

Theory and Practice in Public Policy

PUBP 500 003 – Fall 2020

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Course Information

Class Meeting: Tuesdays, 7:20 – 8:30 pm, for class discussion on Zoom.

Recorded lectures for each session are to be viewed at your convenience before each scheduled section. Assigned readings should also be completed in advance of our weekly discussion session. Discussion topics will be posted weekly on Blackboard under the Discussion Board tab on Blackboard. Students who prefer or require a fully asynchronous course experience will have the option to respond in a post of about two hundred words in the Discussion Board.

Office Hours: By appointment via phone or Zoom – email instructor to schedule

Contact: bstabile@gmu.edu

Course Description and Objectives

Theory and Practice in Public Policy, the gateway course for the Master's Program in Public Policy, introduces you to tools and concepts that will help you navigate in the world of public policy in two ways. First, we explore several types of theories and assess their strengths, weaknesses and applicability to public policy in order to understand different varieties of theory, their uses and application. Second, you will be introduced to several perspectives on the practice of policy analysis and be given an opportunity to engage in an analytical policy project. Strong ethical and international components are built into the course.

The objective of this course is to help you become a more sophisticated policy professional with an ability to operate effectively and ethically in a political environment. While many of the applications will be U.S.-based, the theories apply more broadly to policymaking elsewhere. You will be presented with a variety of ways of looking at political phenomena, conceiving of relationships, and understanding outcomes. The course seeks to heighten your sensitivity to economic and political context and your appreciation of theoretical rigor, disinterested analysis, and the importance of empirical evidence for assertions.

You will hone your skills in recognizing values, seeing multiple sides of issues, casting

alternative frames to problems, understanding underlying interests, identifying stakeholders, and devising strategies for action. Finally, the course aims to enhance your proficiency in identifying and using appropriate, authoritative source material and in writing and speaking articulately, succinctly, logically, and convincingly. Upon completion of this course, you should be well underway toward becoming a policy analyst and well prepared for the remainder of the MPP program.

Assessment

You will be asked to demonstrate your facility with the theories and their appropriate use, as well as to hone your research, public presentation and writing skills. Papers and examinations are treated as pedagogical exercises to augment your learning in the course. Grades will be apportioned in the following manner:

Midterm exam: 30%

Policy analysis project: 40%

Active, consistent class participation and attendance: 20%

Policy Project Presentation: 10%

Class participation is an important part of your grade; participation does not necessarily mean talking a lot. It means preparing carefully by completing the assigned reading before each day's class. Good participation can mean one deft comment that moves the discussion forward.

***Writing Emphasis** One of the key goals of this course is to make sure that every MPP student is able to write for a policy audience at a proficient level of competency. The course, usually taken in the first or second semester at GMU, is used to identify students who may need assistance in achieving that level. The instructor may advise you to take other courses that will further build your writing skills.

Learning Outcomes

1. Knowledge and understanding:

- Acquire a basic knowledge of the origins of public policy
- Acquire a basic understanding of the policy formulation process
- Acquire a basic understanding of the market economy's interaction with public policy
- Acquire a basic understanding of how complex social questions can be addressed in an analytical fashion.

2. Develop quantitative and qualitative skills

- Be able to conduct graduate level research

- Be able to read economic analyses with policy relevance

3. Professional development and leadership

- Be able to present the findings of analysis in a persuasive and professional way
- Be able to write clearly and persuasively at the professional level

Required Texts and Readings

The following required books are available via the George Mason University bookstore. Other readings will be available online at the indicated web address, or via e-journals through the George Mason University library website at library.gmu.edu, or E-Reserves via Blackboard.

Eugene Bardach, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* (CQ Press, 2015). (Note: GMU ebook, or purchase 5th or 6th edition if possible)

Lee Fritschler and Catherine E. Rudder. *Smoking and Politics: Bureaucracy Centered Policymaking*, 6th ed. (Pearson, 2006).

Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Harvard University Press, 1970). Note: GMU ebook

Jennifer Jacquet. *Is Shame Necessary: New Uses for an Old Tool* (First Vintage Books, 2016)

Michael Sandel. *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Cornell University Press, 1998).

Deborah Stone. *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making, 3rd Edition* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).

Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. (Penguin Group, 2008 or 2009) (any edition)

*Detailed descriptions of the course requirements and assignments, and relevant honor codes and Schar/GMU information, are included in the Appendix of this syllabus. Participation and presentation skills are given special emphasis in this course, and the written finished product must be of the highest professional quality. Preparation of the readings for each class session is essential for successful course participation.

A grade of **A or A-** indicates sustained excellence and outstanding performance on all

aspects of the course. The grades of **B and B+** denote mastery of the material and very good performance on all aspects of the course. The grade of **B-** is given for marginal quality work that is not quite up to graduate level standards. The grade of **C** denotes work that may be adequate for undergraduate performance, but is not acceptable at the graduate level. The grade of **F** denotes the failure to perform adequately on course assignments.

The class participation grade takes into account a student's **presence in class** and **contributions to the course dialogue**. Conscientious participation entails:

- earnest discussion and demonstrated knowledge of assigned readings
- application of course concepts to relevant current events or the work circumstances and experience of individual students
- courteous, professional, and respectful dialogue with course colleagues
- meaningful engagement in class, while refraining from using a computer (except for note taking) or electronic devices

All written work is expected to be of the highest quality, representing both grammatically correct and carefully considered analysis. Elements of central importance to sound analysis include adequate depth, breadth, relevance and clarity of the concepts considered. Language is the most important tool available to evaluators. Use it well.

I strongly encourage the use of the GMU Writing Center. Explore their offerings at <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>

Assignments must be submitted on time to receive full credit.

All assignments should be sent to the instructor as an email attachment, labeled first with the student's last name, at bstable@gmu.edu by class time on the date due.

Finally, you must have a functioning GMU email account in order to receive class notifications and correspondence.

Weekly Readings and Assignments

Session 1 (August 25): Introduction and Syllabus Review

Session 2 (September 1): The Practical Power of Policy Analysis

Public policy is intended to solve public problems for the public good. The creation of sound policy for this purpose is the topic that will principally concern us over the course of the semester ahead. When and how does policy make a difference, and how do we best approach policy analysis to meaningfully improve the conditions targeted? Bardach shows us the (eightfold) path, and Eyler and Brownson offers examples to inspire us.

Bardach, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*. Note: GMU ebook, or purchase 5th edition if possible

“The Power of Policy to Improve Health,” Chapter 1 in *Prevention, Policy, and Public Health*. Eyler, Amy A. and Ross Brownson. 2016.

Session 3 (September 8): Agenda Setting and Problem Definition

How do public problems compete to reach agenda status, and how do various stakeholders compete to advance their own problem definition and policy solutions in the stream of politics?

Cairney, Paul and Nikolaos Zahariadis. “Multiple streams analysis: A flexible metaphor presents an opportunity to operationalize agenda setting processes,” in *Handbook of Public Policy Agenda-Setting*, Edited by Nikolaos Zahariadis, Edward Elgar, 2016. Available at <https://paulcairney.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/cairney-zahariadis-multiple-streams-2016.pdf>, accessed August 11, 2019.

Stabile, Bonnie. “What's the matter with Kansas? Legislative debates over stem cell research in Kansas and Massachusetts,” *Politics and the Life Sciences* 28 1, 2009.

Session 4 (September 15): Rationales for Public Policy: Market Failures

The first question we should ask before working to propose any particular policy solution is what the rationale for seeking a policy solution is –that is, what warrants the expenditure of government funds and the exertion of government authority over the problem at hand? Why is it a public problem? Weimer and Vining offer sound grounding for this rationale where it exists.

Weimer and Vining, “Rationales for Public Policy: Market Failures,” Chapter 5 in *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*, pp. 74-115.

Session 5 (September 22): Policy Goals and Criteria

What values are at play with regard to our policy problem? What goals are we trying to achieve through policy means to mitigate the problem at hand? As Yogi Berra famously said, “If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up somewhere else.” Bardach’s discussion of Criteria and Stone’s section on Goals should be especially useful to you in setting the path of your Policy Analysis.

Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*

Session 6 (September 29): Policy Project Proposal Due (Midterm Assignment)

Session 7 (October 6): Bureaucracy and Policy

Do Bureaucrats (a term I use lovingly) do more than carry out policy? Do they actually make it? How, why, when, and to what effect?

Fritschler and Rudder, *Smoking and Politics: Bureaucracy Centered Policymaking*

October 13: Tuesday classes do not meet this week due to Fall Break (Monday classes will meet on Tuesday this week)

Session 8 (October 20): Exit, Voice and Loyalty

*Hirschman hopes to demonstrate to **political scientists** the usefulness of **economic concepts** and **economists** the usefulness of **political concepts**. What “mechanisms of recuperation” are available in the economic and political realms?*

Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Harvard University Press, 1970). Note: GMU ebook

Session 9 (October 27): People Influencing Policy in the International Arena

How do Transnational Advocacy Organizations influence the definition and amelioration of public problems?

Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*

Session 10 (November 3): Policy Influencing People: “Libertarian Paternalism”

An oxymoron for our times that can help you conceive of viable policy alternatives to public problems.

“Humans and Econs” and “Money”: Parts I and II, and “Health,” “Freedom” and “Extensions and Objections”: Parts III – V in Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*

Session 11 (November 10): Shame as a Policy Mechanism

Jennifer Jacquet. *Is Shame Necessary: New Uses for an Old Tool*

Session 12 (November 17): Justice in the Polis

Michael Sandel. *Justice: What's the right thing to do?*

It is strongly recommended that the final draft of your Policy Analysis be completed by this date so that you have time for final editing and review before submission.

Session 13 (November 24): Pulling it all Together in Theory and Practice (A Review of Course Themes)

*****Policy Analysis due at the start of session, and Voice Over Power Point Presentations are also to be posted by this date.*****

Thursday, November 26th: Happy Thanksgiving!

Session 14 (December 1): Policy Analysis Presentations and Discussion

This week's lecture videos feature you as instructors! After viewing your classmates' presentations, come to our discussion time prepared to ask pertinent questions, and offer comments and affirmations for this final, important element of class participation.

Appendix

A. Detailed Descriptions of Course Assignments

Participation: Students must be well acquainted with the readings for each session and be prepared to discuss them in detail. **All students are expected to actively participate in and contribute to the course dialogue. To be prepared for each session's discussion it is recommended that you:**

1. Write a brief statement encapsulating, in a sentence or two, the overarching theme of the evenings readings, and be prepared to share it. (Not to be handed in – just to guide your discussion...)
2. Identify a quote of significance from the reading that really strikes you and that you think warrants further examination and discussion.

3. You might bring an article from the popular press to our attention on an issue that illustrates course themes, or might be usefully examined with course frameworks or methodologies.
4. Consider using Twitter to share articles and insights on topics of interest to our inquiry. I'm @bstabile1.

Policy Project Proposal (Midterm Assignment)

Each proposal should identify the policy issue on which the policy analysis project will focus in a memo of six pages in length as outlined below:

1. **Applying the insights of Bardach** explicitly, explain the problem at hand, and be sure not to conflate potential solutions in the problem definition. We don't want to begin outlining policy alternatives just yet, we just want to understand **the size and shape of the problem** (dazzle us with some facts here – go easy on the emphasis words – let the data impress us...). For **whom** is this issue problematic? **What** are the manifestations of the problem (morbidity, mortality, economic costs, educational setbacks, for instance?) **Who** is predominantly affected (or on which particular group, if any, will you focus your analysis?) On **what jurisdiction** will you focus – which city, county, country? Knowing this will help you to **identify your client** – the person or organization for whom you are writing the analysis – and later in the semester, will help you to identify and present plausible policy alternatives to recommend and analyze so that the identified problem might be mitigated through policy means. (2 pages, double-spaced)
2. **Considering Stone, identify the criteria** (3 to 5) that you will use to articulate and assess the goals of any policy interventions that you will develop later to address the problem at hand. Explain why the criteria you have selected are important with regard to your problem definition. (1 page, double-spaced)
3. **Based on Weimer and Vining, explain the rationale for public policy intervention** for the problem identified. (1 page, double-spaced)
4. **Identify any insights from Multiple Streams Analysis** that might be useful in understanding the policy context in which your identified problem exists, whether from the Problem, Policy or Politics Streams (remembering that our focus now is more on problem definition versus exploring full blown policy interventions.) (1 page, double-spaced)
5. **Include a preliminary bibliography** of at least six sound sources substantiating the size and shape of the problem at hand.
6. Send as a Word document email attachment (labeled with your last name only, course number and “proposal”) to bstabile@gmu.edu by the start of class discussion time.
7. Be prepared to discuss your proposal with classmates for this session.

Policy Analysis Project

(Original Project Design by Professor Emeritus Cathy Rudder)

Develop a **policy analysis** along the lines of Bardach's Eightfold Path in *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*. The deliverables include a written policy analysis of approximately 15 double-spaced typed pages. The analysis should include:

- An executive summary of the report (*not to exceed one page*)
- A succinct discussion of the problem, including brief relevant history and context, and some relevant academic literature substantiating the nature and extent of the problem to be addressed– *a maximum of about two pages*)
- Identification of the client for whom the project is undertaken (*about one paragraph*)
- Identification of the stakeholders (*about one paragraph*)
- Identification and explanation of the criteria against which outcomes are to be assessed (3-5 criteria; *about one page*)
- Presentation of policy alternatives (3 or 4 alternatives) you are suggesting might be brought to bear on solving the problem, including evidence from the academic literature of the success of such proposed interventions and where they have been tried already.
- **Description and Assessment of Possible Solutions presented in a Matrix with Policy Alternatives on one axis and Criteria on the other. The narrative section discussing this matrix and its findings will make up the bulk of the paper.**
- Identification of Recommended Policy Alternative/Solution in light of the identified criteria. Just one alternative should be selected. (*one paragraph*)
- Give some indication of how the policy solution you recommend would be evaluated if the solution is implemented. What data need to be collected now or in an ongoing fashion in order to evaluate the policy in the future? (*This should be about one paragraph.*)
- Conclusion. Cleanly tell us what you told us, and briefly tell us why it matters. (*No more than a page.*)
- Assigned reading: Incorporate relevant class readings and lectures into your policy analysis and indicate how they apply when relevant throughout the analysis.
- References listed alphabetically by author's last name and full bibliographic information.

Policy Analysis Project Presentation

Each student will prepare a Voice Over Power Point Presentation of about seven minutes in length (ten maximum) to be uploaded to the course Blackboard Discussion Group section.

For the **presentation** you should:

- Give a brief summary of the policy problem, the advice you offered your client, and the reasons for your recommendations, including the criteria used, and your assessment of the policy alternatives based on those identified criteria.
- Include at least one relevant element of strategy, tactics or insight from the **class readings**.
- Make a persuasive argument concerning the strategy/policy alternative you are proposing.
- Indicate how the selected policy alternative will likely lead to the desired outcome.

B. University and Schar School Honor Codes and Policies

No cheating, plagiarizing, or other unprofessional conduct will be tolerated. (Please see Schar School statement below.) 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:

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:

1. Lying to administration and faculty members.
2. Falsifying any university document by mutilation, addition, or deletion...

Schar School Policy on Plagiarism: One Instance of Cheating and You Are Expelled

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 School of Public Policy. 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 or 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 any commercial services to which the School might subscribe. 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 Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it. (<http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook/aD.html>)

The Schar School Statement on Plagiarism, the University Honor Code, and some valuable **Resources on Graduate Research and Writing** are available at <http://schar.gmu.edu/current-students/masters-advising/masters-101/topic-5-graduate-research-and-writing/>

C. Academic Accommodation for a Disability

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.