PUBP 500-DL2: Theory and Practice in Public Policy

Instructor: **Professor Justin Gest**
Classroom: **Online**
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Class times: **Wednesdays, 4:30pm-7:10pm (live and synchronous)**
Office Hours: **By appointment**

Course Description:

This course prepares students to think, analyze and communicate about public policy—action taken by governments intended to achieve particular social outcomes. It introduces key concepts in the field across a variety of disciplines including political science, sociology, economics, psychology and law to ascertain the best strategies for the design and execution of governance within and across borders. It reviews principal texts by some of the greatest minds in the social sciences. And it applies concepts and arguments to contemporary challenges facing American and international society. All the while, this course helps students develop the practical skills of critical thinking and strategic communication necessary to succeed in the world of public policy.

Each week, we engage a new manner of thinking about public policy and governance. With the establishment of each new lens, we apply it to the examination of policy questions and action. We then engage one another to articulate and exchange our ideas about ongoing debates. Each week thus repeats the same pattern of thought (lecture), application (groupwork) and articulation (discussion) in a manner that accumulates increasing layers of sophistication as students deepen their knowledge.

By the end of the course, students will have a better understanding of how to consider policy design and action in a variety of ways. Students will be able to prepare a rigorous, systematic analysis of policy questions in a clear, succinct and organized manner. And students will be more effective and fluent communicators—in writing, presentation, and formal documentation. In short, they will be better prepared to excel in the Masters in Public Policy degree program and, more generally, in an increasingly demanding political and policy environment.

Prerequisites:

There are no pre-requisites for this course. Students are expected to have varying levels of familiarity with certain concepts in political science and policy analysis. In any case, the course provides references to all literature that would bring students up to speed with ease.

Assessment Requirements:

Class participation and activities **(20%)**

One individual half-memo due on October 7th **(20%)**

One collaborative half-memo due on November 4th **(20%)**

One collaborative, full-length memo due by 11:59pm on December 6th. **(40%)**

Please submit all memos electronically **before the commencement of class on the due date**.

Late assignments:

All assignments will be docked three percentage points for each day they are submitted late. Group analyses will be docked six points for each day they are submitted late.

Writing Emphasis:

This course places an emphasis on student's articulation of their ideas for a professional policy audience. For students who want a quick refresher on expository writing "rules" and some useful tips, please see Robert Strunk, Jr., and E.B.White's *Elements of Style,* 4th Edition (Longman: 1999). For students who have had less practice writing and who want or need more extensive guidance on producing effective prose, please see Sarah E. Skwire and David Skwire's, *Writing with a Thesis*, 11th Edition (Cengage: 2010)*.* A recent primer on writing public policy analyses is Catherine Smith's *Writing Public Policy: A Practical Guide to Communicating in the Policy Process.* All are available in the GMU Library.

Reading Materials:

This course makes use of open access journalistic content, small-fee case studies and a variety of key books—which students may borrow from the library or purchase in hard copy or electronic form. These books include:

> **Bardach, Eugene. 2000 (or 2012).** *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving***. Chatham House. NOTE: GMU eBook**

Gest, Justin. 2020. *Mass Appeal: Communicating Policy Ideas in Multiple Media.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Hirschman, Alfred O. 1970. *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States.* Harvard University Press. NOTE: GMU eBook.

Kahneman, Daniel. 2013. *Thinking, Fast and Slow,* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Lessig, Lawrence. 2014. *The USA is Lesterland*, TED.

Neustadt, Richard E. and Ernest R. May. 1986. *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers.* The Free Press*.

Sandel, Michael. 2009. *Justice: What's the right thing to do?* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Stone, Deborah. 2011. *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making, 3rd Ed.* W.W. Norton.

Grading and Expectations:

All papers will be marked for the strength and structure of their analysis, not the analysis' recommendation. Students' work will be evaluated on its rigor, the depth of its evidence, its organization and clarity, and the contextualization of its ideas amongst the others being studied. Students should take care to ensure that they avoid spelling and grammar errors. In the case of the final memo, students will be evaluated similarly. However, a significant portion of evidence should emerge from primary and independently collected sources.

As this course is a seminar, we will together discuss, analyze and debate key topics. This requires that all course participants come to class fully prepared, having done the assigned readings, completed the required written assignments, and having considered the issues and materials. It also requires that seminar participants contribute their thoughts and ideas to the collective conversation, engaging openly, thoughtfully, and respectfully.

This course is depends heavily on content delivered and discussed during weekly meetings. Consequently, attendance is mandatory*. Seminar participants are expected to notify the instructor in advance when their other responsibilities will prevent class attendance. Student grades will be lowered for unexcused and uninformed absences.

If your schedule or professional obligations require you to miss more than two classes, you should consider enrolling in another elective or taking this course in a different semester.

Office Hours:

Students are encouraged to arrange office hours anytime by appointment. Email queries are also very welcome.

Feedback:

This course is meant to be intellectually stimulating, idea-based, open-minded, and real world relevant. It is very useful to receive student feedback about the progress of the course. There are three primary avenues for giving feedback, and students are encouraged to make use of them all: (1) An anonymous mid-term survey; (2) Book an appointment for office hours; 3) Send an email anytime. Your input is valuable.

University Honor Code:

Per the University's honor code, cheating, plagiarism, and lying will not be tolerated. These are defined in the University Catalog as follows:

A. Cheating encompasses the following:
    1. The willful giving or receiving of an unauthorized, unfair, dishonest, or unscrupulous advantage in academic work over other students.
    2. The above may be accomplished by any means whatsoever, including but not limited to the following: fraud; duress; deception; theft; trick; talking; signs; gestures; copying from another student; and the unauthorized use of study aids, memoranda, books, data, or other information.
    3. Attempted cheating.

B. Plagiarism encompasses the following:
    1. Presenting as one's own the words, the work, or the opinions of someone else without proper acknowledgment.
    2. Borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment.

C. Lying encompasses the following:
    1. The willful and knowledgeable telling of an untruth, as well as any form of deceit, attempted deceit, or fraud in an oral or written statement relating to academic work. This includes but is not limited to the following:
    2. Lying to administration and faculty members.
    3. Falsifying any university document by mutilation, addition, or deletion…

Schar School Policy on Plagiarism:

The following is Schar School policy regarding plagiarism (www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook):

"The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of public policy inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the Schar School. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable.

"Plagiarism is the use of another's words or ideas presented as one's own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another's work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

"Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one's professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.

"The faculty of the Schar School takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of "F." This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student's transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (e.g., F-1, J-1, J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.

"To help enforce the Schar School policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student's work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The Schar School policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Codes; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it."

Academic Accommodation for a Disability:

The following is Mason policy regarding accommodation for a disability:

"If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS."

Online Classroom Etiquette:

This course relies on students' active participation and engagement to meet its learning objectives. It is challenging to simulate the immediacy and connection that physical classrooms facilitate. To come as close as possible, students are asked to follow the following norms and etiquette while on our Zoom platform:

1) Please use a **desktop or laptop** computer to connect to class, rather than a tablet or mobile device.
2) Please keep your **cameras on** during class sessions. Visuals are critical to building trust in virtual environments and facilitate a seminar-setting with non-verbal communication. Ensure you secure a strong internet connection in advance.
3) Please use a George Mason **University-provided background** from here or here so that all students are in a "uniform" environment, as we would be in a classroom. No need to tidy up behind you! Light the front of your face; not the back of your head.
4) Please keep **microphones on mute**, unless you are speaking.
5) Turn off and **silence all other web applications** and set aside other electronic devices during class sessions.
6) Please limit use of the chat box to **class-relevant matters**.
7) Always be **respectful** to each other.

NOTE: Class lectures and sessions will not be recorded or posted.

Use of Electronic Devices in Class:

Students are expected to focus their attention entirely on lectures and discussion during class meetings. They are expected to refrain from carrying on other professional or personal activities while the class is meeting. Seminar members engaged in other professional or personal activities during class time will be asked to leave the session until they are finished with such activities and to return only when they are prepared to participate in the seminar. Use of mobile phones in class is not permitted, unless for course purposes.

Weekly Theme and Class Materials:

Lectures will not recapitulate course reading materials. They will apply, debate and discuss the implications of related concepts, arguments and evidence. Therefore, students should ensure that they read all assigned materials in their entirety **before** the beginning of each class.

1) August 26:   Introduction

No reading assigned.

2) September 2:   Think Analytically

Text: Bardach, Eugene. 2000 or 2012. *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*. Chatham House, entire.
Case: Levinson, Amanda. 2011. 'Unaccompanied Immigrant Children: A Growing Phenomenon with Few Easy Solutions' Migration Policy Institute.
Case: Park, Haeyoun. 2014. 'Q. and A. Children at the Border,' *New York Times*.
MA: Chapter 1: "A Multilingual Toolkit"

3) September 9:   Think Problematically

Text: Stone, *Policy Paradox,* p. 37-267
Case: 'Values in Conflict: The Furor over Admissions Policy at a Popular Virginia Magnet School,' Kennedy School of Government Case Program. C15-06-1848.0.
MA: Chapter 2: "The Executive Summary"

4) September 16:   Think Philosophically

Text: Sandel, Michael. 2009. *Justice: What's the right thing to do?* Farrar, entire.
Case: 'Hero or Traitor? Edward Snowden and the NSA Spying Program', Kennedy School of Government Case Program. C2018.0.
MA: Chapter 3: "The Press Release"

5) September 23:   Think Relatively

Text: Neustadt, Richard E. and Ernest R. May. 1986. *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers.* Free Press, p. 1-133.
MA: Chapter 4: "The Op-Ed and Blog"

6) September 30:   Think Contextually

Text: Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time,* p. 134-270.
MA: Chapter 5: "The Briefing"

7) October 7:   Think Psychologically

Text: Kahneman, Daniel. 2013 *Thinking, Fast and Slow,* Farrar, entire.
Case: Moskvitch, Katia. 2014. 'The road design tricks that make us drive safer,' BBC.
Case: Benedictus, Leo. 2013. 'The nudge unit – has it worked so far?' *The Guardian*.
Case: Thaler, Richard and Mario Rizzo. 2007. 'Econoblog: Should Policies Nudge People To Make Certain Choices? *Wall Street Journal.*
Case: Wang, Shirley. 2014. 'In Tests, Scientists Try to Change Behaviors,' *Wall Street Journal*.
MA: Chapter 6: "The Broadcast Appearance"

8) October 14:   No Class

9) October 21:   Think Consultatively

Text: Hirschman, Alfred O. 1970. *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States.* Harvard University Press, entire.
Case: Gest, Justin. 2014. "After the Fall: The Politics of Insecurity in Youngstown, Ohio' in *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics and Marginality*. Forthcoming.
MA: Chapter 7: "The Elevator Pitch"

10) October 28:   Group Meetings

11) November 4:   Think Instrumentally

Text: Stone, *Policy Paradox,* p. 269-377.
MA: Chapter 8: "The Website and Social Media"

12) November 11:   Think Powerfully

Text: Lessig, Lawrence. 2014. *The USA is Lesterland*, TED, entire.
Case: Greider, William. 1981. 'The Education of David Stockman,' *The Atlantic*.
Case: Vogel, Kenneth P. 2014. 'Karl Rove and the Modern Money Machine,' *Politico*.
MA: Chapter 9: "A Multimedia Strategy"

13) November 18:   Presentations

14) December 2:   Presentations