Policy Lab
How to shape policy solutions (and public problems)?

Year: 2024-2025, 2nd Semester
Professor: Vincent Caby [vincent.caby@sciencespo-grenoble.fr]
Level: international students

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Course overview

Objectives:
The objective of this course is twofold:

- Firstly, the Policy Lab aims to provide students with the basic working methods necessary for training in political science and social sciences. The course focuses on key skills such as reading and critically discussing research papers; searching for, collecting, organizing, and analyzing diverse data sources; and applying political science theories and concepts.
- Secondly, the Policy Lab introduces students to the sociology of public problems and public policy analysis. The ultimate goal is to provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills for critically thinking about and responding to public problem claims in the media and the public sphere. The course addresses key questions such as: Which specific steps do troubling conditions have to go through to become a public problem? How and why does attention to public problems rise and fall? How to identify and map claims, claimsmakers and discourse coalitions?

Target group and requirements:
The Policy Lab is recommended for students seeking to understand and design advocacy and communication strategies for a wide range of interest groups: public affairs consulting firms, civil society organizations, etc.
It is also recommended for students interested in pursuing political science research.

This course is designed for beginner students. There are no prerequisites in programming or computer coding. However, the Policy Lab does require students to set up and use the following user-friendly, point-and-click software: Excel, DNA, Visone.

How does the course work?
The Policy Lab is divided into two parts.

The first part of the course (from week 1 to week 6) introduces the sociology of public problems and public policy analysis. Students will learn concepts and theories (e.g. claims, claimsmakers, discourse coalitions, etc.) through the reading of classic journal articles, their presentation and discussion, and the Professor's feedback and lecture.

- In the second part of the Policy Lab (from week 7 to week 11), students will use previous concepts and theories to describe and explain the social construction and the career of a public problem and its policy solutions. They will learn how to use data collection and analysis methods through the reading of methodological texts and the Professor's guidelines and feedback.

Student participation:

This course requires the active participation of students before and during class:

- Before class: each week students must individually read and take notes on the week's required reading(s). With their assigned group, they must prepare an oral presentation of one required reading (once in the semester). The full list of required readings and oral presentations can be found in the "Course agenda" section. With their assigned group, students must also prepare their research assignment.
- During class: each week, students must individually answer questions about the week's required reading(s) and actively participate in the ensuing discussion. With their assigned group, they must deliver an oral presentation of one required reading (once in the semester). With their assigned group, students must report progress made (and problems encountered) in their research assignment.

To increase students' attention, participation, learning and satisfaction, smartphones are prohibited in class[1]. Students should avoid multitasking on their laptops[2] [3] during class.

[1] "Several studies have specifically examined texting and academic performance (…). Barnes et al. (2012) tested 40 students twice, once in a texting condition and once in a non-texting condition, and discovered that students scored 27% lower on end-of-class quiz scores when in the texting condition. In another study, sending three texts during one class period resulted in students scoring an average of 16 points lower on an end-of-class quiz (Ellis et al., 2010) (…). Students typically underestimate the impact that such use has on academic performance (Junco 2012)". (Schneider 2012: 11-12).

[2] "Using laptops for unstructured purposes can be just as damaging to learning as unstructured cell phone use. Wurst, Smarkola, and Gaffney (2008) observed three student cohorts (…) of business students in relation to laptop use and discovered that laptop use did not improve academic performance in the way of grade point averages (…). The cohort without laptops reported greater satisfaction with their education. Sana, Weston, and Cepeda (2013) found that students who multitasked 12 times on laptops during a lecture period scored 11% lower on the end-of-class content assessment than laptop users who did not multitask (…). Fried (2008) examined the performance of psychology students by using weekly self-reports (…). Laptop users reported being off task about 23% of the time during class and scored significantly lower on the objective tests and homework assignments (…). Other students reported being distracted by laptop users (…)". (Schneider 2012: 12-13).

[3] "Research suggests that using laptops to take notes is less effective than taking handwritten notes. Mueller and Oppenheimer (2014) conducted three studies that compared longhand notetakers with laptop notetakers (…). Longhand notetakers outperformed laptop notetakers on conceptual material". (Schneider 2012: 13).

Course grading

List of course evaluations

Evaluation	Type	Weight
Attendance		
Plagiarism		
Weekly class participation *includes a bonus/malus system based on answers to the Professor's questions about the week's reading*	individual	20%
Oral presentation and discussion of a research paper	group	20%
In-class quiz on Part 1 concepts and theories *covers Part 1 concepts and theories*	individual	10%
At-home coding test *coding of press articles using the DNA software*	individual	20%
Research assignment	group	30%
Nb: There is no resit session for this course.		

Attendance:
« *L'assiduité et la ponctualité aux enseignements sont obligatoires et un contrôle est fait par l'enseignant. Le défaut d'assiduité de l'étudiant peut entraîner sa défaillance.*
En cas d'absence, l'étudiant doit prévenir l'administration par email (absences-etudiants@iepg.fr) dans les 3 jours suivant le premier jour d'absence. Les pièces justificatives d'absence doivent être envoyées à l'adresse dédiée (absences-etudiants@iepg.fr) accompagné du formulaire de justification d'absence, au plus tard 7 jours après le retour de l'étudiant à l'IEP.

Seules peuvent être considérées comme justifiées les absences pour raisons médicales ou pour convocation nominative à un examen ou un concours, ou encore pour le décès d'un proche, sur présentation d'un justificatif (certificat médical, convocation à un examen ou concours, production d'un acte de décès) ».
Les absences sont considérées comme injustifiées dès qu'elles ne sont pas établies par un document officiel ou lorsque l'absence n'a pas été déclarée dans les conditions prévues à l'article 1.11. Le refus d'accès à un enseignement en raison d'un retard ou l'exclusion d'un cours en raison d'un comportement inapproprié sont considérés comme des absences injustifiées. En cas d'absences injustifiées, la mention « défaillant » est inscrite sur le relevé de notes.

L'étudiant est déclaré défaillant dans les cas suivants : 1° Au-delà de trois absences injustifiées par semestre aux enseignements dont l'assiduité est obligatoire ; 2° Lorsque l'étudiant est absent aux épreuves de contrôle continu ou d'examens terminaux de 1ère et 2ème session ; 3° Lorsqu'il a échoué aux épreuves de contrôle continu (…). La défaillance implique que l'étudiant n'a pas réussi son année universitaire » (Articles 1.11 et 1.12 du Règlement des études et des examens 2024-2025).

Plagiarism:
« Le plagiat consiste à reproduire un texte, une partie d'un texte, une illustration ou des idées originales d'un auteur, sans lui en reconnaître la paternité par un référencement bibliographique ou iconographique adéquat
Les auteurs présumés de plagiat seront traduits devant la section disciplinaire compétente qui pourra prendre des sanctions pouvant aller jusqu'à l'exclusion définitive de tout établissement d'enseignement supérieur » (Articles 1 et 3 de la Charte anti-plagiat).

« *L'utilisation de l'IA générative est autorisée uniquement à des fins d'aide à la réflexion et de soutien méthodologique (par exemple, pour mettre en forme des données)*

Toute utilisation d'un algorithme d'IA générative dans le cadre d'un travail académique doit donner lieu à une mention explicite de cet usage. En particulier il est attendu une mention précise de l'algorithme utilisé (par exemple « OpenAI gpt-3.5-turbo »), de la date et de la méthode exacte d'interrogation de l'algorithme.
Tout copier-coller direct des réponses générées par un algorithme d'IA générative est considéré comme un acte de fraude et de plagiat, conformément aux règles académiques en vigueur ». (Articles 2, 3, 4 de la Charte sur les bons usages de l'intelligence artificielle générative)

Weekly class participation

Each week, students must actively participate in the class discussion.
The class participation grade includes a bonus/malus system based on answers to the Professor's questions about the week's reading. Students will be questioned individually on the required readings. Using their notes, they must be able to summarize the text and answer the following questions: What is the author's main idea? What are their main arguments? What lessons can be drawn from the required reading on the week's topic, concepts and/or methods?

Oral presentation and discussion of a research paper

Each week, a predefined group of students must deliver an oral presentation of the week's required reading. The presentation must last no longer than 15 minutes. Students must use a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation must be structured as follows:

Presentation guidelines/ Evaluation criteria

Presentation guidelines/ Evaluation criteria ***Tips***	**Pts**
Introduce the author and the journal	/1
Make explicit the main research question (*Have you checked the abstract, the introduction and conclusion sections?*)	/1
Make explicit the case study and its relevance to the research question (*Have you checked the introduction and the methods section?*)	/2
Make explicit the data sources and data collection and analysis methods (*Have you checked the methods section, footnotes and annexes?*)	/3
Make explicit the main results – the answers to the research question (*Have you checked the body and the conclusion section?*)	/4
Make explicit the lessons that can be drawn for the research assignment (*Lessons can be methodological or theoretical*) (*Have you checked the topic for today's lesson?*) (*Have you checked the structure of the research assignment?*)	/3
Answer the Professor's questions	/1
The powerpoint is clear, it structures and illustrates the presentation	/1
The presentation is well-structured, clear, dynamic. It captures students' attention	/4
NB: Failure to follow the guidelines will result in a grade of less than 10. **The Professor will stop the presentation after 15 minutes.**	

In-class quiz on Part 1 concepts and theories

In Week 7, students will take an in-class test on the concepts and theories covered in Part 1 of the course. The complete list of concepts and theories that students should master by the end of the course can be found in the "Course Agenda" section.

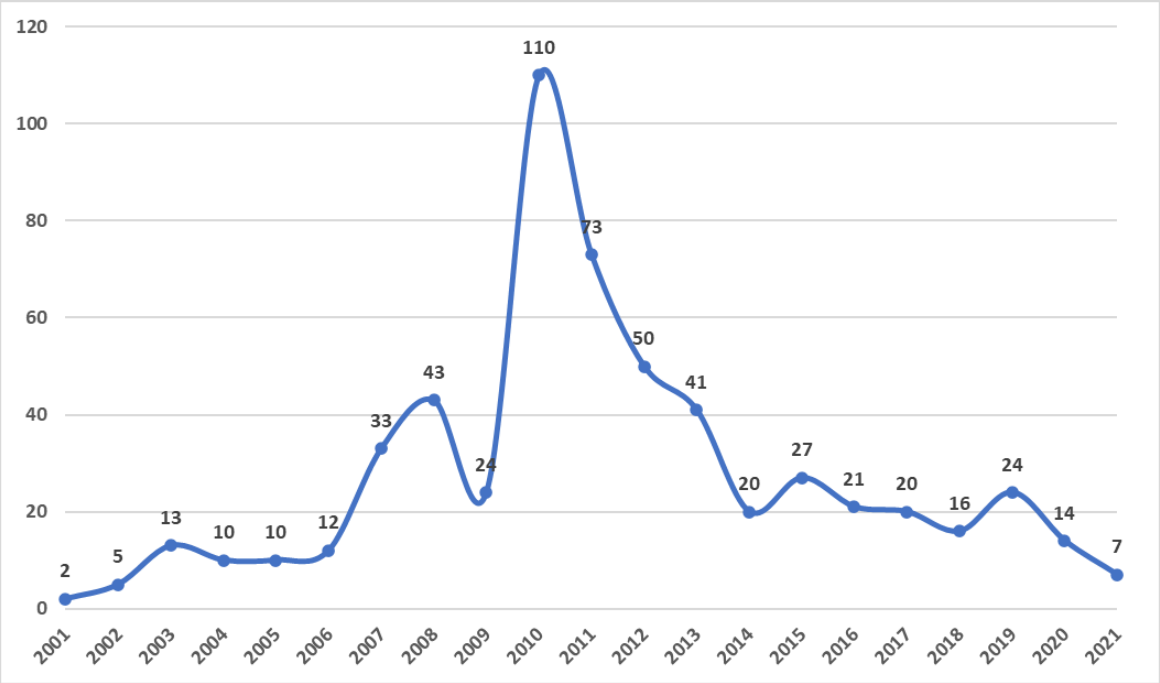
At-home coding test

Between week 8 and week 9, students will pass an at-home coding test. They will have to code a number of press articles using the DNA software. Prior to the test, the Professor will provide guidelines on how to use the software.

Research assignment

Topic:
Every academic year, the Policy Lab focuses on a public dispute on a given public problem. This year, the research topic will be bed bug infestations in Toronto. Working in small groups, students will have to build and analyze a database of articles from the newspaper The Toronto Star (N=575) on the topic. The ultimate goal is to describe the structure of claims, claimsmakers and coalitions and its variations over the periods 2001-2021, and to explain the social construction and the career of the public problem of bed bug infestation in Toronto.

Number of Toronto Star articles on bedbugs per year (2001-2021)



Students must form groups of 2 or 3 and must choose the time period over which they will study how the Toronto Star covers the public problem of bed bug infestation in Toronto. Each time period corresponds to a particular moment in the career of the public problem (Fig. 1). Each period covers an equivalent number of newspaper articles to be collected and analyzed (Table 1).

Table 1: Main features of the time periods studied

Timeframe	Nb of articles	Nb of Students
2003-2004	23	2
2005-2006	22	2
2007	33	2
2008	43	3
2009	24	2
2013	41	3
2014	20	2
2015	27	3
2016	21	3
2017	20	3
2019	24	2

How does it work?

- From week 1 to week 6, students will learn concepts and theories from the sociology of public problems and public policy analysis through the reading of classic journal articles, their presentation and discussion, and the Professor's feedback and lecture. With their assigned group, students should use this knowledge to write the introduction section of their research assignment.
- From week 7 to week 11, students will learn how to use data collection and analysis methods through the reading of methodological texts and the Professor's guidelines and feedback. With their assigned group, students should use this know-how to collect and analyze their data and write the methods and the results sections of their research assignment.
- On week 12, With their assigned group, students will present the results of their research assignment to the class. The Professor will provide feedback.
- The deadline for submitting the final version of the research assignment and the DNA database is one week after week 12.

Course agenda

Week/ Date	Part	**Topic**, Concepts (💡), Methods (✂), **TEST** (✎)	**Required readings/** Oral presentations
W1 Jan. 22	1/ The sociology of public problems: Concepts and theories	**Introduction** Presentation of the syllabus Selection of the oral presentation and formation of student groups ✂ How to read a scientific paper? ✂ How to present and discuss a scientific paper? 💡 Public problems ; The constructionist approach	
W2 Jan. 29		**The rise and fall of public problems** 💡 The natural history model The issue attention cycle Wicked problems; Super-wicked problems The public arenas model; Problem competition; Selection criteria	**Hilgartner & Bosk 1988** Downs 1972 Ball & Lilly 1982
W3 Feb. 5		**Framing claims** 💡 Framing Ground (diagnostic frame); Warrants (motivational frame) Conclusions (prognostic frame) Shaping competitive claims: an interactive, trial-error approach	**Best 1987** Best 1987
W4 Feb. 12		**Claimsmakers** 💡 Insider Vs. outsider claimsmakers Opportunity structures: cultural and political opportunities ✂ Breakdown the claim	**Merchants of doubts 2014** Nelkin 1975 Pfohl 1977 *
W5 Feb. 19		✎ **FEEDBACK ON CLASS PARTICIPATION** **Mass media coverage** 💡 Primary definers Vs. secondary definers Secondary claims; Organizational and cultural selection criteria Editorializing	**Hall 1978** Wolch et al. 1997 Wagner & Payne 2017 *
W6 Feb. 26		**Discourse coalitions and policy change** 💡 Discourse network analysis ; Discourse coalitions The Policy Stream Model Problem stream; Policy stream; Political stream	**Fergie et al. 2018** Fergie et al. 2018 Hawkins & McCambridge 2020*
March 5		**No class**	

Week/ Date	Part	**Topic,** Concepts (💡), Methods (✂), Test (✎)	**Required readings/** Oral presentations
W7 March 12	2/ Case study: Data collection and analysis methods	✎ **QUIZ ON PART 1 CONCEPTS AND THEORIES (Flyvbjerg 2006 included)** **Research design: Research question and case study** Presentation of the research assignment 💡 The value of case-study research	**Flyvbjerg 2006** Breindl 2013 *
W8 March 19		**Data collection and analysis: Building a database, coding qualitative data** ✂ How to search and collect newspaper articles using Europresse? ✂ How to chronologically and thematically analyze articles using Excel? ✂ How to identify claimsmakers and claims using DNA and Excel?	**Miller 2018**
W9 March 26		**Data analysis:** ✎ **FEEDBACK ON CODING WITH DNA** ✂ How to perform an intercoder reliability test?	
W10 April 2		**Data analysis: Network analysis** ✂ How to identify and map discourse coalitions using Visone?	
W11 April 9		**Q&A on the research assignment** ✂ How to finalize the research assignment?	
W12 April 16		**Students' presentations of the draft version of their research assignment**	
TBD		✎ **DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING THE FINAL VERSION OF THE RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT AND DNA DATABASE**	

Bibliography

Required readings and oral presentations:

Week 2:
- Ball, R. A., & Lilly, J. R. (1982). The menace of margarine. The rise and fall of a social problem. *Social Problems*, 29(5), 488-498.
- Downs, A. (1972). Up and down with ecology. The issue-attention cycle. *The public Interest*, 28, 38-50.
- Hilgartner, S., & Bosk, C. L. (1988). The rise and fall of social problems. A public arenas model. *American journal of Sociology*, 94(1), 53-78.

Week 3:
- Best, J. (1987). Rhetoric in claims-making. Constructing the missing children problem. *Social problems*, 34(2), 101-121.

Week 4:
- Kenner, R. (Film director). (2014). *Merchants of doubts* [Movie]. Participant Media.
- Nelkin, D. (1975). The political impact of technical expertise. *Social studies of science*, 5(1), 35-54.
- Pfohl, S. J. (1977). The "discovery" of child abuse. *Social problems*, 24(3), 310-323.

Week 5:
- Hall, S. et al. (1978). The social production of news. In: S. Hall et al. (Ed.). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state and law and order* (pp. 53-77). London: McMillan.
- Wolch, J. R., Gullo, A., & Lassiter, U. (1997). Changing attitudes toward California's cougars. *Society & Animals*, 5(2), 95-116.
- Wagner, P., & Payne, D. (2017). Trends, frames and discourse networks. Analysing the coverage of climate change in Irish newspapers. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 25(1), 5-28.

Week 6:
- Fergie, G., Leifeld, P., Hawkins, B., & Hilton, S. (2019). Mapping discourse coalitions in the minimum unit pricing for alcohol debate: a discourse network analysis of UK newspaper coverage. *Addiction*, 114(4), 741-753.
- Hawkins, B., & McCambridge, J. (2020). Policy windows and multiple streams: an analysis of alcohol pricing policy in England. *Policy & Politics*, 48(2), 315-333.

Week 7:
- Breindl, Y. (2013). Discourse networks on state-mandated access blocking in Germany and France. *info*, 15(6), 42-62.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.

Week 8:
- Miller, D. M. (2018). The bed bug resurgence in North America. In: S. L. Doggett, D. M. Miller & C. Y. Lee (Eds.), *Advances in the biology and management of modern bed bugs* (pp. 45-49). John Wiley & Sons.

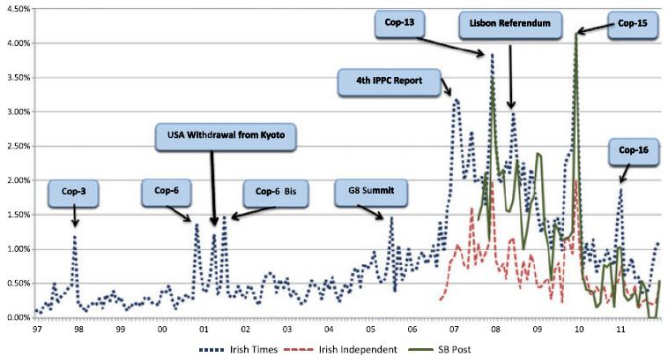
Handbooks:
- Best, J. (2024). *Social problems*. W. W. Norton & Company, NY: New York.
- Cellier, J. (2015). *Visone : Une introduction*. Online publication.
- Weible, C. M. (Ed.). (2023). *Theories of the policy process*. NY : Routledge.
- Leifeld, P., Gruber, J., & Bossner, F. R. (2019). *Discourse network analyzer manual*. Online publication.

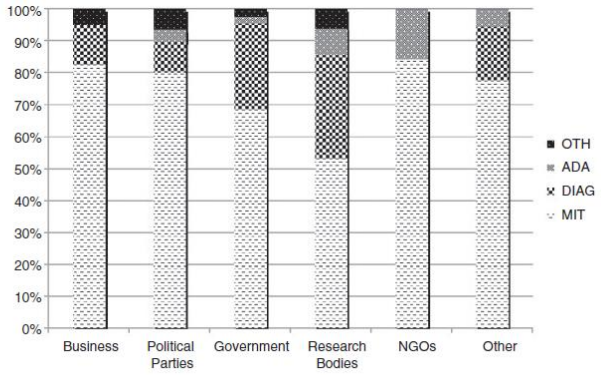
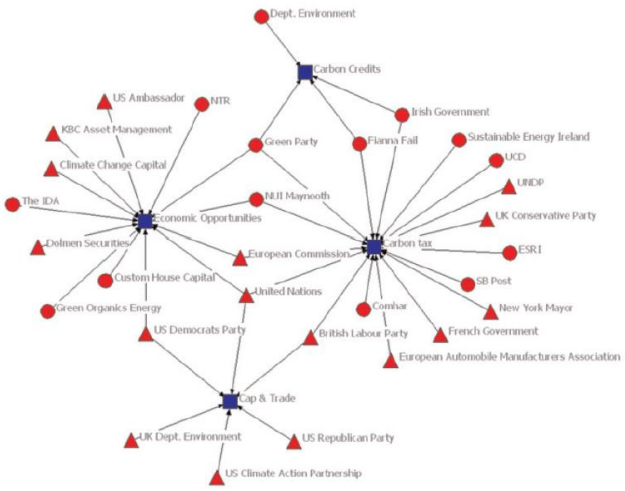
Structure of the research assignment

The research assignment must be structured as follows. All examples are taken from Wagner & Payne (2017).

Table 4: Presentation guidelines/ Evaluation criteria

Presentation guidelines/ Evaluation criteria	**Pts TS=50**
Introduction section	**S=5**
Research question > refer to syllabus Ex.: "*This paper investigates how anthropogenic climate change is presented to the Irish public by three of Ireland's most important national newspapers*" (Wagner & Payne, 2017: p.5)	**1**
Theoretical framework > refer to concepts and theories seen between Week 1 and Week 6 "*Some research on the coverage of climate change in newspapers has found that the journalistic norms of objectivity and balance have led newspapers to inaccurately report the issue by giving too much weight to the opinions of climate contrarians (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004; Antilla, 2005; Boykoff and Mansfield 2008)*" (*Ibid.* p.6)	**4**
Methods section	**S=10**
Case study, its perimeter and value > refer to syllabus and concepts and theories seen between Week 1 and Week 6	**2**
Data sources (newspaper) and their relevance "*The three newspapers used as data sources for the Irish case study are chosen because of their readership rates, their perceived credibility and because of their influence on how climate change issues are framed and debated in Irish society. The Irish Independent is the country's bestselling national newspaper; it is politically conservative (Truetzschler, 2004) and takes a populist stance on social issues and a right-wing stance on economic issues*" (*Ibid.* p.11)	**2**
Data collection tools (database) and strategy (keywords, timeframe, results) and their relevance > refer to class discussions between Week 7 and Week 11 "*To uncover which events are correlated with the peaks in the coverage of climate change, data were collected using the online database Lexisnexis UK by searching for articles containing the words 'climate change' or 'global warming'. The percentage of articles that referred to either of these keywords was then calculated for each newspaper for an extended period of years. Data for The Irish Times were collected for the period between 1997 and 2011*" (*Ibid.* p.11)	**2**
Data analysis tools (software) and strategy (coding operations) and their relevance > refer to class discussions and methods seen between Week 7 and Week 11 "(1) *We calculate the trend in the coverage of climate change between 1997 and 2012 to uncover what events are correlated with peaks in coverage*"; (3) "*we conduct a discourse network analysis to uncover which actors are given a voice, which policy measures they favour and with whom they share policy positions*" (*Ibid.* p.5) *"The aim (…) is to uncover which actors' views were given a space in Irish newspapers, what policy measures they favoured or opposed, and to determine which organisational types shared positions (…). The same sample of 517 articles were reanalysed to find all the direct or indirect statements made by organisations commenting on issues related to climate change. These statements were then categorised in accordance with seventeen inductively created normative statements that cover all of the issues discussed. Leifeld's discourse network analyser software (Leifeld, 2010) is used to code four variables for each statement: (1) the name of the organisation making the statement, (ii) the classification of the organization making the statement into one of six different types, (iii) the statements that they address and (iv) a variable indicating if they agree or disagree with the statement. The discourse network analyser software enables the coding of the statements in a form that allows the data to be visualised. The data are visualised to illustrate the relationships among the organisations that are responsible for shaping how climate issues*	**4**

are conceptualised in and by Irish newspapers. The main advantage of these visualisations is that they show which organisations are using similar story lines, providing the reader with a visual representation of the structure and the size of the different discourse coalitions" (*Ibid.* p.12)	
DNA file	**S=10**
Recoding of two random newspaper articles	
Results section	**S=20**
Analysis of the public problem's career > refer to class discussions and methods seen between Week 7 and Week 11 Ex.: "*Our analysis shows that the share of climate change coverage in Irish newspapers steadily increased from 1997 until 2009, and that since then the extent of the coverage has decreased significantly, with only relatively minor peaks occurring during the annual COP meetings. The primary causes of the peaks in the coverage of climate change throughout the period analysed were the annual international climate conferences and the publication of influential scientific reports (…) In Figure 1, we can see that the level of coverage initially rose slowly during the early and pre-problem stage, and that this was followed by a sudden and large increase in coverage in 2007 during the alarmed discovery stage. Coverage then plateaued above two per cent for two years during the realisation of costs stage, before falling dramatically during the post-problem stage. Although the data appear to provide evidence supporting Down's theory, it may be that the collapse in the coverage of climate change was due to the newspapers switching their focus to the more immediate problems associated with Ireland's economic crisis*" (*Ibid.* p.22)  **Figure 1.** Trends in climate change coverage. (*Ibid.* p.13)	**5**
Analysis of the most frequent claims > refer to class discussions and methods seen between Week 7 and Week 11 "*For the final level of analysis, we use Leifield's (2011) approach to inductively create seventeen affirmative normative statements (Table 1), each of which describes an issue that organisations were found to have either agreed or disagreed with in the articles analysed. In the 517 articles, 250 statements are made by representatives from 135 different organisations*" (*Ibid.* p.15) **Table 1.** Frequency of the viewpoints expressed on the normative statements, 2007–08. *Statement number* / *Debate* / *Agree* / *Disagree* 1 — Agriculture: Measures should be taken to reduce the amount of emissions emitted during the production of food. — 18 — 0 2 — Alternative Fuel/Energy: Increasing the use of alternative fuels or energy sources (wind, solar, geothermal) is necessary in order to reduce emissions. — 42 — 0 3 — Biofuels: Biofuels are a desirable means of reducing emissions. — 14 — 11 4 — Cap & Trade: Emissions trading schemes are an appropriate means of reducing emissions. — 6 — 0 5 — Carbon Credits: The purchase of carbon credits should be used to meet Ireland's emissions levels targets. — 7 — 1 6 — Carbon Tax: A revenue neutral carbon tax could help reduce emissions. — 27 — 5 (*Ibid.* p.16)	**5**
Analysis of the most frequent claimsmakers > refer to class discussions and methods seen between Week 7 and Week 11	**5**

"*The organisations are grouped into six categories to determine which types of interest groups dominate the discussion (Business, Government, Political Parties, Research Bodies, NGOs and Other)*" (*Ibid.* p.15).  **Figure 5.** Organisational type by rhetorical frame (chi sq. significance = 0.001). (*Ibid.* p.17) OTH=other; ADA=adaptation; DIAG=diagnostic; MIT=mitigation	
<u>Analysis of discourse coalitions</u> > refer to class discussions and methods seen between Week 7 and Week 11 "*In Figures 6 through 12 below, we visualise how climate change is constructed through discourse by Irish newspapers using the data coded with Leifeld's discourse network analyser software. The squares represent the normative statements, the circles represent Irish organisations, the triangles represent non-Irish organisations, and the lines connecting organisations to the normative statements illustrate when an organization has made a comment either in support or in opposition to that statement. The visualisations, known as sociograms, illustrate which organisations have co-produced story lines through their use of similar statements when discussing climate change*" (*Ibid.* p.15). "*The Incentives Cluster includes the statements regarding economic incentives or market interventions that could be introduced to try to mitigate climate change, as well as the statements regarding potential economic opportunities arising from climate change. The government, business actors and political parties made eighty per cent of the positive statements. There was little resistance to proposals arguing that economic incentives could be used to induce climate friendly practices*" (*Ibid.* pp.18-19).  **Figure 9.** Incentives agreement cluster. (*Ibid.* p.20)	**5**
Other criteria	**S=5**
The report is well-structured and well-written	**3**
The report includes a table of contents and a bibliography	**2**
NB: Failure to follow the guidelines will result in a grade of less than 10.	