Theory and Practice in Public Policy  
George Mason University  
Schar School of Policy and Government  
Fall 2017

GENERAL INFORMATION

Listing: PUBP 500-004  
Time/Location: Thursdays, 07:20 – 10:00 pm, Founders Hall  
Instructor: Dr. Jason Dechant  
Phone: 703-861-4493  
Email: jasondechant@gmail.com  
Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

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 that allows you to practice working in a team. Strong ethical and global components are built into the course.

COURSE OBJECTIVE

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 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 your Master’s program.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
Given that the objective of this course is to help you become a more sophisticated policy professional, a focus of the course will be on strengthening skills to explore various dimensions of issues and developing strategies for action. Throughout the course, we will consider the fundamental questions that underlie good policymaking. In particular, we will ask the following:

- What is your policy goal?
- What are your options (policy alternatives)?
- What are the trade-offs (the additional criteria) that you will need to confront when making policy recommendations?
- What are the political, bureaucratic, and logistical realities of the situation and how will they affect your final policy recommendation?

Successful completion of this course provides the students with the following:

1. Knowledge and understanding
   - Basic knowledge of the origins of public policy
   - Familiarity with the policy formulation process
   - Appreciation of the market economy’s interaction with public policy
   - Understanding of how complex social questions can be addressed in an analytical fashion

2. Professional development and leadership skills
   - Working together in small groups, with shifting leadership
   - Presenting competently and effectively and
   - Writing clearly and persuasively at the professional level

REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS


**REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT**

Both individual and group work are important skills to be developed and you will be evaluated on each throughout the course. They will allow you to demonstrate your knowledge of theories, strengthen your research skills, and refine your presentation and writing proficiency. Exercises and exams are treated as pedagogical exercises to demonstrate your learning throughout the course. Grades will be assigned and apportioned as follows:

- Group Analysis and Presentation 30%
- Final Exam 25%
- Exercise (Remote) 15%
- Class Participation/Quizzes 15%
- Individual Critical Review 15%

**Group Analysis and Presentation**

The class will be divided into small teams. Each team will develop a policy paper generally following the guidelines and approach introduced in Bardach’s *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis* on a topic to be determined for a specific client (e.g., Congress, DHS, state governors, relevant segment of industry, etc.). The assignment includes:

1. Policy analysis paper of no more than 15 pages including:
   a. A bibliography (does not count against page limit)
   b. A one-page executive summary (does not count against page limit)
2. An informal memo/email that includes:
   a. A description of the client/stakeholders to which the paper is directed
   b. A statement of team roles and responsibilities

The presentation will occur during the designated class period and each team will be allotted a window of time, followed by a question period. Assigned grades (for both the paper and presentation) will be an equal weighting of group performance and individual contributions.
Final Exam
A final exam will be given at the end of the semester. It will consist of a limited number of essay questions and a practical exercise. It is take-home and open-book.

Class Participation and Quizzes
Part of your evaluation will be based upon how well you are prepared for class and this is demonstrated in class participation and quizzes (if and when they are given). Quality participation is not measured by the amount of talking or participation, but the quality and relevance of the comments. Given this is a policy processes course, those with experience (past and present) with some aspect of the process are encouraged to relate their knowledge and experiences to the theories and concepts introduced in the course to test their utility. Missing more than three classes will result in a grade reduction.

Individual Critical Review
Conducting compelling policy analysis involves more than following and formulaic procedure. It requires critical thinking at every step and consideration of what makes some analyses stronger than others. Therefore, every student will be required to do a critical review of a selected policy analysis (of their choosing) and convey their review in a short paper no longer than 10 pages. Additional details will be provided during class.

Policy Exercise
A short policy exercise will be conducted (remotely) during the designated class period. It will be a practical exercise that will be based upon the readings and instruction to that point in the course. The exercise will be issued via email immediately prior to the class period, to be completed during the period, and returned via email at the end of the class period. Additional details will be provided during class.

GENERAL GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

Papers
Writing research and policy papers is a fundamental part of graduate study. The quality of a paper is determined by a number of factors, including presentation of facts, development of argumentation, clarity of analysis, acknowledgment of sources, and accuracy of format and style. A good guideline for elements and format of a research paper and bibliography, including online sources, is A Pocket Style Manual, Seventh Edition (2015), by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers. Note that your written assignments in this class will be used to evaluate whether you might need to take a writing class as part of your course of study.
Presentation
Being able to prepare and conduct a presentation of current or proposed work is essential in any professional environment. The quality of a presentation depends on what is discussed and how it is communicated to the audience. A good paper or outline is the basis, but it is equally important to develop a script (or outline) specifically for the presentation. It should lay out how to introduce the topic to the audience, which parts to emphasize and which to skip, how to close the presentation and start the discussion. It is highly recommended to stage a dry-run ahead of time to test the format (stand-alone, with slides, Powerpoint supported, etc.) and to properly manage the time allotted.

Grading
All written and oral assignments will be judged using the GMU system for grading graduate courses as laid out in the university catalog. Grades earned for each assignment will be added numerically, and the weighted average will be used to determine the final grade, which allows for the grades of A, A-, B+, B, B-, as well as C, F, and IN. Assignments that are submitted late will lead to a grade reduction, up to being marked as missed entirely. Un acceptably frequent periods of absence (missing more than three classes) will result in grade reduction as well. No extra credit will be given.

Electronic Communication and Blackboard
The GMU email accounts are the primary and authoritative means of electronic communication; announcements regarding classes will be sent to those accounts only. Students are free to use other accounts, but are solely responsible for any failed communication, missed deadline, etc. Blackboard will also be used to post announcements, presentations, and other items, so be sure to check regularly. I generally respond to emails within 24 hours during the week.

Special Needs
If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me AND contact the Office of Disability Services at http://ods.gmu.edu/. All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS before classes start.

SPGIA Policy on Plagiarism
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. 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 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 SPGIA 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 SPGIA policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it.

**Honor Code**

George Mason University shares in the tradition of an honor system that has existed in Virginia since 1842. The Honor Code is an integral part of university life. In the spirit of the code, a student's word is a declaration of good faith acceptable as truth in all academic matters. Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations.

This course is subject to all policies of the George Mason University Honor Code as laid out in the university catalog. As stated above, the provisions regarding plagiarism are particularly relevant. The best way of avoiding plagiarism charges is rigorous and meticulous documentation and, to the extent possible, retention, of all sources that are used for preparing papers and presentations. While it is not necessary to cite a source for every single statement, it is expected that students reference major sources in a way that allows fellow students and other readers to identify them. This means e.g. when citing an author in the text, the cited work needs to be referenced in full in the bibliography, and the bibliographic citations need to be complete and verifiable.
## SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>08/31</td>
<td>Introduction and Course Overview</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>09/07</td>
<td>Fundamentals of Policy Analysis</td>
<td>Bardach</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>09/14</td>
<td>Theories of Public Policy</td>
<td>Oliver</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>09/21</td>
<td>Ethics and Policy Analysis</td>
<td>Sandel</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>09/28</td>
<td>NO CLASS/Practical Exercise (Remote)</td>
<td>Miller and North</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10/05</td>
<td>Economics in Policy Analysis</td>
<td>Miller and North</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10/12</td>
<td>Goals, Choices, and Trade-Offs</td>
<td>Stone (pp. 1-103)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>10/19</td>
<td>Problems and Solutions in the Policy Process</td>
<td>Stone (pp. 104-end)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>10/26</td>
<td>The Policy Process in Action</td>
<td>Fritschler and Rudder</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>11/02</td>
<td>Principals and Agents</td>
<td>Miller</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>11/09</td>
<td>Legislative Solutions to Complex Policy: Base Realignment and Closure</td>
<td>Goren</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>11/16</td>
<td>Policy Shaping Choices</td>
<td>Thaler and Sustein</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>11/23</td>
<td>NO CLASS-THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>11/30</td>
<td>Further Motivations in Social Policy</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>12/07</td>
<td>Group Presentations</td>
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## DETAILED SCHEDULE

<To be provided>