

## Annex B

### **Public Policy Task Force: Participatory Decision Making for Service Provision in Singapore**

- Instructor: Assistant Professor of Sociology Ijlal Naqvi
- School: School of Social Sciences
- Pilot: Term 2, AY2014-15 (Jan to Apr 2015)
- Next course-run: Term 1, AY2015 (Aug to Nov 2015)

#### Course description

This task force will examine how Singapore's public service is moving towards an increased role for public engagement in making decisions about service provision. Singapore's public service has historically worked on a model of centralised governance and the efficient execution of policy. However, Singapore's past is not its future, and the public service has increasingly looked towards a more inclusive model of governance which is more attentive to the views and desires of the citizenry. Despite the proliferation of phrases like co-creation and community engagement across Singapore's agencies and ministries, the nature and the extent to which Singapore's public service will embrace the new ethos of public engagement is very much up in the air. Which issues are appropriate for public engagement? What will the participation look like? What impact will increased citizen participation have on the culture of governance in Singapore? How will service outcomes be affected by increased levels of citizen participation? These unresolved questions have great significance for the future of Singaporean governance.

The focus on citizen participation in governance is both part of a global trend and a response to local politics. The tightly contested general elections and presidential elections of 2011 served notice that Singaporeans wanted their voices to be heard. The Our Singapore Conversation was an experimental foray into widespread deliberation on questions of governance by the public service, but it did not lead to decisions on questions of public interest based on the conversations. The Singapore public service has looked to promote public engagement, but often on niche issues and without ceding decision making capacity. The global move to increase citizen participation reflects both democratic norms of voice and participation, the capacity of social media to let ordinary people have their voices heard, and the focus by governments on the need for resilience and adaptability in the face of complex globalised challenges to health and security.

Students will produce a report on community engagement in Singapore for a VWO which aims to be a community enabling network. The VWO is not part of the Singapore government and has independent funding, although it is affiliated with the elected MP of the ward and its staff currently includes public servants seconded from active service. The report will assess efforts towards public engagement and participatory decision making conducted by the VWO within the larger context of how Singapore's public service is approaching similar questions. The field visits will include observations of public engagement activities such as focus group discussions and interactive poster exhibitions. Additionally, students will interview staff and volunteers of the VWO, other key informants, as well as citizens who do (and do not) participate in the events held by the VWO. The events held by the VWO will explore the expansion of local health facilities. The client for this report will be the staff of the VWO and the task force will culminate with a student presentation of the report and its key findings to the client.

The task force members will meet the client in week 2 to establish their goals and objectives for the report.

The task force will collect field notes from interviews and observations at the field sites. These notes will then form the basis for the task force's qualitative data analysis. Each student will be responsible for writing analytic memos on the themes which emerge from their fieldwork. Techniques for writing field notes and analyzing them will be introduced and revisited during class sessions.

#### Draft Report Outline

1. Recommendations to client
  2. Concepts and definitions
  3. Related activities across the Singapore Government
  4. Research findings
    - a. Citizen response
    - b. Reflections of Public Servants, volunteers, and other key informants
    - c. Observations of community events
  5. Analysis and discussion
  6. Conclusion
- Schedule and Responsibilities

Two students will act as the overall editors of the report. The remaining students will be spread across the report topics. All students will contribute to the field observations and interviews. The above outline is a draft, and students should expect to revisit this outline on the basis of what they learn through their field work.

#### Schedule

In-class discussions: 6 weeks  
Field Trips: 4 weeks  
Presentation and Final Report: 2 weeks

#### Grading

Field notes 30%  
Qualitative Data Analysis 30%  
Class Discussion 20%  
Peer evaluation of contribution to task force 10%  
Entire task force paper (same grade for entire class) 10%

\*\*\*\*\*