

BIOET 401Q: “Science, Ethics, Policy, and Law”

Fall 2023

A Guide to the Course Project / Policy Brief

In this class, you are required to complete a course project. The project will take the form of a *policy brief*, a review of work in a science-related policy area, together with one or more recommendations. The entire project will comprise 400 possible points, or 40 percent of your course grade.

What’s A “Policy Brief”?

A policy brief is a document that sets forth an affirmative case for a specific change to some formal policy. You might think of it as an extended-form persuasive document, one that asks you to present the “best case” for some policy innovation. It is designed to be a starting point for a discussion of a proposed policy change.

In this course, the policy brief will focus on topics that are scientific in nature, in some way (so, for example, we’d rule out a policy brief whose central thesis was “The Catholic Church should reinterpret Romans 1:27 not to condemn homosexuality.”) Instead, the focus should be on public policy changes that are / can be informed by science. Your topic may be in an aspect of science policy itself, or a policy area for which scientific research and evidence offer relevant insights.

Some examples / additional guidance:

- <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/policy-briefs/>
- <https://web.stanford.edu/class/siw198q/modelppr/amber2.htm>
- <http://blogs.lshrm.ac.uk/griphealth/files/2017/01/Policy-briefs-guide2015.pdf>

Note that some of these differ significantly from the guidelines described below; they’re designed to give you a rough idea of the form and substance of a policy brief.

Target Audience

A key component of a policy brief is the *target audience*. This is the policy-maker (or policy-making body) that is the intended recipient of the brief. The target audience should be a policy-making entity that has substantial control over policy in the area of your topic; this implies that they are *usually* government entities of some kind. They may be local, state/regional, national, or international authorities – including those in other states/regions/countries – so long as the scale of the problem / issue your brief addresses corresponds to the relevant policy scope of the target audience.

In short, your brief's argument can be targeted at any of countless policy-making bodies. A very-incomplete-but-illustrative list might include:

- the State College Police Department,
- the Hall County (NE) Department of Regional Planning,
- the Pennsylvania Independent Regulatory Review Commission,
- the Punjab Legislative Assembly,
- the Inspector General of the U.S. House of Representatives,
- the Supreme Court of the Phillipines,
- the International Bureau of Weights and Measures.

A similar (incomplete, but suggestive) list of potential topic areas will be posted separately.

Course-Specific Guidelines

While policy briefs can take on a wide range of forms and structures, for purposes of BIOET 401Q meeting the following criteria will be required:

- The final policy brief should be between 3000-5000 words (roughly 12-20 double-spaced pages), *not* including the bibliography / references. Please include tables, figures, or other non-text components in-line with the policy brief's text, rather than separately at the end of the document.
- The policy brief should include at least seven sections:
 1. An **Executive Summary**: A 2-3 paragraph précis of the brief's recommendations.
 2. A **Background** section that describes the origins and history of the policy question or challenge to be addressed.
 3. A **Recommendation** section, that outlines the specific change(s) to policy that you are recommending.
 4. A **Justification** for those recommended change(s). This might include scientific evidence, descriptions of how/why the changes will address the policy challenge/question, and/or other considerations (efficiency, public relations, political expediency, etc.).
 5. An **Implementation** section that describes (a) the *mechanism* (legislation, administrative action, etc.) by which the policy recommendation(s) will be made effective, and (b) the *enforcement* provisions of the policy (e.g., incentives for compliance, penalties for non-compliance, and the sources / actors involved in providing those incentives and penalties).

6. The **Implications** of the policy. This section *must* include a discussion of the ethical implications of the proposed policy change(s).

7. A **Bibliography** / list of **Works Cited**.

- All items on the project schedule (below) should be typed, and double-spaced, in 12 point font, and include a header containing:
 - the title of the project,
 - your name,
 - the name of the class (“BIOET 401Q” will do),
 - the component (“Proposal,” “Annotated Bibliography,” “Rough Draft,” or “Final Draft”), and
 - the date the component was submitted.

Project Schedule

The project will have four deadlines over the course of the semester. Components are due no later than 11:59 p.m. EST on the date indicated, and should be submitted in Adobe PDF form, via email to zorn@psu.edu.

- **September 5: Proposals due.** This should be a **brief** (1-3 sentences) description of the topic your policy brief will address. The proposal will be worth 40 possible points.
- **October 10: Annotated bibliography due.** You will submit a list of no fewer than eight sources that will be used in your policy brief, including a full citation and brief (2-3 sentence) description of each. Internet sources are fine, but no more than one third (33 percent) of all your sources may be directly from the internet. For internet cites, be sure to include the URL. The annotated bibliography will be worth 60 possible points.
- **November 14: First draft due.** On this day you will turn in a completed first draft of your policy brief, which I will read and critique, and return to you for revision. The first draft will be worth 100 possible points.
- **December 7: Final draft due.** On December 7, 2023 you will turn in the final draft of your policy brief, in electronic format. The final draft will be worth 200 possible points.

Some Helpful Hints

- *It's reasonable – and probably advisable – to choose a topic about which you know something already.* Being able to draw on your own scientific (or other) expertise will probably make your life easier.

- *Turn in each component of the project on time.* Each part of the project process (proposal, bibliography, first draft, final brief) will be graded separately; grades on any part will be reduced by ten percent of the possible points for that assignment for each day they are late.
- *Talk to the instructor.* I will be happy to discuss any stage of the process with you at any time, including help with selecting a topic, finding resources, and outlining a plan. Also, if you wish to do more than one rough draft, I will read and give comments on any version of your paper, no matter how preliminary, at any time it is presented to me.
- *Do not wait until the last minute.* Procrastination is a killer on assignments such as this. A paper thrown together the night before a deadline will almost certainly not be very good.