COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course provides an introduction to policy analysis for masters-level students. Weimer and Vining define policy analysis as “client-oriented advice relevant to public decisions and informed by social values.” Policy analysis is a field of applied social science research in which analysts define and frame public problems, identify potential options for addressing problems, use reason and evidence to evaluate options, and sometimes recommend solutions. Within this broad definition, numerous specific approaches can be observed in day-to-day policymaking.

Wildavsky – one of the founders of the modern discipline of public policy studies – says that policy analysis “can be learned but not taught.” Accordingly, this course examines current policy issues as a learning strategy. Students will also be asked to conduct their own analyses of multiple policy issues.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
- Students will be able to identify and define public problems, identify and evaluate policy solutions, and make educated recommendations to policymakers.
- Students will be able to critically evaluate policy-relevant information by assessing the accuracy and completeness of such information and identifying the values and perspectives inherent in it.
- Students will understand the strengths and limitations of various approaches to policy analysis.
- Students will gain a basic understanding of the principles of program evaluation.
- Students will improve their ability to bring clarity to complex policy issues in both written work and oral presentations.

READINGS
There are two required textbooks
- Eggers and O’Leary, If We Can Put a Man on the Moon, 2009.
All other readings will be available on Blackboard (blackboard.gwu.edu).

Readings should be done prior to class, so that you can engage in a meaningful discussion of their content. (See the section below entitled “Course Requirements” for an explanation of how students will be assigned as discussants for specific readings.)

Several readings are brief. This does not mean that they are simple or straightforward, but only that you are reading an excerpt selected to help you focus on what’s most important in an author’s work.

Several readings are labeled as “case materials.” These readings demonstrate the practical implications of the more theoretical readings. Case materials will be the basis of class discussion; students should bring a copy to class. Students do not need to master the specific policy details in case materials. Instead, materials should be read holistically to determine how the policy issue has been framed, what alternatives have been analyzed (or ignored), what goals and objectives (explicit or implicit) are driving the analysis, how tradeoffs are being made, and how analytically sound the conclusions are.
Students should regularly read – online or in print – a national newspaper (e.g., NY Times, LA Times, Washington Post, or Wall Street Journal) as discussions will often be based on current policy issues.

**CLASS SCHEDULE AND OUTLINE**

The course outline generally matches the eight steps in Bardach’s book. Exceptions include classes that address alternative paradigms for policy analysis, the intersection of politics and policy analysis, and program evaluation. In addition, the course is conceptually broken into two parts: Sessions 1 through 5 focus on *framing* policy analysis (Bardach’s Steps 1 through 4) and while Sessions 7 through 10 focus on *doing* policy analysis (Steps 5 through 8).

**Session 1 (January 12): Laying the Foundations**

- **Key Topics**
  - Course Logistics, Syllabus, Introductions
  - A Definition of Policy Analysis
  - Framing vs. Doing Policy Analysis

- **Readings**
  - Eggers and O’Leary, Preface and Introduction.
  - Berman, (ed), *Encyclopedia of Public Administration and Public Policy, 2e*, “Policy Sciences Approach,” deLeon and Martell, pp 1495-1498, 2008. (The roots of public policy analysis as a distinct discipline lie in Lasswell’s work. We’ll discuss Denver’s T-REX project in class, either today or next week.)
  - Weimer and Vining, *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice, 5th Ed*, “What is Policy Analysis?” pp 23-26, 2010. (One of the most widely used texts in MPP programs around the country. As we’ll see later in the course, there are other schools of thought, but W&V give us a good starting point.)
  - Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century*, “A Debate without Data?” pp 2-3, 2014. (Ignore the public fanfare about this French neo-Marxist and focus on his modest, but powerful, claim about data.)

- **Assignment Due:** None

**January 19 – No Class (Martin Luther King Day)**

**Session 2 (January 26): Defining Policy Problems**

- **Key Topics**
  - “Wicked” vs. Well-Structured Problems
  - Problem Trees
  - “Off-the-Shelf” Problems: Market Failures, Government Failures, Fairness and Equity

- **Readings**
  - Bardach, “Step 1-Define the Problem” and “Step 2-Assemble Some Evidence”, pp 1-16.
  - Eggers and O’Leary, Chapter 1.
  - Wade et al, *Psychology, 11th Ed.*, “Thinking Critically,” pp 6-13, 2014. (Yes, it’s from a Psych 101 textbook, but the message couldn’t be more relevant to policy analysis.)
Session 3 (February 2): Specifying Policy Alternatives

Key Topics
- "Off-the-Shelf" Policies
- Policy Creation
- The “Do-Nothing” Alternative

Readings
- Bardach, “Step 3-Construct the Alternatives,” pp 16-31 and Appendix B, “Things Governments Do,” pp 141-149. (Appendix B – a broad list of policy instruments – provides an excellent foundation for specifying policy alternatives.)
- Eggers and O'Leary, Chapter 2.
- Case Materials: Congressional Budget Office, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and the Federal Role in the Secondary Mortgage Market, December 2010. (Scan this CBO report, but as you do, focus on its development of three conceptually distinct policy alternatives and especially on Table 1.)

Assignment Due: PS#1
Case Materials: Washington Post, “Obama to Announce $100 Million Plan to Train New Educators,” February 6, 2012. (This article describes a new initiative that the President proposed two years ago. Think about using both the logic model framework and the stakeholder-based process analysis from the Strelneck reading to map out implementation issues that might be associated with this program. This reading will be the basis of an in-class exercise.)

Assignment Due: None; PS#2 distributed

February 16 – No Class (Presidents Day)

Session 5 (February 23): Developing Evaluation Criteria

Key Topics
- The Usual Suspects: Cost, Efficacy, Equity, Administrability, Sustainability
- Process Values as Criteria
- Maximization vs. Threshold Criteria

Readings
- Bardach, “Step 4-Select the Criteria,” pp 31-47.
- Franklin, Letter to Joseph Priestley on Prudential Algebra, September 19, 1772. (In a single paragraph – the second – Ben makes the case for careful consideration of criteria.)
- Stone, Policy Paradox: Art of Political Decision Making, selections from “Part II-Goals,” 2012. (This reading is a bit dis-jointed, but worth slogging through. Stone defines five important criteria for thinking about public policies, but describes each in a somewhat different fashion. This reading is a mix of snippets of text and summary tables.)
- Case Materials: Tanner, “Social Security, Ponzi Schemes, and the Need for Reform,” Policy Analysis, No. 689, Cato Institute, November 17, 2011, and Weller, “Building it Up, Not Tearing it Down: A Progressive Approach to Strengthening Social Security,” Center for American Progress, December 2010. (Be sure you can extract the evaluation criteria implicit in these two analyses; we will do an in-class exercise based on these readings.)

Assignment Due: PS#2; PS#3 distributed

Session 6 (March 2): Alternative Paradigms for Policy Analysis

Key Topics
- History of Policy Analysis as a Discipline
- Intuitive vs. Deliberative Decision Making
- Incremental Decision Making vs. Synoptic Decision Making

Readings (This session has more readings than usual but most are short. They offer a sample of divergent views of the practice of public policy analysis.)
- Moran, Rein, and Goodin, (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy, Chapter 2, “The Historical Roots of the Field,” deLeon, pp 39-57, 2006. (A nice summary of the field; don’t worry about mastering all the theoretical constructs that deLeon lays out in Section 3.)
- Fry & Raadschelders, Mastering Public Administration, “Charles Lindblom: Probing the Policy Process: Policymaking as Analytical and Interactive Process,” pp 271-282, 2008. (Despite the date, most of the work described in this reading was done between 1955 and 1990.)
- Alpert, Washington Post, “Can Government Learn to Fail Fast?,” April 12, 2014. (Can we actually put Lindblom’s advice into practice?)
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Working Group III, Fifth Assessment Report, Sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2, pp 159-161, 2014. (The policy analysis paradigm we’ve been considering in PPPA6006 is an example of System 2 thinking. Don’t worry about the details of Figure 2.2; it’s only included for context.)


Schultze, The Politics and Economics of Public Spending, pp 74-76, 1968. (A modest, but powerful, claim for the value of analysis.)

Case Materials: Clemons and McBeth, Public Policy Praxis, pp 81-84, 2009. (This case – the Pocatello Prison Siting Story – nicely illustrates the intersection of multiple paradigms for policy analysis.)

Assignment Due: PS#3

March 9 – No Class (GWU Spring Break)

Session 7 (March 16): Projecting Outcomes based on Models of Human Behavior

- Key Topics
  - Constructing Alternate Futures: The Importance of the Baseline
  - A Sharp Pencil and a Calculator (and, maybe, Excel)
  - Microeconomic and Political Analysis

- Readings
  - Bardach, “Step 5-Project the Outcomes,” pp 47-63.
  - Stone, Huffington Post, “Understanding Cause and Effect,” July 27, 2013. (Four examples of why, without an analytic baseline, you can’t sort out cause and effect.)
  - Case Materials: Congressional Budget Office, Cost Estimate: S.801 Caregiver and Veterans Health Services Act of 2009, August 31, 2009. (Don’t worry about the details other than the estimate for Section 102’s stipends to caregivers on page 5; we’ll go over that section in class.)

Assignment Due: None; First set of Group Project topics distributed

Session 8 (March 23): Projecting Outcomes using Evidence and Experience

- Key Topics
  - Causal Inference
  - Demonstration Projects & Policy Experimentation
  - Uncertain Outcomes

- Readings
  - Trochim, The Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2nd Ed, Section 1-2d, “Introduction to Validity,” pp 20-23, 2007. (A framework for thinking about the conditions under which evidence can be seen as a reasonable proxy for the “truth”.)
Cartwright and Hardie, *Evidence-Based Policy*, pp ix-7 and 80-84, 2012. (The focus here is on external validity. Their references to RCTs – randomized controlled trials – can be read broadly to refer to all research designs deemed internally valid.)

Case Materials: Ryan, *Scraping the Jargon and Entering the Discussion*, October 20, 2010. (Explains how careful analysis improved the design of the US Visa Waiver Program.)

Case Materials: Baker, Chen, and Li, *Nationwide Review of Graduated Driver Licensing*, February 2007. (Ask yourself how the evidence in this study can be used to project the outcomes of new policies. An in-class exercise will be based on this reading.)

**Assignment Due:** Framing Memo

**Session 9 (March 30): Making Policy Tradeoffs**

**Key Topics**
- Cost-Benefit, Cost-Effectiveness, & Multi-Attribute Analysis
- Elimination of Dominated Alternatives: Ranking and Threshold Methods
- Alternative Methods for Making Tradeoffs, including Breakeven Analysis

**Readings**
- Bardach, “Step 6-Confront the Tradeoffs” and “Step 7-Decide!” pp 63-70.
- Milbank, *Washington Post*, “Obama, Lost in Thought,” April 26, 2011. (Set aside your views on Obama’s presidency and focus on the tension between integrative complexity and politics.)
- Case Materials: Gladwell, *The New Yorker*, “The Order of Things,” February 14/21, 2011. (Don’t worry about which sports car you should buy, focus on his critique of ranking schemes.)
- Case Materials: US EPA, *Regulatory Impact Analysis of Proposed Revisions to National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Ozone*, November 2014. (Read the Overview on pp ES1-ES3, skim the rest of the Executive Summary, study Tables ES-6, ES-7, and 5-10, and come to class ready to advocate for one of the proposed ozone standards (60, 65, 70 ppb) or the status quo (75 ppb).)

**Assignment Due:** None; Second set of Group Project topics distributed

**Session 10 (April 6): Telling the Story**

**Key Topics**
- Bringing Clarity to Complexity
- Effective Writing and Presenting

**Readings**
- Eggers and O’Leary, Chapter 8.
- Case Materials: Improving Health in the Marshall Islands, Blackboard. (In addition to the reading, view three online videos. This material will be used for an in-class group exercise.)

**Assignment Due:** None
Session 11 (April 13): First Round of Group Presentations

Session 12 (April 20): Politics & Policy Analysis

- **Key Topics**
  - Politics & Policy: Two Sides of the Same Coin?
  - Methods for Integrating Political Analysis into Policy Analysis

- **Readings**
  - Eggers and O’Leary, Chapter 3.
  - Wheelan, *Introduction to Public Policy*, “Balancing Substance and Politics,” 2011, pp 519-520. (Understanding the difference between wonks and hacks is important.)

Assignment Due: None

Session 13 (April 27): Second Round of Group Presentations

Session 14 (Wednesday, April 29): Program Evaluation & Course Wrap-Up

- **Key Topics**
  - Program Logic Models, Revisited
  - Survival Skills for Policy Analysts

- **Readings**
  - Eggers and O’Leary, Chapter 6.
  - OMB, Use of Evidence and Evaluation in the 2014 Budget, May 18, 2012. (OMB doesn’t always fund agencies to do the kinds of evaluation described in this memo; nonetheless, it’s indicative of the rationales that drive program evaluation in the current fiscal and political climate.)
  - Governmental Accountability Office, Designing Evaluations, Chapters 1-4, 2012. (It’s ok to skim the section on logic models and the parts of Chapter 4 you may have covered in PPPA 6002).
  - Case Materials: Pew Center on the States, The Impact of Hawaii’s HOPE Program on Drug Use, Crime and Recidivism, January 2010, and Governmental Accountability Office, Financial Education and Counseling Pilot Program, 2011. (In each case, identify the type of evaluation, the research design, the key findings, and any obvious limitations on the findings.)

- Assignment Due: None; Final Policy Analysis papers are due by 5pm in hardcopy to the instructor’s mailbox in MPA601, on Wednesday, May 6.

**Grading**

- Problem Sets (10% each)
- Framing Memo (15%)
- Group Policy Analysis and Presentation (25%)
- Final Policy Analysis (30%)
Grades for assignments and for the course as a whole reflect the following philosophy:

- **A Excellent**: Exceptional work for a graduate student. Work at this level is unusually thorough, well reasoned, creative, methodologically sophisticated, and well written. Work is of exceptional, professional quality.
- **A- Very Good**: Very strong work for a graduate student. Shows signs of creativity and a strong understanding of appropriate analytical approaches, is thorough and well reasoned, and meets professional standards.
- **B+ Good**: Sound work for a graduate student; well reasoned and thorough, without serious analytical shortcomings. Indicates the student has fully accomplished the basic objectives of this graduate course.
- **B Adequate**: Competent work for a graduate student with some evident weaknesses. Demonstrates competency in the key course objectives but the understanding or application of some important issues is less than complete.
- **B- Borderline**: Weak work for a graduate student but meets minimal expectations. Understanding of key issues is incomplete. (A "B-" average in all courses is not sufficient to sustain graduate status in 'good standing'.)
- **C+/ C / C- Deficient**: Inadequate work for a graduate student; rarely meets minimal expectations for the course. Work is poorly developed or flawed by numerous errors and misunderstandings of important issues.
- **F Unacceptable**: Work fails to meet minimal expectations or course credit for a graduate student. Performance has consistently failed to meet minimum course requirements. Weaknesses and limitations are pervasive.

**Course Requirements**

- **Problem Sets**: Three problem sets early in the semester will test whether students have grasped certain core concepts. Students are encouraged (but not required) to work on the problem sets in groups of no more than four and provide a single submission to be graded. Some problem set content may be similar to that used in prior classes; current students may not consult prior students about such assignments, nor may students use in any way answer sheets that have been previously distributed. Students are reminded of their obligations under GWU’s Code of Academic Integrity.

- **Framing Memo**: This memo will frame a policy problem for further analysis. It should comprise three distinct sections: a problem definition (Bardach’s Steps 1 and 2), a set of policy alternatives (Bardach’s Step 3), and a set of evaluation criteria (Bardach’s Step 4). For this assignment, you are only framing the policy analysis, not actually doing the analysis. You don’t need to project the performance of alternatives, assess the tradeoffs among alternatives, or make a recommendation. Students should also select a notional client (i.e., a policymaker) with at least some power to address the issue. Students may choose any policy issue of interest, but should frame their analysis narrowly enough to do a good job within the course schedule.

The memo may be no more than five pages and should be double spaced (12 point font, 1-inch margins). Citations should be on a separate page and do not count against the page limit. Submissions should be written in memo format. Academic prose or an essay format is not appropriate; instead, apply the guidelines in the readings from Session 1. An example of the memo is on Blackboard, but students are strongly cautioned against relying on the example as a definitive template. There is no one right way to structure a policy memo. You should tailor your memo to your client’s concerns and the nature of your policy issue. Grammar, as well as clarity of prose and presentation, will be graded.

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1 It is understood that competing time demands may make it hard for some students to schedule time to work in a group.
Start by identifying your client’s position (e.g., Mayor of Chicago, Assistant Secretary of Defense, US Senator, City Public Works Director, etc.). Include a very short summary of the power, resources, and/or authority that your client could bring to bear on the problem. Select one policy problem and identify the root causes of the problem. Describe the most important consequences of the problem. Use both evidence and logic to demonstrate why the problem needs to be addressed. One-sided arguments and exaggerated rhetoric are rarely convincing. Provide four to five credible policy alternatives that merit your client’s consideration. Explain the rationale behind each alternative and provide sufficient detail about how it would work. Proposed alternatives should be conceptually distinct rather than slight variations of one another. One of your options should be a “do nothing” or “status quo” alternative. Describe it in the same level of detail as your other alternatives. Describe the evaluation criteria that you believe should drive the decision about which alternative to select. Bear in mind that your criteria must be operationalized in your Final Policy Analysis (described below); you are not developing criteria for use during policy implementation. Be specific about how your criteria would be operationalized in an analysis. Some criteria may be important not because your client cares about them, but because other stakeholders care about them. Do not describe how your alternatives will fare with respect to the criteria; simply describe the criteria. This Framing Memo will form the foundation for the student’s Final Policy Analysis.

- **Final Policy Analysis**: The student will complete the policy analysis begun with the Framing Memo. Instructor comments on the memo should be incorporated and, based on the Eightfold Path, the remainder of the analysis should be completed. The student should project the performance of alternatives, assess the tradeoffs among alternatives, and recommend an alternative. The analysis should demonstrate the student understands course readings and be based both on logic and on the presentation and critique of relevant evidence. A complete criteria-alternatives matrix should be included, with a short phrase in each cell of the matrix that describes the relevant projected outcome. You may also include a numeric rank or rating in each cell, if you believe that will improve or clarify the decision-making process. The memo should start with a succinct one paragraph summary of the analysis and recommendation. This summary should clearly articulate the tradeoffs associated with recommended course of action. The memo is limited to 12 pages (double spaced, 12 point font, 1-inch margins); the first five or so pages should be a revised version of the framing memo. Include a 140-character tweet that captures the essence of your paper. Again, while there will be a sample Final Policy Analysis on Blackboard, it is for illustration only. Do not view it as a definitive template for your paper.

- **Group Policy Analysis and Presentation**: Groups of about 5 students will conduct and present in class a policy analysis structured around Bardach’s Eightfold Path. Groups are free to arrange their work as they think best, but experience suggests that at least two out-of-class meetings will be needed. Groups will be formed randomly (to mimic most work settings where one does not get to select one’s colleagues). Policy topics will be given to the group approximately four weeks prior to the presentation date. Topics will be broad issue areas or proposed solutions; thus, the group’s first task will be to identify and succinctly define a policy problem to be analyzed. Groups will give an oral briefing and provide a hardcopy of presentation slides to the instructor. (A written report is not required.) Groups should plan on presenting for 15 minutes and then leading a substantive class discussion of the presentation for an additional 15 minutes. It’s fine for one or two group members to not participate in the presentation itself, but then these group members should play a prominent role in the discussion segment.
Taken in its entirety, the presentation and discussion should make a cogent and compelling case in support of the recommended alternative, without ignoring or minimizing the downsides of the recommended option. While groups may include political feasibility as an evaluation criterion, they should not conduct a detailed political analysis of the alternatives – the focus here is policy analysis. Grading will be based in equal parts on the quality of the analysis, the coherence and clarity of presented material, and the professionalism of the verbal presentation.

- **Class Participation**: Policy analysis is a collective activity that benefits from discussion and debate. And, as more art than science, learning to do policy analysis depends on active student engagement. Students are expected to contribute to class discussions with critical thinking, creative suggestions, and substantive questions. Students can expect to be called on by name from time to time if class discussion bogs down or only a narrow range of perspectives is being heard. Students are expected to remain respectful of others’ opinions and to keep an open mind about their own opinions.

Class participation will not be graded, but each student will be randomly assigned several readings from the syllabus. If you are a discussant, please study your reading and be prepared to launch the discussion with a provocative question, a comparison to another reading, or a point that was difficult to understand. Reading assignments will be posted prior to the second class meeting.

**ADDITIONAL POLICIES AND INFORMATION**

- **Blackboard**: Blackboard will be used to communicate with students. Please make sure that you can access the course and that you regularly check whatever email account Blackboard uses for you. If you have problems with Blackboard, contact the Helpdesk at 202-994-5530 or helpdesk@gwu.edu.
- **Attendance**: Please try not to miss class! Policy analysis is a skill that is learned by doing and we will be practicing these skills in class. If you do miss a class, please let me know in advance; make sure you get notes from a classmate and download assigned materials from Blackboard.
- **Turning Things In**: Assignments are due in hardcopy at the start of class. Electronic submission of assignments is not permitted. Multi-page assignments should be stapled; covers are unnecessary.
- **Late Work**: Unless an exception is made by the instructor, late work will be penalized with a one grade step reduction (e.g. from an A- to a B+) per day.
- **Laptops**: You are welcome to use a laptop to take notes. Please refrain from checking email and surfing the web during class. It is extraordinarily distracting to people sitting behind you!
- **Collaboration**: With the exception of the Problem Sets, all assignments must be completed by students working on their own.
- **Academic Honesty**: All examinations, papers, and other graded work products and assignments are to be completed in conformance with the George Washington University Code of Academic Integrity. (see [http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html](http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html)). Please note the prohibition on consulting former students or relying on prior answer keys when completing problem sets.
- **Incompletes**: A student must consult with the instructor to obtain an “incomplete” before the last day of class. The student and instructor will sign the CCAS contract for incompletes and submit it to the School Director. Consult the TSPPPA Student Handbook for the relevant CCAS policy.
- **Grades**: No grade changes can be made after the conclusion of semester, except for clerical error.
- **Syllabus**: This syllabus is a guide to the course. Sound educational practice requires flexibility and the instructor may revise content and requirements during the semester.
- **Accommodation for Students with Disabilities**: If you need additional time or other accommodation due to a disability, let the instructor know in first week of the class. For accommodation on the basis of disability, you need to provide documentation to the Office of Disability Support Services.