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Writing Public Policy: A Practicum

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Practical experience teaches the difficulty and the messiness of democratic public policy processes. A discourse analytic perspective on rhetorical action in the institutional settings of policy work reveals the dynamics of effective agency. By simulating practical experience and by developing a discourse analytic perspective, academic instruction in professional and technical communication can show students what elected officials, governmental staff, and non-profit non-governmental organizations (NGOs) do to make or to implement policy.

Public Policy Communication in the Curriculum

This essay describes an undergraduate writing course on communicating public policy specialized for students of public affairs and policy studies. The course is offered as an advanced elective in the Writing Program at Syracuse University, where the Policy Studies major and minor in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs is often combined with majors in the humanities, social sciences, engineering, or professional programs. I designed, developed, and teach the public policy communication course with grounding in technical and professional communication, which I also teach (Smith, "WRT 400").

Public policy communication instruction has several aims in common with technical and professional communication instruction. Both aim to (1) teach specialists in fields other than writing to understand relations of communication and action; (2) show communicators how to be agents of best thinking and best practice by taking the perspectives of rhetoric or discourse and using methods of research or analysis; and (3) situate academic instruction in important work of the world.

The commonality is predictable because policy matters and technical matters make similar demands on communicators. Any setting of public policy action—whether proposing, advocating, deliberating, deciding, administering, or implementing—involves the complex need familiar to teachers and to practitioners of technical and professional communication to integrate issues, expertise, viewpoints, practices, and ethics in contexts of function. Within that general similarity even stronger overlap is possible: where technical communication addresses a societal problem or crisis, it may directly engage the public policy process. Technical communication research has instantiated failures of technicians to communicate effectively in federal legislative initiatives (Bostian and Bostian) and, in governmental investigations, failures to recognize the social contingency of information (Dombrowski). Such research usually concludes that technical and professional communicators need to become more alert to social, cultural, political, and ethical aspects of technical information and its uses.

Technical communication teachers have recognized the need and responded to it. One pedagogical approach is to bring public controversies, embodied by participants who disagree on policy, into the technical writing classroom in order to help students recognize politics, ideologies, and ethics as elements of communication situations (Martin and Sanders). Another approach is to build public policy concerns into technical curricula, then into discipline-related or issue-specific technical and professional communication instruction (Olds and Wiley; Blank; Bereano). Service learning sends students out of the classroom to fulfill assignments that address public problems in order to show students uses of literacy for positive change in communities. Yet another approach is to introduce students to public policy workplaces such as government agencies or, for communicators already working there, to support rhetorically-aware professional development (Matalene). That is the approach taken by the course described here, which offers communication practice and rhetorical education relative to public policy work in governmental institutions and publicly-supported non-profit organizations.

Rationale, Goals, and Approach of This Course

If “a public policy is an actual or proposed government action intended to deal with a given societal problem” (Coplin and O’Leary 5), then policy-interested and problem-concerned students need to know how government acts, especially to understand how communication is core to government operation. Even policy students who are sophisticated regarding political processes and informed about the structure of public institutions are relatively unaware of the everyday interactions by which public governance gets done. Such students might also have narrow and conventional ideas of language. They

might see language as transparent and only instrumental. Simultaneously and contradictorily, they might share popular mistrust of language used by government, where rhetoric is generally characterized as deceptive or the opposite of substantive, rhetoric *versus* reality. Those beliefs were shown in pre-course assessments for the course described here. Such assessments strengthened my original rationale for the course: by means of rhetorical education and professional communication development, to familiarize practices of public policy making in institutional democracy and to prepare students for effective participation in policy processes.

The goals of the course are to develop a discourse perspective on language use or rhetoric, a strategic approach to communication, and the practical skills required for communicating in settings of governmental action. Course pedagogy is informed by discourse theory regarding rhetorical development and by cognitive process theory regarding communication skills development.

"Discourse is language use relative to social, political and cultural formations—it is language use reflecting social order but also language shaping social order" (Jaworski and Coupland 3). A discourse perspective views language use as a type of social practice involving the set of social and cultural conditions that 'make meaning.' Discourse study considers events of language use as wholes made of interdependent parts. The method of discourse study reflected in the pedagogy described here is Erving Goffman's interactional sociology, which discloses the social contingency of information by micro-analysis of human interaction to discern "the interaction order," or situational social orders as they develop in the real time of face-to-face communication events ("Interaction" 2).

Communication practices addressed by this course include team writing, writing for others, speaking for others, and writing or speaking that anticipates re-use by yourself or by others in multiple settings. A method of composing and representing is taught that emphasizes strategic thinking and planning based on problem-solving cognitive process theory (Smith and Smith).

Writing Public Policy: A Practicum

Objectives of this practicum for students studying public affairs and policy are to

- learn selected genres of governmental communication,
- interact with current practitioners (elected and appointed officials, administration professionals, non-governmental non-profit organizational leaders or members active in policy work), and
- experience the dynamics of public policy discourse through simulated events of governance.

The course description distributed to students says

This writing and rhetoric workshop offers practice in argumentation and communication in the public sphere. . . . The aim of the course is to develop critical awareness and practical abilities necessary for communicating in processes of policy-making and implementation.

You bring to the course a substantive interest and/or experience in community issues, public affairs, non-profit organizations, political organizations, or government at any level.

You will be instructed in reasoning and persuasion, legislative research, selected genres of policy communication, and principles of effective writing and speaking.

Related to your interest, you will conduct exercises derived from varied functional roles in policy-making (e.g., governmental professional, citizen activist, elected official, organizational spokesperson, lobbyist).

Assignments

Of the three forms of governmental action—legislation, administration, and judicial decision—course assignments address two, legislation and administration. Assignments tailored for public affairs and policy studies students are selected from varied legislative and administrative communication tasks, with the selection based on (1) situational knowledge I gained as a consultant to federal agencies; (2) suggestions by federal, state, and local government professionals acting as consultants to the course; and (3) students' preferences expressed in pre-course assessment. Here are the current assignments:

- *Discovery Paper*, to identify a chosen substantive interest to which course exercises will apply over the semester
- *Legislative History*, to chronicle either the history of action surrounding a particular act or a history of all or some action taken on an issue
- *White Paper*, to present background on an issue from a viewpoint (e.g., citizen activist, city planner, administrator of a non-governmental organization, or technical expert)
- *Fact Sheet*, to summarize an issue or a position in one page
- *Public Comment in Informal Rule-Making*, to respond to calls for comment on proposed standards, rules, or regulations by administrative agencies charged with implementing and enforcing statutes
- *Non-Profit Organization Mission Statement*, to identify aims and roles of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in public policy
- *Fund Raising Strategy Memo*, to develop strategy for sustaining NGO participation through public (governmental) funding

- *Legislative Open Hearing*, to deliberate public policy publicly and to record the deliberation

These assignments do not represent progression through phases of deliberation. Rather, they represent genres of policy activity and associated communication in public institutions: define an issue; trace a history of legislative action; summarize information for presentation to different audiences or in varied settings; respond to calls for comment on agency action; maintain an organization for action; testify as to a viewpoint; deliberate; and set a course of action. A range of participatory roles is also reflected in the assignments: government agency heads, staffs, or consultants; concerned citizens; spokespersons for community or non-profit organizations; elected and appointed office holders or their staffs.

Assignments reflect both governmental and non-governmental action. Here, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are non-profit organizations with an interest in public policy or with a functional relationship to government. Some non-profits implement public policy, increasingly as a result of recent privatization of numerous government functions. For example, the Syracuse Onondaga County Private Industry Council, Incorporated, a 501(c)(3) organization, manages job training for local government in Syracuse, New York. Such government-related non-profits depend on public (governmental) as well as private (philanthropic) funding. They compete for support with other non-profits serving other functions (e.g., for the arts, education, environmental protection, or social services). Because non-profits are sites of public policy work, this course addresses their functions and communication situations.

All students fulfill all assignments according to interests declared in pre-course assessment or in the discovery assignment. Students from a recent course offering include Mark, a junior double majoring in Policy Studies and Economics, who wanted "to communicate to federal banking policy makers and to the general public" the greater benefits of policies aimed at underserved areas to the economy as a whole and not only to target constituencies. Mark wrote,

The identified constituency (minority and low income credit seekers) suffers from both blatant acts of discrimination and banking policies like the CRA (Community Reinvestment Act) that (because they are not enforced) simply fail to meet the needs of those underserved groups. In the greater sense, however, one could reasonably argue that everyone is affected by these policies because the economy as a whole is unable to benefit from the contributions of these individuals. Communicating this greater benefit is extremely difficult.

The background paper ('white paper') assignment, useful for working out arguments, served Mark's aim of achieving enforcement of community reinvestment provisions.

Charlotte, a health care professional employed by the Salvation Army and completing an undergraduate degree in Policy Studies before starting graduate study in social work, wanted to understand policy on health care services for teenaged single mothers: "I do not have a good understanding of the depth of current services or of the policy that formed them." The legislative history assignment, useful for tracing acts and amendments concerned with health care for low-income families, served her aim: "I would like to find out more about these policies and what it takes to plan, implement, and eventually to change them." The public comment assignment, which she used to argue as a professional in favor of proposed standards for care, served Charlotte's aim of making positive change.

Lauren, a junior interning with the non-profit Syracuse Onondaga Private Industry Council, Incorporated, was "somewhat aware of what steps must be taken to implement an already written policy." She wanted "to learn more about how policy is written, shaped, and formed. . . . I would like to learn how to write a good policy. . . ." Betsy, a senior majoring in Policy Studies who had worked as personal staff for a state representative and was interviewing for central staff positions in state government, wanted "to do the research necessary and acquire the writing skills to be able to . . . draft legislation that . . . helps the environment and the people that live in it . . . but also finds a middle ground for pesticide industries and government." For Lauren and Betsy, instruction in strategic planning for writing and speaking was especially useful.

Teaching Methods and Materials

The course does not use textbooks in the traditional sense. In the offering described here, all students had previously taken an introductory policy studies course, so they were familiar with the basics of policy making and analysis (Coplin and O'Leary). Students are referred, as needed, to the instructor's guides on professional writing and on government documents research (Smith and Smith; Smith, "WRT 400"). An argumentation textbook is similarly referenced (Ramage and Bean). Illustrative samples of policy communication are provided by consultants (cited in Smith, "WRT 400"), who discuss those samples during visits to the course. Students are also referred to special collections available on the Internet (e.g., organizational 'white papers' on the Y2K problem). All students read selectively in the *Federal Register*, the *Congressional Record*, published hearings, and other government publications, as required by assignments. Otherwise, substantive readings are found by students in their individual topical areas.

Students' written products are critiqued by the instructor in the usual ways. Writing process is also critiqued by the instructor's review of records that students make of their plans for writing. Critique of

spoken interaction relies on discourse analysis as described, below, for the open public hearing assignment.

Planning, whether for writing or speaking, is emphasized. For each assignment, three aspects of communication must be planned: rhetoric in context, argument in context, and presentation in situation. A strategic approach using structured planning methods is taught (Smith and Smith). Students render planning (audience charts, topic diagrams, document outlines) graphically and refer to these visual records of planning throughout work on an assignment.

The requirement for strategic thinking and methodical planning is intended to prepare students for conditions of public discourse. Conditions include

- the implication of social roles and functional role relationships in communicative acts
- the co-construction of meaning
- the influences on a present event by other events, and by people present or absent
- the re-distribution and re-use of documents for multiple purposes
- the relationship of written documents to other communication media
- the relationship of official to unofficial records

Assignment: Legislative Open Hearing

Students encounter all of the conditions for public discourse listed above in the course's culminating assignment, a simulated open hearing to deliberate legislation. The model in this assignment is the United States Congressional committee or subcommittee hearing, which may be familiar to students if they watch C-SPAN or if they have held internships in Congress. The chosen model demonstrates public deliberation as it is currently practiced in a developed nation's institutional democracy. Other national models might be used for this assignment as well. In this course, the United States model is chosen because it is relatively familiar.

A single legislative topic is chosen and a type of hearing is specified to which students bring individual expertise and a role-related viewpoint (e.g., citizen activist or city planner or NGO administrator or technical expert) they have developed over the semester. The chosen topic is wide (e.g., education reform) and the specified type of hearing is deliberative (e.g., exploratory prior to proposing legislation), so that diverse knowledge and opinion can be useful. Although students may have specialized in topics different from the one chosen for the hearing, they can be expected to bring their expertise and interest to bear on the wider topic of the hearing. In fact, the hearing is the main opportunity in the course for developing the ability to relate specialized work to wider public contexts. Topic and hearing

type might be chosen by students, collectively, or by the instructor. In the course offering described here, the instructor chose.

Prior to the simulated hearing, students question a senior staff member in state government who serves as a course consultant. They examine sample legislative documents—a draft bill; an accompanying bill memo (statement of sponsor's legislative intent and purpose of the bill); a statute; and records of deliberation (committee, hearing) and debate (full house, floor session). Students plan their individual participation in the simulation, possibly view C-SPAN videotaped hearings, and practice presenting orally while being videotaped. The assignment description is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Assignment description for legislative open hearing

Government often holds open public hearings to deliberate a legislative or administrative action and to make a record of the deliberation. Hearings may be held either in the legislative or executive branch. Hearings are held for many purposes: legislation, appropriation, oversight of operations, investigation, approval of nominations to office.

In the general format of a legislative hearing, members of the government make statements on the topical issue, and experts or bureaucrats or citizens testify from their knowledge or viewpoint. More important for the hearing's purposes than statements or testimony is the question-and-answer that follows. Members question the witnesses in orderly but not adversarial ways as in a debate or a trial. The purpose of hearings, after all, is to deliberate. The hearing is recorded, officially, in a transcript later published as the authoritative record of the hearing. The transcript is verbatim and the published version is nearly verbatim; it cannot be edited as the *Congressional Record* of floor debate is edited.

You will participate in a simulated open public hearing on proposed legislation. Your role will be either as member of the majority party who is calling for legislation and chairing the hearing; or as the committee's ranking minority party member; or as staff drafting the legislation and writing the committee report; or as supporting or opposing witness; or as journalist reporting the hearing for news media.

This will be a combined group/solo exercise, with collaborative research and planning leading to individual or co-writing and individual speaking. The topics of the hearing will be assigned. You will relate your interest to the topic.

Simulation

A subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and Labor is holding an open hearing prior to proposing legislation on education reform. For the hearing, public and government agency comment is solicited on three questions: What are public education's most pressing needs for reform? What specific changes are proposed? How to pay for reform?

Table 1 (cont.)**Assignment description for legislative open hearing**

The hearing will be held (date) in (location) from 10 to 11:20 AM.

Presiding will be Rep. ____, Chair; Rep. ____, Ranking Minority Member; ____, Majority Staff; ____, Minority Staff. (Students are assigned to each role.)

Spokespersons for community groups, non-profit organizations, professional or trade associations, local governments, and interested citizens will testify. Witness panel #1 (assigned students) will testify on (date). Witness panel #2 (assigned students) will testify on (date). After panel presentations on each day, committee members will question witnesses in roundtable discussion.

Journalists (assigned students) from a national newspaper, a national television network, an Internet journal, a trade association newsletter, a constituency (interest group) hotline, and other venues may interview staff and witnesses prior to the hearing, will attend the hearing, and will report on presentations and discussion.

The topic is education, the agenda is to reform education, and the purpose is to hear from diverse viewpoints to identify needs, priorities, and funding options toward that agenda. Each participant represents a viewpoint and has a different role in policy-making (proposing, organizing, testifying, or reporting). Thus, each participating group (members, staffs, witnesses, journalists) offers a constellation of individual viewpoints within a shared perspective on the issue of education reform. Politics is the processing of differing or conflicting viewpoints, and hearings are occasions for putting viewpoints into interaction. Resulting policy is accomplished through coordination, cooperation, negotiation, and compromise. Public deliberation is doing that publicly, on the record.

To conduct the hearing, participant groups will self-script (write their own plot and individualize their characters), within these general guidelines:

- each group must articulate (at least) two developed, different viewpoints
- where a single outcome is expected and multiple contributors are involved (e.g., legislative proposal, position statement, journalistic report), the outcome must reflect interaction or negotiation.

Enact these guidelines in your group. In class, we'll offer suggestions, but primarily you will script yourselves. Use your role-playing and performance abilities!

Required writing

- *fact sheet*, by everybody
 - one-page summary of most important aspects of your message.
 - Several document designs possible: 1) an argument, with a one-sentence proposition at top, with a supporting bulleted list of items, 2) several short paragraphs with subheadings for each paragraph that 'tell the story' in telegraphic form, 3) invent-your-own visual and verbal cues for easy, quick reading and referral while speaking

Table 1 (cont.)**Assignment description for legislative open hearing**

- *bill memo* (majority, minority, conference versions), by staff as described by the consultant staff member of the state assembly
- *members' statements, questions* (majority, minority), by members five-minute (two-page) opening statements and prepared questions the chair and ranking member will ask witnesses (two or more questions for each witness)
- *testimony statement, answers to potential questions*, by each witness 2 1/2-minute testimony (one page) and (short) prepared answers to anticipated questions
- *notebook article*, by journalists
one page or less informal background piece on the upcoming hearing, based on interviews
- *news report*, by journalists
one page or less news article summarizing the hearing, in publication style (the style of the reporter's publication)

Summary of writing assignments for the hearing simulation: Everybody writes three (possibly more) documents, a fact sheet and two other documents according to role. All documents are short (either length-specified, or unspecified with a three-page maximum).

In a recent course offering, the simulated hearing was conducted as described. I assigned roles to students, who planned and performed in characters they developed for the assigned role. For example, students assigned to be committee members and staff re-focused my proposed general topic for the hearing, education reform, on a specific reform, charter schools. Relatedly, other students assigned to be witnesses developed characters as spokespersons for teachers' professional associations, for parent associations, and for citizen groups such as concerned taxpayers. Students assigned to be journalists reported on the hearing for a trade journal, a small town newspaper, and a neighborhood newsletter.

The simulated hearing was videotaped by a professional photographer from the university's audio-visual services. (To become comfortable on camera, students had earlier taped and critiqued oral presentations in class. Due to lack of time, we did not view and discuss C-SPAN broadcasts of hearings in class, as I had intended to do.) In the class following the simulation, we played the entire tape for review and critique, stopping when students wanted to comment on a performance or to raise a question about a hearing procedure. Principles of rhetoric familiar from planning exercises were used as guidelines for critique. Sensitively and skillfully, students self-critiqued and peer-critiqued performance.

After students commented from a rhetorical perspective, I commented from a discourse perspective. My perspective derived from

observing numerous Congressional hearings (as a consultant preparing federal agency professionals to testify), and from applying (as a scholar of communication) to public governmental hearings Goffman's way of analyzing face-to-face interaction in public settings (Smith, "Is It Worth Fixing This Plane?").

A summary of Goffman's applicability to the discourse of a public hearing might be useful. (This summary is brief and pointed; Goffman's elaborated theory encompasses more than present purposes require.) In Goffman's early study of social behavior, a unit of analysis is the 'gathering,' which occurs whenever two or more people interact face-to-face and make themselves present to each other (*Behavior* 3-12). Any gathering is 'public' because it involves two or more people consciously aware of each other and behaving in relation to their co-presence (9). Such little 'publics' or small-scale societies tend to generate their own norms. Fulfilling interactive obligations, or fitting in, becomes the key to being effective, or to being a member in good standing with power to influence the direction of interaction (145). Goffman offers a fine-grained qualitative approach to analyzing events of public discourse as institutional 'moments,' or phenomena of operation in the relatively stable, more-than-provisional cultural formations such as governments by which societies manage their collective concerns (Douglas). While Goffman focuses primarily on oral face-to-face interaction, which is the focus of the hearing assignment, his ideas might also apply to writing. If we think of written text as a 'gathering,' his ideas illuminate the intertextual, multi-vocal, and multi-modal features of documents.

I did not teach Goffman's theory directly. Rather, I critiqued student performance by highlighting features identified by Goffman as salient to co-constructing meaning publicly through interaction (*Behavior*). Notable features include

- *involvement*, or sustained cognitive and affective engrossment in what is happening at the moment, with attention allocated both to focused interaction (immediate, face-to-face talk) and to unfocused interaction (experiencing others through the senses if they are present or through mediations if they are distant) (36-37, 43-63)
- *embodiment*, with proprieties governing the physical body, clothing, seating arrangements, and other significant aspects of unfocused interaction (24-35)
- *occasion*, or "a structuring social context, with an agenda of activities and a decorum, in which a pattern of conduct tends to be recognized as the appropriate and (often) official one" (19)
- *situations*, creating episodes that "could not occur outside the physical boundaries of the event and [are] dependent on conditions intrinsic to it" (21-22). An episode occurs when "participants become present to each other and mutual monitoring occurs" (37).

- a *locus* of realities, with each reality always refracting others, e.g., differing expectations enter the occasion; power relations structure what can happen; receptions oppose each other; official records are authoritative while unofficial records are believed

For no student performance did I comment on all these features. Rather, one or several features were marked as strengths, weaknesses, or ambiguities in a performance. For example, when critiquing a particular question-and-answer exchange, I might characterize a question by a student playing committee chair as seeming less oriented to the immediate focused interaction (e.g., not calibrated with the previous question by that questioner) as to the unfocused interaction (e.g., getting a question and its answer on record for future use regardless of whether it fits the logic of a present exchange). I might then ask the questioner what, among those interactive norms, was the interactive purpose of the question. (We learned that students have difficulty managing the split of attention required by real-time performance that tries to remain mindful of two records simultaneously being created, the official public record that the stenographer in the hearing room is making and the unofficial but influential report that the news media cameras and journalists might make.)

Regarding answers by a student playing witness, I might ask about a sudden change of body position, leaning sharply forward or abruptly sitting back when answering a particular question. I would inquire what the embodiment communicated in the moment or might communicate later on television evening news. (Among our students, males leaned forward and females sat back when faced with an unexpected or unwelcome question.)

Lessons Learned

A recent offering of this course was successful, according to both the students' and my assessments. For other instructors who might offer such a course, some remarks about the experience might be useful.

It is important to have the right students in this course. Majors might vary, but students must have an interest or experience in public life. Discipline to sustain the interest or to re-frame the experience over a semester might need to be developed, but the initial motivation is crucial. Early in-class visits by practitioners who speak candidly to students about government operations can help students sort out their commitments. It is also best for students to be at advanced stages of their majors. For all these reasons, it is advisable to set prerequisites (as to major and status) and to screen prospective students, either by asking departmental advisors to screen or by interviewing students yourself.

In final self-assessments and course-assessments, some students remarked that the course offers excellent training. I take this to mean that they recognize how much there is to learn about public discourse, that they learned from practice, and that they see how to continue learning from experience, whether their own or others'. Next time the course is offered, I might explicitly teach methods of discourse analysis to enrich training with more reflection. My intention then will be to support not only excellent generic performance but also to develop perspectives on the genres themselves.

Most students liked the learning environment created by a course design that prescribes the forms and functions of assignments but leaves decisions about topic to students. Future offerings will retain this BYOC, or bring your own content, feature.

Beyond what might happen in the future at Syracuse University, teachers elsewhere might legitimately draw two lessons from this course: first, that students in many majors wish to understand public policy making and implementation, and, second, that teachers of professional and technical communication are potentially well-prepared to address that wish. When policy *communication* is made the focus of learning, or when discourse is studied to recognize the rhetorical action of policy work, then students gain in the dual way familiar to experienced technical/professional writing teachers, in rhetorical knowledge as well as subject knowledge.

Finally, because practical experience importantly motivates and authorizes learning or teaching related to public policy, teachers should work from their own experience in designing courses. That is, teachers' substantive interests or experience in community issues, public affairs, non-profit organizations, political organizations, or government at any level should inform course planning as it informs students' course participation. For the course described here, I principally drew on my experience as a training consultant to federal legislative and executive agency staff learning how to make their expertise useful in Congressional open hearings. From that particular experience of training witnesses, I gained not only knowledge of governmental public hearings as communication situations but also the conviction that it is important, for the experts who are participants as well as for the democratic process, to maintain effective public deliberation. Many professional and technical writing teachers have comparable experience and conviction (e.g., as consultants or citizen activists or elected officials) that might lead to different, equally appropriate course designs.

Conclusion

The course described here teaches public policy work through practice in discursive governance. From practical experience can come awareness of the difficulty and the messiness of democratic

public policy processes. The volume of information and the density of conflict; the politicization of information; the necessity to act within power hierarchies (e.g., majority or minority status based on election results) and structures (e.g., political parties)—all of these are everyday conditions of public policy work. All are distorted by news reportage or academic critique lacking the contextual knowledge that practice develops, and that a discourse perspective highlights.

If an aim of communication instruction is to show students how to be agents of best thinking, best practices, and positive change, then students need to know the potential for as well as the constraints on agency in particular settings. In public policy settings, agents are termed “players,” or “individuals, groups, or institutions that work to influence public policies” (Coplin and O’Leary 7). “Unorganized categories of people such as the public, voters, consumers, or taxpayers are not automatically players” (Coplin and O’Leary 7). Simply being affected by policy does not make a player. “To be a player, a person must be actively attempting to influence the public policy process” (Coplin and O’Leary 7). Such a person needs to know what activity is likely to be effective. Communication courses can show what policy players *do*.

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