COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The interplay of culture, organization, and technology underpins virtually all of crucial public policy issues we face today. Consider the amassing of our personal data by the National Security Agency, Google, and Facebook. Or the use of the very latest Web technologies by political campaigns, autocratic governments, and those who organize to defeat them. And consider the 2008 financial crisis, abetted by the adoption of new computer technologies that enabled finance to accelerate trading, a short-term profit culture on Wall Street, and the presence of organizational silos within banks and financial regulatory regimes. With both technologies and the organizational systems in which they are embedded growing ever more complex, unpacking how they interact with each other and with culture is critical not only to averting future crises, but to analyzing and intervening effectively in any number of public policy issues.

Effective policy analysis, making, and implementation depends on understanding the “culture(s)” of the people or entities involved—be they nations, social groups, or communities; professional groups such as lawyers or engineers; agencies such as the World Health Organization or the U.S. Department of Transportation; or the Internet. From marketing to diplomacy, peacekeeping, and foreign aid, effective intervention in another culture also may hinge on a grasp of the workings of social networks or the role of identity. Lack of such knowledge frequently causes failure. This course is designed to provide practical and intellectual skills, not only to help minimize failure, but to maximize success.

The course brings cutting-edge perspectives to bear on real-world policy processes, which hardly follow a linear path and often encounter unforeseen variables that combine in unforeseen ways, and with unforeseen consequences. It goes beyond cost-benefit analysis and simplistic models to incorporate cultural and organizational determinants of effective policy analysis, making, and implementation. Regardless of your particular MA program, you cannot be a sophisticated analyst of policy without a grasp of these determinants and the appropriate tools, methods, and frameworks for analyzing them.
Learning outcomes will be evaluated by assessing your ability to:

- Unpack the organizational and cultural components of political, economic, and social systems;
- Analyze the framing of policy questions and arguments;
- Evaluate the methods that are appropriate for addressing a particular policy issue;
- Examine the role of technologies and their interactions with culture and organization;
- Assess issues of risk;
- Observe and describe culture and organization at micro and macro levels;
- Use the basic tools of social network analysis;
- Conduct open-ended interviewing or participant-observation;
- Perform organizational and cultural audits;
- Identify cultural enablers and barriers to effective policy development, program design, and implementation;
- Understand the dynamics of the organizations you work in or with and how to effectively intervene in them;
- Think through potential unintended consequences of policy actions and strategies to avoid them.

REQUIREMENTS:

**Thinking Points (30%)**: 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 are to address a specific question or questions (outlined in the syllabus) or simply to critically review the readings for the topic of the week. Thinking points in hard copy are due under my office door (Founders Hall, Room 638) on the day before class. You MUST put the following information on the top of each assignment: (1) full name; (2) course number; (3) phone number and e-mail address; (4) topic number and due date; and (5) literature covered.

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

**Assignment 1 – Observational and Analytic Skills (20%)**: See pages 13-14 of syllabus. Written assignment should be 7-10 pages, not including notes and appendices.

**Assignment 2 (10%)**: See pages 15-16 of syllabus.

You MUST put the following information on the top of each assignment: (1) full name; (2) course number; (3) phone number and e-mail address; and (4) assignment number.

**Effort and Approach (20%)**: As the professor, I will complete this part of the evaluation after the final class based on observations and interactions relevant to the course over the semester. Please note: Because it is impossible to participate in class without being present, class attendance is REQUIRED. Also, while speaking in class is important, the amount of speaking time needs to be balanced with the need for other students to have air time, the quality of listening, efforts to build on
the contributions of others, and thoughtfulness of comments. I keep weekly notes on students' participation for grading at the end of the semester.

**Schar School 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 Schar School of Policy and Government. 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 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 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.

**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.

**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 the Schar School’s finest student work with the rest of the world.
READING LIST:

Books: Available in the Arlington bookstore.

Articles and chapters of books: Available on library and e-reserve (Blackboard), as detailed in the syllabus.

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).
SCHEDULE, TOPICS, AND REQUIRED READINGS:

Topic 1 (January 23) Introduction to the Topic and Overview of Course

Topic 1 – Continued (January 30) Historical, Empirical, and Theoretical Perspectives on Key Concepts: Culture, Organization, Institutions, Technology (for purposes of this course, technology as embedded in cultural, organizational, and political systems and policy processes)


Thinking points:
Critically review and analyze the perspectives on culture, organization, and technology presented in the Schein, Scott, and LaPorte readings. Then address this question: How can the failure of Enron be analyzed in terms of these perspectives? Is it a “tame” or “wicked” problem?

Thinking Point #1 due.
Topic 1 – Continued

Introduction to Analysis of a Wicked Issue, Problem, or Conflict: A Theoretical-Methodological Template (copyright 2004: Janine R. Wedel)

1. What is the larger context/circumstances of power and resources in which the parties and their organizations are embedded (e.g., a consulting firm dependent on government contracts; a government agency subject to internal and external auditors, congressional oversight, public and media scrutiny; a government department or agency that has been merged into a mega agency; a company that has been bought out by another company; declining demand for the product the company manufactures; new regulations imposed on the industry)? How do features of the larger context/circumstances constrain, enable, or otherwise affect the parties and organizations involved in the issue, problem, or conflict?

2. Who are the parties involved (e.g., managers, technical specialists, support staff, unionized employees, contractors or subcontractors, civil servants, employees at headquarters, employees in the “field,” other entities) in an 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? What are the contexts that shape them? (Clue: how do people frame what they want or define what is going on?) Who has power or influence, and on what does that depend?

4. What is the “culture(s)” of the organization(s) or venues in which the parties are operating? How does it/they influence the parties’ actions?

5. How do the interests of the various parties, the “culture(s)” of the relevant organization(s) or venues, and other factors combine to produce outcomes?

Topic 1 – Continued (February 6) Guest Speaker: Professor Todd La Porte, Schar School of Policy and Government, "The Interactions of Culture, Organization, and Technology"


Topic 2 (February 13) Culture, Language, and the Framing of Public Policy Questions and Debates

- Culture, thought, and language


  Classic text:
  Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 3-34, 156-158, 159-184, 185-194. (21 pages only available on GMU e-reserve.)

- Public policy framing and discourses


Thinking points:
How do the words and metaphors we use to think and communicate shape how we perceive the world and thereby enable or constrain certain types of action? How does the framing of public policy questions/debates affect the actions that are taken?

Topic 3 (February 20) – Introduction to Method and Observation, Ethnography, and Interviewing

- Film: “Kitchen Stories” to be watched in class

Idea for Assignment 1 (Observational and Analytic Skills) due.

Discussion of Assignment 1.
Topic 3 (February 27) – Intro. to Method and Observation, Ethnography, and Interviewing – Continued

- How ethnography can illuminate what is going on in and across Organizations and venues:


Thinking points:
What knowledge can ethnographic methods contribute that other methods can not?  What are the basic principles of ethnographic method?

Topic 4 (March 6) – Social Network Analysis

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


- Perspectives on and uses of social network analysis


Thinking points:
What are the basic tools of social network analysis? What kinds of problems are they suited to illuminate? Is network analysis a theory or a method?

Spring Break (March 13)

Topic 5 (March 20) Guest Speaker: Professor Todd La Porte, Schar School of Policy and Government, GMU: "The Interactions of Culture, Organization, and Technology: Dealing with Complexity and Risk"


Topic 6 (March 27) Nations as Cultures, How to Study Them, and Varieties of Capitalism


Thinking Points:
1. Describe the characteristics of the different types of economies covered in the readings.
2. Describe the major differences in approach to inquiry between the two readings. Which type of analysis do you find more credible, and why? Which approach is more likely to be able to explain change?
3. How do the two readings fit into Schein’s trichotomy?
4. (Optional) The first reading is quite dated. How does that help you see the perspectives and biases of the authors more clearly?
**Topic 7 (April 3)** International Cultural Contact; Local-Global Cultural Interactions

- Attempts by business representatives operating in one cultural context to do business in or with representatives of others
  

- Representatives of nations (for example, diplomats, NGOs, and other organizations) as they deal with each other across cultures
  

- Foreign aid (especially grant and technical assistance) as an inter-cultural challenge (for example, in providing aid to Russia or Argentina)

**Thinking points:** Political-Business Transactions between Parties or Sides  
(copyright 2004: Janine R. Wedel)

1. What is the geopolitical context?
2. What are the interests/agendas, incentives, and goals of each party or side?
3. What are the circumstances and constraints under which each side is operating?
4. What are the assumptions/beliefs/myths that each party or side has of the other?
5. What are the points of disconnect between the parties/sides? In what ways does each party/side misjudge the other?
6. To what extent are the parties/sides internally homogenous? Who are the various players within each party/side and how are they positioned? What are the interests of the players/divergence of interests within each party/side? What difference does the divergence of interests make?
7. Are the two parties/sides equal or unequal? In what ways?
8. What role do brokers (intermediaries between parties/sides) play? What are the characteristics of those who can mediate between parties/sides?
9. How do interactions between parties/sides change over the course of a conflict or a contentious issue and its resolution—or lack thereof?
Topic 8 (April 10) “Culture” as Embedded in Organization and Institutions: Worlds of Finance, Auditing, and Media

- Auditing cultures

McIntyre, Michael E. “Audit, Education, and Goodhart’s Law Or, Taking Rigidity Seriously.”
http://www.atm.damtp.cam.ac.uk/mcintyre/papers/LHCE/dilnot-analysis.html


- Finance cultures


Cassidy, John, “Rational Irrationality: The real reason that capitalism is so crash-prone, The New Yorker, October 5, 2009,
http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/10/05/091005fa_fact_cassidy?printable=true#ixzz0y9BZYRW4

- Media, public relations; and “truthiness”

http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/cgi/getdoc?tid=zkh84c00&fmt=pdf&ref=results

Thinking points:

1. How did “information silos” contribute to the financial crisis?

2. How are your lives and workplaces “audited” by you and others?

3. In what ways do finance and audit culture intertwine?

4. In what ways do culture, organization, and technological advancement illuminate change in financial practice over roughly the past three decades?

5. How can a “culture of auditing” prevalent in American institutional and organizational life so comfortably co-exist with the presumed failure of auditing in signature (financial) institutions as evidenced by Enron, Arthur Andersen, WorldCom, et al? What do these scandals reveal about the culture and system that spawned them?
6. How do the themes we discussed with regard to finance play out in the media?

**Exam (April 17) and Student Workshop**

**Topic 9 (April 24) Technology: Progress, Privacy, and Identity; Assignment 2**


Miller, Barbara D. “Case of Snowmobiles and Sami Reindeer Herding,” *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 411. (Available on GMU e-reserve.)


**Thinking points:**

1. How do new information technologies affect how we think, get information, and conduct our relationships?
2. Do new information technologies make us more or less free?
3. Is there any link between technology and identity?

**Assignment 2 due.**

**Final Discussion (May 1)**

How Each Topic Informs Public Policy: What analyses and perspectives have you learned that shift or inform how you analyze public policies? Provide specific examples of how your thinking has changed on specific issues.

**Assignment 1 due.**