football player. Eaton shows you dilapidated locker room facilities, leaky pipes, and even bleachers that are closed for safety reasons.

Upon returning to your hotel that evening in the nearby town of South Mountain, you sketch a plan of action. You will continue to interview stakeholders and use their input to draft a mail survey. You’ve rejected using either focus groups or town-hall meetings as too slow and costly as well as possibly politicizing what you see as primarily a cut-and-dried, rational decision-making situation. Then you will work up a cost-benefit analysis, prepare some options, and wrap up your assignment. You figure that all of this will take 3–6 months, and you expect to make the 250-mile trip many times during the upcoming months.

The next morning, you meet with the school board and present your plan. The president of the board, banker Hal Morris, likes your plan but wonders if it would be smarter to do the cost-benefit analysis first. Morris states, “If your CBA shows more benefits than costs, then that information might be helpful in prompting support that will be measured by your survey and then the survey results will further influence public opinion and build support for funding the new facility.” You are surprised and chagrined at Morris’s bold statement advocating a premature attempt to influence survey results and public opinion, but you also note that other board members nod their heads in apparent agreement with Morris.

Two Weeks Later

You sit in your office with your cost-benefit analysis plan spread out on your desk. The costs seem easy to quantify. First, there are the construction costs (somewhere around $11 million). Renovation and construction of the recreation
facilities would take place on school property, so there doesn’t seem to be any of what your policy analysis professor called those “pesky” environmental or social costs to deal with. Then again, there are opportunity costs. In your stakeholder interviews, you found that many individuals would rather see the school district spend money on purely academic facilities rather than athletic and recreation facilities. One stakeholder argued that this was a zero-sum situation: Because money was needed at the middle school for construction of a new academic building, building the gym and recreational facilities would mean that money would not be spent on more important academic matters. You are uncertain how to factor such opportunity costs into your analysis. The benefits are still more difficult to quantify. Certainly, the high school students will benefit from new facilities; and certainly, physical education and sports activities are an important part of a student’s development and health. Yet, one person’s benefit might be another person’s cost. That is, construction of the gym might mean that the middle school does not get its academic building. Thus a perceived benefit to those who support the high school construction might be a perceived cost to those who support spending money on an academic building for the middle school.

As you look over your interviews, you note that supporters of the recreation project contend that the new facilities would bring in new revenue to the community—thus suggesting that it might be a variable-sum situation. That is, these supporters believe that Eastview could host swim meets, basketball and wrestling tournaments, and even some cultural events in their new facilities. In your mind, you can almost hear the school board president telling you to shape the cost-benefit analysis to make it look more positive.

After a long lunch and some time to think, you ask yourself whether you are getting ahead of yourself. That is, perhaps you need to conduct the survey to get a wider view of stakeholders. Again, the school board president’s comments about using survey results to positively influence public opinion sticks in your head. You write a quick survey using the principles of survey construction learned in your MPA program. For example, you remember to avoid leading questions, double-barreled questions, biased questions, and questions that lead to uninformed responses. You also remember to not ask “motherhood and apple pie” questions (questions without costs or trade-offs that everybody is going to agree with). Your five questions (with additional demographic questions) look good, and you think the survey is technically correct. You then fax it to key stakeholders and head for home, thinking you have the bulk of your work in Eastview well in hand.

You spend the next morning on the road, working on a project for another school district. Upon arriving after lunch at your office, you are surprised to see seven faxes on your desk. You are even more surprised that each fax is from an individual stakeholder who is demanding additional new questions or rewritten questions. Some of the revised surveys (like the one submitted by School Board
President Hal Morris) are clearly trying to frame questions in ways that will produce results favorable to the project. Others do the opposite, and still others want to use the survey for other purposes (like testing economic development policies). Some stakeholders even take a hostile, in-your-face tone in their faxes, accusing you and your survey questions of bias (one way or the other). You are surprised at how angry these accusations make you. You remember your professor telling you that survey construction is political, and you remember Miles’ Law (where you stand depends upon where you sit), but somehow you weren’t emotionally prepared for seeing politics in action. You know that your survey is technically correct (although after reading the critical faxes, you are starting to question yourself), but you also know that you have to please multiple stakeholders. You wonder if you have failed as an analyst; and you now worry about your return trip to Eastview, scheduled for December 9.

What Happens Next

On December 6, Rafael Juarez walked into an Eastview High School classroom with a Mexican flag in his hand. Rafael, a Hispanic student in his senior year at Eastview, had received the flag at “Mexico Cultural Appreciation Days,” an event sponsored by a local business group. Eastview High history teacher Howard Eaton took the flag from Juarez. The events after this are disputed. Juarez claims that Eaton made fun of him after taking the flag, saying, “I don’t want to see any Mexican flag in my classroom” and then throwing it in the garbage can. Eaton, on the other hand, admits “placing” the flag in the garbage can; but argued that he was doing so “to keep the classroom environment safe and productive.” Hispanic students in the class were apparently shocked at Eaton’s action. About 40% of Eastview High School is Hispanic. 4

Eastview, an agricultural (tomatoes, squash, lentil beans) and industrial community (former home of an auto parts plant), has a long history of attracting and hiring immigrant farmworkers and, more recently, blue-collar workers from Mexico. In the 1960s and 1970s, these workers (including their families) lived in “migrant camps” on the Eastview plain. The plain is “hot and humid” country. The houses in these camps had plywood walls, and the migrants sometimes experienced heat of over 100 degrees without any air conditioning. In the 1990s, these camps were torn down and replaced with better seasonal housing. Overwhelmingly, these immigrant farmworkers lived in Eastview during the agricultural growing season (May through October) and then returned to Mexico for the winter months.

Over time, however, many workers decided to stay in Eastview, and their children (born in the United States) are American citizens. By 1990, over 15% of Eastview was Hispanic; their share of the population had increased to over 25% by the year 2000. This led to a great deal of racial tension in the town. Fear of “Mexican gangs,” “drug dealers,” and even “Satanism” was, and is, rampant among many of Eastview’s Anglo residents.
The flag incident ignited simmering tension between Anglos and Hispanics. When some Hispanic students in an art class prepared posters of the Mexican flag and posted them in the school’s hallways, some Anglo students responded by tearing the posters down and waving the U.S. flag in a protest. In an effort to reduce tensions, a diverse group of Anglo and Hispanic students marched together in front of the school carrying both American and Mexican flags and prepared diversity posters for the school’s gym and for display at a boy’s basketball game. A rumor circulated that a male Anglo student was going to bring a gun to school, heightening fears among students and parents and leading to a decision to let the high school students out early. Recognizing the potential for rapidly escalating racial and cultural conflict, the high school principal sought to defuse the volatile situation by suspending teacher Howard Eaton and launching a full-scale investigation. The school district’s superintendent stated, “While it is our opinion that the actions of Mr. Eaton were insensitive and inappropriate, we also believe that the student should not have interrupted a history class by waving a Mexican flag, so an investigation is under way.”

Two days after the flag incident, another teacher, Paul Napoli, was placed on suspension when, according to school district officials, he “burned an American flag in the school’s courtyard.” Napoli, who taught mathematics and is the faculty advisor for the school’s Hispanic club, apparently went into the school’s courtyard and invited the media and some students to watch him burn an American flag. He is currently being prosecuted by county officials for public mutilation of an American flag, a violation of a state law that may not be constitutional based on multiple Supreme Court rulings about free speech and the First Amendment. (His flag-burning episode was videotaped and was popular on YouTube before being removed after a month because of racially charged comments).

News of the initial flag incident and ensuing events soon spread to the local, regional, and national media. A local Hispanic cable television station tried to organize a protest at the school, and the expanding story was picked up and quickly spread through the media. Soon, Eastview was being discussed on newspaper and blogs in cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and Dallas. National anti-immigration groups picked up the story, and soon Juarez (an American citizen) was being portrayed as the “typical illegal alien, complaining about how mean Americans are.” Liberal blogs such as the Daily Dose have run daily accounts of the issue. Furthermore, conservative talk radio shows, including the nationally syndicated Louie O’Loudmouth show, have seized on this case as an example of how patriotic Americans are constantly being sacrificed on the altar of “liberal-fascist” support for illegal immigration.

In fact, both the blog and O’Loudmouth have become active players in this controversy. The Daily Dose is considered the most influential liberal blog, and activists writing under pseudonyms have used the blog to raise money for political candidates, fund recount efforts, and organize protest movements. In
this case, a blogger with the user name of “The Truth” has used the Eastview flag incident to bring awareness to racial tensions. The Truth is raising money to buy all Eastview Hispanic students cell phone video cameras and encouraging them to record any racial comments or behaviors so that they can be posted on YouTube as well as the Daily Dose. The Truth is offering a $5,000 reward for the most “viral” video clip of racism at the school.

Conversely, Louie O’Loudmouth (or LO’L as he is known locally) is something of a celebrity in Eastview. He grew up in Eastview, and his family owns the town’s grocery store. Not surprisingly, O’Loudmouth’s show is a staple of the most popular AM radio station in Eastview. Anyone taking a morning stroll through downtown Eastview is frequently within range of O’Loudmouth’s strident voice as it wafts from open shop doors and the open windows of passing cars.

Similarly, those who are supportive of immigration rose to the defense of Juarez and castigated Eastview as “full of inbreds, imbeciles, and hillbillies.” Following is a sample of the Internet buzz from both local and national sources. (Note: These quotes are purely fictional, though based on quotes from a real incident.)

Local

- “Eastview citizens R always the bad guys, why was there a Mexican Appreciation Day, why not an American Appreciation Day?” (Frank, Eastview)
- “Louie O’Loudmouth and local announcers are liars. They make up stories about Hispanics and call us illegals and welfare cheats.” (Bonita, Eastview)
- “Napoli’s burning of the American flag should lead to capital punishment, but I don’t care about the Mexican flag, it is not the USA of American flag.” (Hal, Eastview)

National and International

- “This is typical American provincialism. As a citizen of Italy, I am amazed that the U.S. is afraid of different ways of life. In most countries, different cultures are more accepted.” (Agata, Italy)
- BTW, hey can you imagine a teacher like Eaton throwing away a British flag from a British student on a British holiday like Boxing Day? No, this is just plain wrong, and u know it.” (Joe, Forth Worth, Texas)
- “This is another example of why we need Tea Party Patriots, not tepid patriots. Send them and all there [sic] flags back to Mexico.” (Sarah, Phoenix, Arizona)
The Analyst Returns

After reading about the flag incident, you wondered if the whole project would or should be scrapped. But you got word from your supervisor that the director of the DOE has talked directly with the governor and that you are to remain engaged in the Eastview project.

It is now three days after the initial flag incident. After an exhausting drive, you arrive at Eastview and decide to stop in at school district offices before registering at your hotel. As you enter the office, you are surprised to see the office staff gathered around listening to the Louie O’Loudmouth show. After reintroducing yourself to some, you ask the obvious question: Why is everyone listening to LO’L? The story comes out as a disjointed rush of words with everyone speaking at the same time. Finally, you get the whole story.

It seems that LO’L has taken a particular interest in this controversy at his alma mater and has decided to raise the stakes while further making a name for himself. He has offered to personally contribute $2 million to the fund set up last winter by the superintendent to raise money for the desperately needed gymnasium, pool, and locker room facilities at Eastview High. You know that the project is expected to cost the district about $11 million, funds that are simply unavailable to a relatively poor district like Eastview. You learn that not only has LO’L offered to pony up $2 million dollars of his own money for the fund, but he has also offered to use his radio show to raise the rest of the money from his nationwide base of listeners.

O’Loudmouth’s overly generous offer, however, is not without certain conditions. These conditions are designed to appeal to the political prejudices of his listeners while also presenting the school district with a difficult choice. The first condition is that the investigation of the Mexican flag incident and of teacher Howard Eaton be ended and Eaton exonerated of any wrongdoing. O’Loudmouth’s second condition is that teacher Paul Napoli’s suspension be continued until the burning of the American flag charges have been resolved and, if he is convicted, that he be fired and the Hispanic Club disbanded. Third, the school district needs to sponsor an American Appreciation Day. Finally, LO’L demands that an American flag be installed in a “place of honor” in the cafeteria, in the new gymnasium, in every classroom, in every office, and at every prominent entrance to the campus.

You are appalled by his gall, and surprised by these developments; but you are also confident that the district will reject his demands out of hand, thus allowing you to go about your work for the DOE. When you arrive at the superintendent’s office for your scheduled meeting with him the next morning, however, you get quite a surprise. Superintendent Sharpornot tells you he is seriously considering O’Loudmouth’s offer—and, further, he has asked the school board to meet in emergency session tonight to discuss the offer and maybe make a decision. Superintendent Sharpornot hastens to assure you, and through you the director of the DOE, that he is not a small-town insular racist but a progressive educator.
Sharpornot believes he can negotiate with L’OL to maximize the most innocuous of his conditions (flags in all “places of honor”) while minimizing the most objectionable ones (the American Appreciation Day and disbanding the Hispanic Club). He hopes to get the school board to authorize naming the new gymnasium complex after O’Loudmouth to sweeten the pot for him and his followers. Sharpornot also points out that for making mostly symbolic concessions to O’Loudmouth, the district would get actual and badly needed bricks and mortar, finally providing the gender-equal facilities long required by federal law. In Sharpornot’s view, it is a no-brainer.

As you leave Sharpornot’s office, you overhear parts of conversation from a group of Hispanic parents gathered on the sidewalk outside the office. Words and phrases you hear include “pack the meeting,” “protest,” “disrespect,” and most ominously, “I don’t know if we can control the hotheads.” In addition, you remember that the Daily Dose is waiting to pounce on this story once again, and you think about what would happen if camera phones were indeed being universally used throughout the school. No one wants cameras everywhere, and short clips on YouTube can be misleading (because they are often taken out of context). In addition, Sharpornot clearly does not believe that racism is deep in his school. In fact, he believes strongly that people with racist views are a small minority at Eastview High.

You sit at a local sandwich shop by Eastview Lake, and in your briefcase is your cost-benefit analysis plan as well as your original survey with stakeholder comments attached. You feel that you have lost control (or perhaps never had it) and that you should not get involved with the political maneuverings. You are a policy analyst, not a political advisor. You once again remember, though, your professor at State U telling you that the line between analysis and politics is often narrow. You wonder if you can somehow develop a process to get things back on track or whether this whole project is a lost cause.

Questions to Consider

1. Early in the case, you (as the analyst) see your job mainly in technical terms. Returning to the time before December 6, how would you describe your performance? Do analysts have to play politics when conducting such “technical” exercises? Should they play politics?

2. For the period before December 6, write five good survey questions that you think would help you gain needed information. Then outline a process to conduct the cost-benefit analysis.

3. How did the events of December 6 and later change this policy problem? What do you tell your director when you make your late-morning phone call to her office? That is, what is your recommendation? The governor wants you working on this case but has not
offered detailed policy guidance. How do you walk this political and policy tightrope while maintaining your professional stance in making recommendations to your boss?

4. Assuming you stay on this case (either by choice or by order of the DOE director), an obvious key question is, who are the stakeholders and what are their views? (Is the Eastview community being railroaded by O’Loudmouth and his followers? Is the Daily Dose simply using its powerful national following to manipulate local officials? If so, can anything be done about it?) Complete a stakeholder analysis identifying the multiple interests and players in this case. As you work on this, note that competing interest groups and individuals frequently present alternatives in strategically convenient language. How does each group define the problem? What stories are they telling? How does this reflect their values, interests, and power? (Keep this simple; you don’t need a large, formal stakeholder analysis.)

5. Is this case a good illustration of how a mixed method approach might be especially useful for the policy analyst? Think about how the case combines identification of key facts, cost-benefit analysis, surveys, focus groups, and a policy process model focusing on the politically charged environment within which policy analysis happens. How does the mixed method approach provide the analysis with appropriate armamentaria to operate in these figurative political battlefields?

6. How do you work in such a charged environment? Do you think the media and message board examples are illustrative of what stakeholders think about this situation, or do you think there is more moderation among larger groups? How would you find out this information, and how do you mobilize moderation? Is it unusual for analysts to have to work in such complex and highly political environments?

7. Does the advent of technology make your decision making more difficult? In other words, how do you contain this issue when it is now on blogs, talk radio, YouTube, and cable news? Are you surprised at the emotion and the anger illustrated in this case? Where does this emotion and anger come from? What role do elites play in promoting such emotion and anger, and what role could elites play in defusing such situations?

8. Is this all happening too fast? After all, no serious analysis has been done by Sharpornot or you. Will acquiescence to O’Loudmouth’s demands further inflame the Hispanic community? Will acquiescence to the Daily Dose (The Truth) show that the school district is weak and can be played by outside forces? Is this a right versus right dilemma? Or are there clearly right and wrong policy options?
9. How about the Hispanic parents and kids? Who is looking out for them, and who is including them in the community? And, if they feel rejected and “disrespected” by the school board’s ultimate decision, what implications does this have for the community and education?

10. If, at the school board meeting tonight, the board were to turn to you as an expert policy analyst and ask your advice for both the short- and the long-term way of defusing the situation while also providing the best education for the community in the long term, what will you propose? Can you successfully return the dialogue to a survey and the cost-benefit analysis?

Teaching Cases

In our classrooms, we use cases like this as an opportunity not only to stimulate student discussion and interest but also to allow them to learn by doing. The case can be used in a variety of ways. For example, you could turn the case into a formal writing assignment for which the student has to answer the questions in the form of a memo to a hypothetical decision maker (the director of the DOE, in this case). Alternatively, you could use the case as an informal writing assignment and have students prepare thorough answers to the questions (or merely jot down ideas in response to them) that lead to a class discussion. Finally, you could use the case strictly for discussion—perhaps building on group discussions of each question, or simply discussing the case as a whole after students read through it. Professors obviously also can choose how to teach the case in regard to reading material. This case could be very profitably used at the end of the semester, after students have read and dealt with the differing analytical approaches to policy analysis. Yet, the case could also be used at the beginning of the semester as a way of quickly introducing students to the messy and political world of policy analysis. When we introduce a case early in the semester, besides using it as a touchstone while moving through new material, we normally return to it at the end of the semester so that students can see for themselves their own increased analytical sophistication.

A key principle of case teaching is that students often learn from mistakes. For example, students frequently try to solve the problem without understanding it or paying attention to process and the social and human dimensions at play. Our students are much like the analyst in the case. They understand and appreciate politics, but part of the learning process is to learn technique before learning political sophistication. That is, they most often prefer rationality to politics. Yet, when put into situations involving cases like this, they clearly understand the difficulties of a purely rational approach. Even before the December 6 flag incident, this dilemma is not one in which a purely rational approach will work, due to the nature of the problem. We would discuss it as a wicked problem.
(Rittel & Webber, 1973) and therefore one that calls for a wide range of voices to be invested in deriving a solution and owning the ultimate policy. Still, some students will insist on a straightforward determination of who is right and who is wrong and further insist on imposing a solution that favors the “right” side in this controversy.

For us, as professors, this is a teaching moment; for the students, it is a learning one. Gently prodding students to think about how this dispute symbolically threatens values of both the Hispanic and Anglo communities and thus heightens policy conflict may lead most of them to recognize that both sides have a point. This realization is the first step toward their maturation as policy analysts rather than political partisans. When this happens, students discover on their own the necessity to bring all community members into respectful discussions seeking a policy solution.

Several of the questions for the example case tap into another issue student analysts often struggle with, and it is one that practicing analysts regularly face as well. Namely, the temporal problem—usually characterized by the existence of both short- and long-term factors. Moreover, not only may the seemingly best solution for one factor contradict the seemingly best course of action for the other, but managers and leaders so frequently (if understandably) may fall victim to the tendency to put out the fire in an immediate tree without recognizing the long-term danger of losing the entire forest to a fire. Alternatively, because public administration students are typically trained as staff managers, they might pursue the opposite inclination. That is, they might spend time with grandiose long-term plans without dealing with the immediate crisis.

Cases like the one just presented also become a launching pad to discuss the (more short-term) topic of problem definition—and the fact that different definitions as the cause of the problem will translate into different solutions—and the (more long-term) topic of utilizing a four- to six-step model so as to not miss key factors while trying to determine criteria, generate alternatives, or “do” policy evaluation and selection.

Another avenue to pursue in the classroom is related to several of the case questions. Cases like this one reflect directly on the question of who the analyst works for, their views of democracy and power, and ethical concerns. Other topics we cover in our text and classes that this case lends itself to discussing include Kingdon’s three streams theory (how this issue is a focusing event, and policy entrepreneurs are using it to attach solutions and shape the public mood); and issue expansion à la Schattschneider (1960; policy entrepreneurs are taking this single issue and wrapping it in larger national issues), including the use of the mass media plus narrative (or story) analysis.

In particular, the example case lends itself to this kind of analysis because of O’Loudmouth’s involvement. Students quickly identify with how this policy entrepreneur has used his available national stage to put immigration on the agenda.
nationally while simultaneously presenting his alma mater with a difficult dilemma. In chess, this is the equivalent of putting the opponent’s king in “check.” For the school district, the governor, and the student analyst, the question is how to escape “check,” avoid “checkmate,” and take advantage of their own offensive capabilities. Certainly there are other topics as well, topics covered in the textbooks utilized and in our classrooms, that can be worked into a discussion or into the feedback professors provide in response to a writing assignment based on these questions. As with the questions themselves, our discussion of how to use the case in class is meant to be suggestive and inclusive, not exclusive.

However, we do contend that a pedagogical approach utilizing cases—when presented to students trained with a mixed approach that combines knowledge and skills—is far more likely to produce both increased student interest and analysts better able to address complex issues than will either training students using only a rational model approach or using only a purely postmodern approach. Yet, we must recognize that case teaching doesn’t allow us, or our students, to reach tidy solutions based on professional consensus. The real world just doesn’t work that way, and case studies are most effective when they confirm the messiness of politics and policy analysis for students.

In addition, when teaching a controversial and emotional case such as this, there is always the worry that controversy in the case will spill over to the classroom. A case study like this—one that is balanced, complex, and a true dilemma—can stimulate significant interest, strong feelings, and vigorous debate. This response requires a professor who can be a fair and neutral discussion leader on the topic, who is comfortable with a lively classroom debate, and who understands that he or she is responsible for student feelings as well as educational outcomes. In short, the professor has to model the facilitation skills used by policy analysts in heated real-world events like those discussed in the example case.

As teachers, we know our cases and case discussions with students are most successful when students still want to argue about process and detail at the end of class; when everyone leaves a little dissatisfied; when students leave class still confronting one another about the case; and even when the professor leaves class wishing that somehow the solution students came up with had been just a little more clearly defined.

References


Public Policy Pedagogy: Mixing Methodologies Using Cases


**Footnotes**


2 In November 2002, one of the coauthors participated in a roundtable discussion with Larry Lynn and Michael Munger at the Southern Political Science Association Conference in Savannah, GA. The discussion, organized by Francine Sanders Romero, focused on different approaches to policy analysis and was a pleasant and instructive exchange of ideas.

3 This discussion of case teaching is designed for readers not familiar with the approach. More experienced readers may want to skip or browse this section.

4 Clearly, many of the so-called Anglos are not just of English heritage; but the non-Hispanic whites in Eastview tend to view themselves as Anglo Americans and have incorporated very little, if any, heritage from their other European (primarily) backgrounds into their identities. They are proudly “non-hyphenated” Americans. For this reason, we use their term *Anglo* to designate the non-Hispanic white population of Eastview.
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