

Housing and Community Development GGR357, 2021

Assignment

A 'Briefing Paper' for Ontario's Housing Minister

Due April 15 (Value: 25% of final grade).

- 1,500 word maximum. No cover page.
- Include list of key resources/references used (use any standard academic citation, e.g., APA or Chicago). These words do not count as part of the 1,500.
- 1.5 inch margins; 12 pt. text, 1.5 line spacing, space between paragraphs.
- Put your name in the header of *each* page.
- See memo format template below. This format and specific subheadings **must** be used.
- File name: GGR357 paper 2021 YOUR-LAST-NAME-IN-CAPS.pdf

Goal of this assignment. The goal of this assignment is for you to demonstrate understanding of course themes (listed under Learning Objectives in the syllabus) by researching a specific topic covered in the course, analyzing it, and using a common template – the briefing paper format outline below – to communicate your research and analysis.

Assignment Task, Role and Audience. Assume you have a policy research placement with the Ontario Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs. You have been asked to provide the Minister responsible for housing a briefing paper to help inform her team of advisors about a key current housing issue. [You do not assume it is the current government; it is a 'generic' government looking for advice.]

Topic

We will assume the Minister wants a separate briefing paper on each of her priorities listed below. You can choose which of these topics/priorities you will write your Briefing Paper on.

You can assume the Minister is serious about making progress on each of these. Your task is to identify/explain the nature of the problem and in general what course of action (policy) should be taken. You are not proposing specific programs in detail (that is, not specific numbers of units or dollar amounts). Rather, types of programs that might help implement the policy. (Reminder: a *policy* is a course of action; *programs* are specific actions that implement a policy. You are making policy recommendations, not designing specific programs.)

- A. The Private Rented Sector.** Why is there so little new supply of purpose-built conventional rental buildings by the private sector? We are losing some rentals to AirBnB type uses. What should Ontario's policy be (a general course of action) towards the rental sector and what types of programs (types in general, not specific program details) could potentially be helpful (such as new or changed taxes; new or changed housing subsidy programs; new or changed income or rent payment support)?
- B. Extreme Housing Insecurity: Homelessness.** Many households are a few paycheques from not being able to pay the rent. Can loss of housing resulting in homelessness be prevented? Can we quickly rehouse homeless people? That is, is it possible to decrease the number of unhoused people (i.e., rehousing people) thereby decreasing the need for expensive services for people who are homeless for long periods?
- C. Housing Discrimination and Housing Rights.** Though human rights legislation in Ontario is relatively good compared to other jurisdictions, what do we know about the extent to which housing discrimination continues to be a problem? What does it mean for Ontarians to have the 'human right to adequate housing'? Is it just a nice slogan or should the Ontario government undertake a different policy (new direction) with regard to housing rights, with housing discrimination being one important aspect.

- D. **Disadvantaged Group(s).** How can the Government do better with its housing assistance for one or more disadvantaged groups (your choice, e.g., single mothers, recent immigrants, Aboriginal people, refugees, ...)?
- E. **Propose a topic.** If there is something else relating to housing and/or community development that you want to explore further, email me with a proposed title and two or three key questions you want to explore further. The proviso is that you do this any time before Feb. 22 (the Monday after reading week). I will make a quick decision.

Format

A briefing paper is a short report focussed on a particular policy issue. Briefing papers (sometimes called white papers) are used to inform readers and help people make decisions. They are often used in politics, business and technical fields.

Briefing papers are written in formal business prose; short paragraphs; bulleted lists are *desirable* but should not be overly used. *Sub-headings* are always used: this streamlines the writing and helps the reader find information. Even though the writing style may be less “academic” in tone, in-text citations are still used, for example: (Smith 2012:45).

IMPORTANT

Your paper must use the following memo format and have the same 5 numbered subheadings.

BRIEFING PAPER

TO: Minister of Housing
FROM: (Your name)
RE: Subject (your Topic, one of the above four options)
DATE: Date

1. Topic

A concise statement of what the topic is. This section should explain in a couple of short sentences why the issue matters. It sets out in the form of a question or a statement what the rest of the briefing paper is about.

2. Background: Current Status of the Issue

The details the reader needs in order to understand what follows: how the situation/difficulty arose, previous decisions/problems, actions leading to the current situation/difficulty. Typically this section gives a brief summary of the relevant history of the topic and related background information. What led up to this problem or issue? How has it evolved?

3. Options: Based on Key Considerations

Your observations/conclusions about the key concerns (factors, difficulties, complications) relating to the topic that need to be considered in deciding on policy and program option; in order to provide here a concise description of the options and their pros and cons.

While you will have to decide what to include and what to leave out, this section should be as balanced, impartial as possible. Your aim is to present all the information required for the reader to make an informed decision. Keep the reader's needs uppermost in your mind when selecting and presenting the facts. Remember to substantiate any statements with evidence and check your facts.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

A summary of what you want your reader to conclude from the Briefing paper. Many readers immediately jump to this section, so be sure it covers the points you most want your reader to be clear about. Do not introduce

anything new in the conclusion. Make a recommendation(s). It should offer the most sound advice you can offer. Make sure the recommendation is clear, direct and is based on (flows from) the facts you have put forward in the previous sections.

5. References: minimum of 4 to 6 key resources – books, articles, reports. Include only those that you mention in the text.

The following is for reference and may be helpful.
However, the purpose and format are as described above.

How to Write a Briefing Note [or Briefing Paper]

By *Susan Doyle*, University of Victoria. <http://web.uvic.ca/~sdoyle/E302/Notes/WritingBriefingNotes.html>

What is a briefing? Briefings, whether in the form of briefing notes, longer briefing papers, or oral briefings, are used to keep decision makers informed about the issues they are responsible for. In government, briefings are the principal means of communication between government managers and their ministers (or other senior officials). The demands of government these days are such that senior officials must constantly learn and retain information about an enormous range of topics and issues, which change rapidly. The only way they can do this is to rely on concise, clear, reliable briefings.

What is a briefing note and when is it used? Written briefings are usually done in the form of briefing notes. A briefing note is a short paper that quickly and effectively informs a decision-maker about an issue. A useful briefing note distils often-complex information into a short, well-structured document.

Briefing notes usually deal with "issues"—subjects of debate. Briefing notes are also prepared for any topic someone needs to be informed about. It might be a policy matter, a situation, a report, action by another government—in fact, anything that government deals with. Briefing notes are typically written for those senior-level decision-makers who have to keep track of many, often unrelated, issues may not be familiar with the issues and may not have any related background for whatever reason, cannot spend time doing their own research need a capsule version of the key points and considerations about an issue

What are the characteristics of a good BN? A well-prepared briefing note quickly and efficiently fills a person in on an issue. The most valuable BN is clear, concise and easy to read. To succeed, a briefing note should be:

- **short:** always as short as possible
- **concise:** a short document isn't necessarily concise; concise means every word is used as efficiently as possible
- **clear:** keep it simple and to the point; always keep your reader firmly in mind and include only what matters to that reader
- **reliable:** the information in a briefing note must be accurate, sound and dependable; any missing information or questions about the information should be pointed out
- **readable:** use plain language and design your BN for maximum readability (use white space, subheadings, lists, font, and other means of making reading easier).

How is a BN structured? Briefing notes often follow a standard format, but THERE ARE MANY VARIATIONS on that format. The most important point to remember about the structure of briefing notes is that they have three main parts: the purpose (usually stated as the issue, topic or purpose); a summary of the facts (what this section contains and the headings used will be determined by the purpose of the briefing note); the conclusion (this may be a conclusion, a recommendation or other advice, or both).

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Briefing Paper Evaluation Form

NAME OF STUDENT _____

Assignment Criteria	Marks	Out of
Required elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The five sections • The resources/references: minimum 4 to 6 key appropriate references (up-to-date relevant peer-reviewed articles, or government reports, or reputable NGO / social agency / 'think tank' reports) 		5
Quality of research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant background information/data • Useful current information • Demonstration of knowledge of key issues/debates on the topic 		30
Problem statement; Issue identification: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear statement of why the topic is an important problem/issue • Clear very brief background about the current status of the problem/issue • Logical information/argument in the problem statement that helps lead to defensible recommendations 		25
Quality of analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful comparisons (other jurisdictions; or other similar problems; or with the past – whatever may be relevant and helpful) • Relevance to issues covered in the course (<i>where relevant</i>): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Causes of problem(s) ○ Social implications ○ Impact on different populations ○ Barriers to progress ○ Range of options 		30
Quality of presentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logical argument flow leading to logical, defensible recommendations • Grammar, paragraph & sentence construction • Follows the required format 		10
TOTAL		100

OVERALL GRADING CRITERIA

“A” papers will be error-free and will show superior understanding of course themes through a sophisticated analysis of a well-defined and important problem. The analysis will take into account arguments and counter-arguments and use evidence to reach a sensible conclusion. The writing will be clear, logical and error-free. There will be a minimum of 4 to 6 sources, all of them relevant to the problem.

“B” papers will have a less well-developed analysis and some writing errors. They will show some flair in meeting requirements of the assignment.

“C” papers will show less evidence of careful thought and writing and may contain minor content errors. They fulfill only the basic requirements of the assignment.

“D” papers will only demonstrate partial understanding of course themes, will probably include more than one major error in content and many errors in writing and logic, and will fail to meet key requirements of the assignment.