COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is designed to train you to think critically and contextually about real-world policy issues and processes, be they those of health, education, social security, migration, defense, transportation, finance, or foreign policy. Regardless of your specific focus, you cannot be a sophisticated analyst without the ability to detect theoretical underpinnings and to select and employ the appropriate frameworks and methods.

Anyone who has labored in the policy world knows that the “processes” of policy are messy—whether we are formulating, discussing, designing, and implementing policy, or revising, rationalizing, and responding to it. That is because, as we study in the course, policy processes are embedded in institutions and power relations, ideology and discourse, culture and identity.

Designing and implementing policies that have the desired effects depends on a grasp of the social, political, and cultural contexts in which the recipients of those policies are rooted—be they communities; social or professional groups or social networks; governmental, business, or other nongovernmental entities; or the Internet. Policy processes neither follow a linear path nor lend themselves to mapping with variables whose value and interaction are pre-specified by an abstract model. Often instead, unforeseen variables combine in unforeseen ways, producing consequences that may even contradict the intentions of policymakers.

Bringing cutting-edge theoretical and methodological perspectives to bear, the course takes a critical look at influential models in public policy such as principal-agent theory and rational choice theory. We examine the implications of “audit culture” and the proliferation of metrics in fields from finance to media to international governance regimes, where words have been giving way to numbers. We also introduce you to the practical tools of field research. The course thus provides not only intellectual grounding in theory and method but applied skills as well.
The Objectives of the course include learning to:

- Analyze the framing of policy questions and debates
- Evaluate the methods that are appropriate for studying a particular policy issue or process
- Identify enablers and barriers to effective policy design and implementation
- Begin to observe “culture,” organization, social networks, and informal structure
- Conduct semi-structured and open-ended interviewing
- Carry out basic participant-observation

Learning Outcomes include:

- Ability to unpack the framing of policy questions and debates
- Ability to evaluate the methods that are appropriate for studying a particular policy issue or process
- Ability to anticipate potential unintended consequences of policies and amend policy design and implementation to avoid them
- Literacy in basic “qualitative” research methods
- Comfort with semi-structured and open-ended interviewing
REQUIREMENTS:

Thinking Points (35%): Two written thinking points (up to three single-spaced pages, with paragraph breaks) are expected of each student for Topic 1 and one other topic of your choice for which readings have been assigned. Thinking points can either address the question or questions specified in the syllabus (for some topics) or simply critically review the readings. These questions will also be used in class discussion. A hard copy of your assignment should be given to me by 6:00pm on the day they are due. Please include the following information on the top of each assignment: (1) your full name; (2) course number; (3) phone number and e-mail address; and (4) readings covered in your essay.

Observational and Analytic Skills Assignment (25%): See pages 12-14 of syllabus. Written assignment should be 6-10 pages (single-spaced pages, with paragraph breaks), not including notes and appendices. Please include the following information on the top of each assignment: (1) your full name; (2) course number; and (3) phone number and e-mail address.

Please note: Your Observational Exercise idea is due the second week of class. Please provide two to four sentences about what you might do. This assignment is not graded; it is intended to begin a discussion.

Exam (20%): One multiple choice exam will be given during the semester.

Effort, Approach, and Exercises (20%): As you cannot participate without being present, class attendance is paramount. As the professor, I will complete this part of the evaluation after the final class based on observations and interactions over the semester. With regard to your participation in class, the amount of speaking time should be balanced with the need for others to have air time, the quality of listening, efforts to build on the contributions of others, asking questions of each other and of me, thoughtfulness of comments, and other contributions made to the creation of a mutual learning space. I keep weekly notes on students’ participation for grading at the end of the semester.

READINGS:

Required Readings are available on Blackboard. Selected books also are available on library hard-copy reserve in the Arlington library.

To access e-Reserves, log into your Blackboard account, go to the course page, and then click on the "e-Reserves" link in the left-hand navigation bar. Further details regarding Reserves are located here: http://library.gmu.edu/reserves. Should the Blackboard technology fail, please contact Course Support: http://coursessupport.gmu.edu/Students/. If Blackboard is working and you are not seeing a reserve item that should be there, please contact ereserve@gmu.edu.

If you encounter further problems, please contact the Arlington Campus library. Megan McDonnell is the Access Services Supervisor (kmcdonn1@gmu.edu).
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 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 School of Public Policy 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 (eg. F-1, J-1 or J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.

To help enforce the SPP 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 a 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. ([http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook/aD.html](http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook/aD.html))

Statement on Special Needs of Students:

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

New Voices in Public Policy:

I will consider nominating the very best papers in this course for publication in New Voices in Public Policy. New Voices is a student-and faculty-reviewed journal that shares SPGIA’s finest student work with the rest of the world.

Style Manual: Please use the most recent version of the Chicago Manual of Style, Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, or some similar widely accepted standard.
TOPICS AND READINGS:

August 30 Introduction to the Subject and Overview of Course

Topic 1 (September 6) Public Policy Questions as “Wicked” or “Tame;” Methods and Policy Public Schools; Perspectives on Key Concepts (including Society, Culture, Institutions, and Public Policy)

Required Readings:

Further Resources:

Thinking points:
- What are the characteristics of “wicked problems”?
- According to Sartori, why is it important to reflect on the concepts and methods employed in research?
- In what ways can anthropological approaches contribute to the understanding of public policy processes?

Assignment due: Thinking Points for Topic 1

Assignment due: Observational Exercise idea (see below)
A Theoretical-Methodological Template for analyzing a “wicked” issue
(copyright 2004: Janine R. Wedel):

1. Who are the parties involved (e.g., managers, employees, contractors or subcontractors, members of the community, company representatives, politicians) in a specific issue, problem, or conflict?

2. What are the larger context/circumstances of power and resources in which the parties and their organizations are rooted (e.g., a business or government agency uncertain about continuity of power or resources; a decline in resources; a consulting firm dependent on government contracts; an agency subject to parliamentary oversight or public and media scrutiny; a company that has been bought out by another company or declining demand for the product the company manufactures)? How do features of the larger context/circumstances constrain, enable, or otherwise affect the parties and organizations involved in the issue, problem, or conflict?

3. What are these parties’ respective interests, agendas, incentives, goals, motivations, operating assumptions, and expectations with regard to the issue, problem, or conflict?

4. What is the “culture(s)” of the venues or organization(s) in which the parties are operating? How does it/they influence the parties’ actions? (Clue: how do people frame what they want or define what is going on?) Who has the power or influence to be a player in shaping outcomes, and on what does that depend (e.g., being part of a certain network, professional standing, formal or informal position)?

5. How do the interests of the various parties, the “culture(s)” of the relevant venues or organization(s), and other factors interact to produce outcomes?
**Topic 2 (September 13) Discussion of Method and Analysis of “Wicked” Issues**

**Required Viewing and Reading:**
- Film: *Kitchen Stories* – to be watched in class

**Further Resources:**
- Yanow, Dvora and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds., *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, London and NY: Routledge, 2015. The library has online access to this book; please use the online catalog to find it.

**Thinking points:**
What scientific method is employed to study the “subject” in the film *Kitchen Stories*? Does it achieve the desired results? Why or why not? What might the authors of the above readings for this topic say about that method, and what might they propose as an alternative?

**Topic 3 (September 20) Guest Lecturer:** Dana Dolan, Ph.D. Candidate, Schar School of Policy and Government, GMU: Cultures of Research and Academia; Putting Theoretical and Methodological Knowledge to Work

**Readings:** TBD
**Topic 4 (September 27) Public Policy Framing and Discourse through the Lens of Language and Culture**

**Required Readings:**
- **TBA**

**Thinking points:**
How do the words and metaphors we use to communicate shape how we think and see the world? How does the framing of public policy questions/debates affect the actions that are taken? How does it limit certain types of action, while encouraging others?


**Required Readings:**

**Further Resources:**

**Thinking points:**
- What are informal practices, and what are examples of such practices?
- What is “Sistema” and what are its main features, as outlined by Ledeneva? What are the main similarities and differences between Soviet informal governance and governance in Putin’s Russia? Is “misrecognition” purely a feature of Sistema? What are the ways in which misrecognition is part of your own society?
- Optional: How and why did the concept of “informal economy” evolve? What are the links between informal and formal economy?
Topic 6 (October 11) Employing Theory and Method in Policy Studies: Discussion of the readings listed under Topic 2 (September 14); Review of dissertations listed below in the realms of health and drug policy, finance, social movements, and auditing

  OR:
  OR:
  OR:
Topic 7 (October 18) Social Network Analysis; Student Workshop

Required Readings:

- History and basic tools of social network analysis; networks within and across organizations, communities, groups, and nations

- Uses of social network analysis: from sexually transmitted disease to terrorism to elites to business-government networks, global governance, and corporate governance

Further Resources:


Thinking points: What are the basic tools of social network analysis? Is network analysis a theory or a method? What kinds of problems is it suited to address? How can studying social networks help us understand the spread of disease or the workings of terrorism or organized crime? How can social network analysis shed light on governance?
**Topic 8 (October 25)** Studying In and Across Entities; Policy Travel, Translation, and Assemblages; Cases from Policies Involving Social Programs, Migration, Foreign Aid, and Anti-Corruption

**Required Readings**


**Thinking points: Policy Travel**
Discuss how policies travel. Who are the potential actors involved? How can policies be transformed as they are introduced into and implemented into a new context?

**OR:**

**Thinking Points: Policy/ Studying Through**
Policy connects diverse actors—many of which never interact personally or directly—and which are dispersed among multiple arenas of interaction that are triggered or touched by policy processes across place and time. How do we study a policy issue when many players, communities, and entities (governmental and nongovernmental) are involved in designing and implementing policy and when an equally wide array of actors respond to or are affected by it?
**Topic 9 (November 1) Examining Governance**

**Required Reading:**

**Other Resources:**

**Thinking points:**
Focusing on policy provides a window into the emergence over the past several decades of new forms of governance and new ways of brokering power and influence. How can we examine the interactions between public policy and private interests and the mixing of state, nongovernmental, and business structures that are becoming increasingly prevalent around the world?

**Topic 10 (November 8) Looking Critically at Influential Theories and Metrics**

- **Audit Culture:**

- **Metrics:**

- **Rational Choice Theory:**

- **Principal-Agency Theory:** Example from anti-corruption policy and study
November 15: Exam and Student Workshop

November 22: THANKSGIVING RECESS- NO CLASS

November 29: Discussion of Exam; Student Workshop

December 6: Final Session Wrap Up: What Have We Learned and How Will We Use It?

Assignment due: Observational and Analytical Skills Exercise