HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL
PED-250  Second Year Policy Analysis Seminar
Course Syllabus for 2015 - 2016

Thursday 4:15 – 6:00 pm

Faculty:
Section A: Littauer 332
Faculty:  Eduardo Levy Yeyati  Assistant: Allie Pagano
Office:  Rubenstein 406  Office: Taubman 481
E-mail:  eduardo levy yeyati@hks.harvard.edu  E-mail: alexandra_pagano@hks.harvard.edu
Phone:  617-495-8096  Phone:  617-496-2654
Office hours: Wednesday 4:00-6:00pm; sign up available at:  

Section B: Littauer 382
Faculty:  Lant Pritchett  Assistant: Mary Popeo
Office:  Rubenstein 313  Office: Rubenstein 301
E-mail:  lant_pritchett@hks.harvard.edu  E-mail:  mary.popeo@hks.harvard.edu
Office hours:  Sign up on office door  Phone:  617-495-2133

Section C: Littauer 140
Faculty:  Michael Walton  Assistant: Lisa MacPhee
Office:  Littauer 108  Office: Littauer 207
E-mail:  michael_walton@harvard.edu  E-mail: lisa_macphee@hks.harvard.edu
Phone:  202-251-8702  Phone:  617-495-5994
Office hours:  Check and sign up on https://www.timetrade.com/book/PV7XP.

Note: Section assignments for PED-250 will be given to you after the first plenary meeting of the semester on September 3rd, 2015.

1. Course Description

The PED-250 “Second Year Policy Analysis,” the capstone product of the MPA/ID program, is a course designed to help you further develop your professional skills as a development practitioner.

The main output is the SYPA report itself, which calls for the application of the theoretical and empirical techniques acquired in other courses to an actual development problem. The report is written for a specific client (a government, agency, NGO, etc.) and involves the diagnosis of a problem, the formulation of a policy proposal, and the development of a feasible implementation plan. This requires that you identify an issue, develop the conceptual and empirical basis for recommended action, and then present your analysis and recommendations in a written document.
The *process* of analysis itself, as well as the effective communication of the analysis to others, is also an important part of the skill-building process (and your grade). Thus, in addition to the final product, you will be required to:

- Submit intermediate products throughout the process designed to further the analysis and gain feedback from others
- Effectively communicate your results through oral presentations and through a policy brief that is written and presented after the main report is submitted.

**Clients:** While the report must be written for a real client, you are not required to have an actual relationship with them. This is for two reasons: (1) not all clients on truly interesting development questions will be available and interested; and (2) clients’ interests may not be aligned with the primary purpose of the SYPA, which is to define a problem and use techniques from the overall MPA/ID Program. Having a real relationship with your client is fine provided that this does not lead to a product that is inconsistent with the SYPA goals.

**Resources:** Several resources are available to help you develop your SYPA report:

- The *PED-250Y seminar* will allow you to interact with section leaders and other MPA/ID students with similar interests. You will be assigned to one of three sections based on your likely SYPA topic, which you will provide at the end of the first class meeting. Subsequent sessions are designed to coach you through the steps of preparing the SYPA and to develop your professional skills as a policy adviser. Section leaders are available to deal with questions about writing SYPAs and to advise individual students about both substance and process. Support and insights from fellow MPA/ID classmates is especially important, and this is formally incorporated into the process.

- Second, each student will have a faculty adviser, drawn from the HKS faculty, who has specialized expertise in at least some of the issues associated with his or her SYPA. Your faculty adviser will be an important source on substantive and methodological issues. The most helpful advisers are those with enough interest in you and/or your project to actively assist you in developing a valuable SYPA. We strongly encourage you to discuss your topic with faculty members who might be interested in serving as adviser as soon as possible. If you are still considering several possibilities, consult potential advisers about ways to define a topic. By Thursday, September 25th, every student must have found an adviser. Those who have not done so will be assigned one, but it is far better to find a good fit on your own than to be assigned.

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1 In rare circumstances, faculty members from other schools can be recruited to be advisers, but permission to use non-HKS-affiliated faculty is required: it is given *only* if the faculty member indicates a sufficient interest in the SYPA topic to volunteer their services.
Students should note that it is their responsibility to meet regularly with their section leader and adviser. In the fall semester, the key output is the SYPA outline. Adviser signatures (or other forms of confirmation to the section leaders) are required on these outlines, as they constitute a contract between the student, the adviser and section leader. A first full SYPA draft is then due at the beginning of the spring semester. The rest of the spring semester is devoted to revisions, making oral presentations, submitting a final SYPA and preparing a policy brief.

2. Objectives of the SYPA Experience

The SYPA experience provides an environment for building and expanding a number of critical, professional competencies, including:

- Identifying and conceptualizing an important development problem;
- Interpreting how a problem is related to potential processes of change;
- Applying technical approaches to analyze these challenges, using tools from economics, political analysis and diagnostic approaches to implementation;
- Using effective empirical techniques—quantitative or qualitative;
- Preparing practical recommendations for action by key decision-makers;
- Developing effective communication through both written work and oral presentations;
- Providing constructive feedback to colleagues on all of the above.

The combination of seminars, relationships with the adviser and section leader, and interaction with other students, form the crux of the SYPA experience and present you with an opportunity to build these competencies.

For most, the SYPA will be an unfamiliar experience. Note that the SYPA is:

- **Not a slightly longer term paper.** Students who try to do it during a few intense weeks in February always find that they have misjudged the amount of work involved. They produce an inferior product and have a high risk of failing.
- **Not a research report.** Students who have modeled their SYPA on research articles have also been disappointed in their final grade. While strong research is a necessary input, the SYPA is primarily concerned with using the research findings for practical policy recommendations rather than for advancing an academic discipline.
- **Not primarily a methodological exercise.** Students who carry out elaborate technical analyses are sometimes surprised to find that they need to deal with the practical implications of messy policy situations involving stakeholders with diverse and conflicting interests.

What, then, is the SYPA? The SYPA is an analysis in which you frame a development
problem conceptually, use analytic tools to generate a better understanding of the problem and of the options available for dealing with it, and provide recommendations and implementation advice tailored to the needs of decision-makers. Good SYPAs provide conceptual, analytic, and empirical support for the recommended actions, as well as clear analysis on how the problem (and your recommendations) relate to drivers of change and interact with political processes. Importantly, good SYPAs provide an assessment of implementation capacity and give a realistic framework for the implementation of the recommendations.

Students can work either as individuals or as pairs. If you work as a pair you will both receive the same grade (unless there are large differences in the participation part of the grade—see below). More than two on a team is not allowed.

3. Enrollment

All second-year students in the MPA/ID Program must enroll in PED-250. The course is worth 1.5 credits. Successful completion of the SYPAs is a prerequisite for graduation from the MPA/ID Program. This course is restricted to MPA/ID students.

4. Course Design

There will be three sections of PED-250. We will try to group students with similar interests as well as to balance the size of the sections.

The course is structured to take students through a sequence of the components of policy analysis work, including (but not limited to):

• defining a policy question
• literature review and conceptualization
• alternative empirical strategies
• political analysis
• analysis of implementation
• making effective presentations
• targeting policy briefs to alternative stakeholder narratives

The meetings of PED-250 will take several forms:

• **Plenary class meetings.** These classes will bring together the entire MPA/ID second year class to introduce and discuss a topic. **All full class meetings will be held in L140.**

• **Section meetings.** Section meetings will be used to take you through the various phases of the work, from initial problem definition to the policy brief, using a mixture of small group work, presentations, discussions and feedback. Giving feedback to others is an important professional skill, and this will be integrated into the course in the section meetings, especially, but
not exclusively, in the small group work.

- **Individual meetings with section leaders and advisers.** You are encouraged to work with your section leaders and your advisers to clarify your topic, develop strategies for collecting and analyzing data, and examine the implications of your analyses and recommendations. You bear responsibility for arranging to meet with section leaders and advisers.

The course is designed with a lot of structure, to take students through the various components of preparing and delivering a professional policy paper. However, there may also be somewhat more fluidity that a standard course in order to accommodate periods of intensive presentation, group work, and faculty travel.

Within each section, students will often be organized into smaller groups—typically 3-5 people—working on closely related themes. This will allow interactions within these groups, including informal presentations and feedback. Learning how to give critical, constructive feedback (in a safe environment) is a valuable professional skill.

5. **Deadlines**

The SYPA is organized around six deadlines. We will not accept late submissions, so do allow enough time to complete all assignments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>DELIVERABLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, September 3rd, 2015</td>
<td>Initial topic selection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, September 25th, 2015</td>
<td>Submission of adviser preference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, November 9th, 2015</td>
<td>SYPA outline</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, January 31st, 2016</td>
<td>First draft of SYPA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, March 14th, 2016</td>
<td>Final draft of SYPA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday April 8th, 2016</td>
<td>Policy brief</td>
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</tbody>
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- **Topic selection:** you will provide an initial description of your topic, in one or two paragraphs, in a form that will be sent to you. Your assignment to a PED-250 section will be based on this. While few students have a fully specified topic at this point, the overwhelming majority of past students have written SYPAs on some aspect of the initially identified topic.

- **Adviser selection:** this is the date when all advisers are assigned. This is a school-wide process that goes beyond MPA/IDs—we strongly encourage you to meet with advisers early to get a good match.

- **SYPA outline:** this is essentially a contract between you, your adviser and your section leader, covering the substance of your SYPA. It should include the conceptualization of the policy or institutional reform problem, your initial literature review, your methodology and planned analysis of your
SYPA. It may be necessary to redraft the outline before all parties concur in its design, but it is vital that this agreement be completed before the end of the semester so that you can work on an agreed plan during the winter break. Advisers must sign off on the outline, either literally or by email.

- **First SYPA draft:** this is the basis for (a) making a presentation to the members of your section and (b) getting feedback from your adviser and section leader. The better developed your first draft, the higher the quality of feedback you will get from both those sources. We strongly recommend that you prepare a first draft that is a complete product.

- **Final SYPA:** due **March 14th, 2015**, immediately after the start of the Spring Break (you are free to turn it in earlier). This date is intended to keep your Spring Break free for other activities while offering you the first weekend of the break to apply last minute finishing touches to your work if needed.

- **Policy Brief:** this is a self-standing product, in which you will write a sharp, four page brief, that is both positioned strategically to interact with the positions of the various stakeholders, and is highly accessible and engaging.

The way to get the most from this process is to take these deadlines seriously, in substance and timing, so you do not have to play “catch up” just to survive. **Getting behind is the most common problem for students working on SYPAs.** It is easier to work on immediate course demands than to define a topic and carry out work that is not due until the next semester. Therefore, it is critically important to define a feasible topic as soon as possible so you can make realistic plans.

In addition to these deadlines that relate to the substance of your SYPA, all students will need to prepare a submission to section leaders for Human Subjects Review, by October 16, 2015. Section leaders will determine whether you have human subjects issues. If your research does not involve human subjects, the process ends there. If it does involve human subjects, then you will need to make a formal submission to Harvard’s Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research (CUHS). Clearance by CUHS is required before undertaking any research involving human subjects. You will then also be required to have completed the training and receive a CITI certification.

Major assignments must always be turned in electronically by 4PM on the due date. Intermediate assignment submission will be determined by section leaders. Late submissions will not be accepted. Note that the final SYPA must also be submitted in paper form (see below).

**6. Grading.**

PED-250 is worth 1.5 credits and will be graded on the usual HKS grade distribution. **Writing an acceptable SYPA (B- or better) is a pre-requisite for graduation.**
PED-250 grades will be based on the quality of your final SYPA, as jointly assessed by your adviser and section leader, and on your submissions and presentations in the preparation of the SYPA, participation in classes and section meetings, and the policy brief. The grading breakdown is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final SYPA</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>SYPA Outline</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Draft SYPA</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy brief</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation/Assignments</td>
<td>10%</td>
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</tbody>
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The grade for the final SYPA will be based exclusively on the written product (and jointly agreed on by the adviser and section leader). Grades for the SYPA outline, the draft SYPA and the policy brief, will be based both on these written products and class presentations.

The class participation element will be based on the quality of your contribution to class discussions, and completion of the other intermediate assignments.

**Late SYPAs** (those turned in after the March 14th deadline) will be automatically penalized two grades (e.g., from B+ to B-).

Final papers that your adviser and section leader consider unacceptable (below B-) will be returned for further revision and such revised SYPAs cannot receive a final grade higher than B.

**7. Joint degree students**

The requirements, timing and grading for joint degree students will be the same as for other students, with two qualifications:

- Students undertaking a joint HKS/HBS degree will have an HBS adviser as well as an HKS one.
- Students at other schools may not be able to join class sessions in the Spring Semester, depending on their location. All deadlines for written assignments remain the same. Efforts will be made to have you make presentations by video conference. We encourage you to make special efforts to stay in touch with section leaders and advisers in this semester.