Theory and Practice in Public Policy
PUBP 500 001 – Fall 2018

Bonnie Stabile, PhD
Director, Master of Public Policy Program
Research Assistant Professor
Schar School of Policy and Government
George Mason University

Course Information

Class Meeting: Tuesdays 7:20 – 10:00 pm, FH 468
Office Hours: Tuesdays: 6:00 – 7:00 pm, and by appointment, FH 652
Contact: bstabile@gmu.edu, 703 993-8566

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 that allows you to practice working in a team. 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 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 work individually and in teams in order 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: 20%  
Group policy analysis project: 30%  
Final exam (covers entire semester): 25%  
Class participation and attendance and (possibly) pop quizzes: 25%

If you are working a schedule that requires you to miss more than 3 classes, you should consider taking this course in a different semester. Class participation is an important part of your grade; participation does not 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
• Work together in small groups, with shifting leadership
• Professional presentation skills
• Be able to write clearly and persuasively at the professional level

**Required Texts and Readings**

The following required books are available in 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.


Lee Fritschler and Catherine E. Rudder. *Smoking and Politics: Bureaucracy Centered Policymaking*, 6th ed. (Pearson, 2006). **NOTE**: It is very important that you purchase the 6th edition as it is substantially different than the previous editions.


*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/](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 bstabile@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 27): Course Welcome and Introduction**

**September 3: Labor Day Holiday – University Closed**

**Session 2 (September 10): 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.*


**Session 3 (September 17): Agenda Setting and Problem Definition**


**Session 4 (September 24): Rationales for Public Policy: Market Failures**


**Session 5 (October 1): Exit, Voice and Loyalty**

*Hirschman hopes to demonstrate to political scientists the usefulness of economic concepts and economists the usefulness of political concepts.*


October 8: University Holiday – Monday Classes Meet Tuesday, October 9 (Tuesday Classes do not meet this week)

Session 6 (October 9): Bureaucracy and Policy

Midterm distributed.

Fritschler and Rudder, Smoking and Politics: Bureaucracy Centered Policymaking

Session 7 (October 15): Policy Goals and Criteria

Midterm due.

Stone, Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making

Session 8 (October 22): People Influencing Policy in the International Arena

Keck and Sikkink, Activists Beyond Borders

Session 9 (October 29): Policy Influencing People: “Libertarian Paternalism”

“Humans and Econs” and “Money”: Parts I and II in Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness

A Further Nudge in Social Policy

“Health,” “Freedom” and “Extensions and Objections”: Parts II – IV in Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness

Session 10 (November 5): Shame as a Policy Mechanism

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

Session 11 (November 12): Justice in the Polis

Michael Sandel. Justice: What’s the right thing to do?
Session 12 (November 19): Pulling it all Together in Theory and Practice

*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 26): Policy Analysis Presentations and Discussion

Final Distributed

*Policy Analysis due at the start of session.*

Session 14 (December 3): Policy Analysis Presentations and Discussion

Final Due

Appendix: Detailed Descriptions of Course Assignments

A. 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:**

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. A few times during the semester, 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.

B. Group Policy Analysis Project details to follow

C. 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/.

D. 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.