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.”

Wildavsky – one of the founders of the modern discipline of public policy studies – says that policy analysis “can be learned but not taught” and Bardach suggests that “policy analysis is more art than science.” It draws on intuition as much as on method.” To get the most out of the class, students need to actively engage the material, and to learn by doing rather than only by listening to lectures.

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).

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 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 identify linkages to core course concepts.

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.) Discussants are not assigned for readings from the two textbooks, or for several of the case materials. All students should read these materials each week.
CLASS SCHEDULE AND OUTLINE
The course outline generally matches the eight steps in Bardach’s book. Exceptions include classes that address the intersection of politics and policy analysis and the topic of program evaluation.

Session 1 (January 11): Laying the Foundations
- **Key Topics**
  - Course Logistics, Syllabus, Introductions
  - A Definition of Policy Analysis
- **Readings**
  - Eggers and O’Leary, Preface and Introduction.
  - 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. As we’ll see later in the course, there are other schools of thought, but W&V give us a good starting point.)
  - deLeon and Martell, *Encyclopedia of Public Administration and Public Policy, 2e*, “Policy Sciences Approach,” 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.)
  - Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century*, “A Debate without Data?” pp 2-3, 2014. (Ignore the fanfare about this French neo-Marxist and focus on his advice about avoiding a “dialogue of the deaf.”)
- Assignment Due: None

January 18 – No Class (Martin Luther King Day)

Session 2 (January 25): Defining Policy Problems
- **Key Topics**
  - Critical Thinking, Deconstruction of Policy Rhetoric, Inquiry vs. Advocacy
  - Problem Trees
  - “Off-the-Shelf” Problems: Market Failures, Government Failures, Fairness and Equity
- **Readings**
  - 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.)
- Assignment Due: None; PS#1 distributed
Session 3 (February 1): Specifying Policy Alternatives

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

- **Readings**
  - Eggers and O’Leary, Chapter 2.
  - Case Materials: Congressional Budget Office, Transitioning to Alternative Structures for Housing Finance, pp 1-6. December 2014. (You only need to read the summary of this CBO report; be sure you can articulate the different purposes of Tables 1 and 2.)
  - Case Materials: Krauss and Mouawad, New York Times, “Accidents Surge as Oil Industry Takes the Train,” January 25, 2014. (Think about the types of policy alternatives that should be considered to address this problem; the article will be the basis of an in-class exercise.)

- **Assignment Due:** PS#1 due

Session 4 (February 8): Implementation and Policy Design

- **Key Topics**
  - Logic Models for Characterizing Programs
  - Top-Down and Bottom-up Perspectives on Implementation
  - Program Execution

- **Readings**
  - Eggers and O’Leary, Chapters 4 & 5.
  - W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Logic Model Development Guide, Chapter 1, “Introduction to Logic Models,” pp III - 14, 2004. (Often used for program evaluation, logic models are also very handy tools when designing policy alternatives.)
  - Strelneck and Linquiti, Environmental Technology Transfer to Developing Countries: Practical Lessons Learned During Implementation of the Montreal Protocol, pp 1-12, Fall 1995. (Sections 2 and 3 are the most important parts of this reading; skim the other sections.)
  - Case Materials: Washington Post, “Obama to Announce $100 Million Plan to Train New Educators,” February 6, 2012. (This article describes an initiative that the President proposed a few 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 15 – No Class (Presidents’ Day)
Session 5 (February 22): Developing Evaluation Criteria

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

Readings
- Bardach & Patashnik, “Step 4-Select the Criteria,” pp 27-46.
- 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.) (A)
- 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.) (C)
- Case Materials: ProCon.org, “Should Social Security be Privatized?,” August 28, 2015. (As you review this piece, think about what criteria should be used to evaluate proposed reforms to the social security system. We will do an in-class exercise based on this reading.)

Assignment Due: PS#2 due; PS#3 distributed

Session 6 (February 29): Conceptual Paradigms for Policy Analysis

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

Readings
- Moran, Rein, and Goodin, (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy, Chapter 2, “The Historical Roots of the Field,” deLeon, pp 39-47, 2006. (A nice summary of the field; note that Sections 3 and 4 are not part of the assigned reading.) (D)
- Fry & Raadschelders, Mastering Public Administration, “Charles Lindblom: Probing the Policy Process: Policymaking as Analytical and Interactive Process,” pp 273-276, 2008. (Despite the date, most of the work described in this reading was done between 1955 and 1990.) (F)
- Schultze, The Politics and Economics of Public Spending, pp 74-76, 1968. (A modest, but powerful, claim for the value of analysis.) (G)
- Weimer and Vining, Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice, 5th Ed, “Problems Inherent in Bureaucratic Supply,” and “Problems Inherent in Decentralization,” pp 178-189, 2010. (Even though we have a public policy problem, government may be unable to deliver a solution.) (H)
- Case Materials: Alpert, Washington Post, “Can Government Learn to Fail Fast?,” April 12, 2014; Hawkins, Greater Greater Washington, “Public Officials who Communicate their Plans, Listen to Feedback, and then Fix Mistakes Aren’t Idiots,” October 9, 2015; Tankersley and Matthews, Washington Post, “Can We Have an Evidence-Based Government?,” April 16, 2013. (Read these three blog posts and think about whether we can actually put Lindblom’s advice into practice.)

Assignment Due: PS#3 due
Session 7 (March 7): Projecting Outcomes based on Models of Human Behavior

- **Key Topics**
  - “Seeing” the Future Impacts of Today’s Policy Choices
  - Constructing Alternate Futures: The Importance of the Baseline
  - A Sharp Pencil and a Calculator (and, maybe, Excel)
  - Microeconomic Analysis

- **Readings**
  - 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.) ([B](#))
  - *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**: Topics for Groups A, B, C, & D distributed

March 14 – No Class (GW Spring Break)

Session 8 (March 21): Projecting Outcomes using Evidence and Experience

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

- **Readings**
  - Bardach & Patashnik, “Part IV, Smart (Best) Practices,” pp 125-139.
  - 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.) ([F](#))
  - *Case Materials*: Ryan, Scrapping 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 28): Making Policy Tradeoffs

- **Key Topics**
  - System 1 (Intuitive) and System 2 (Deliberative) Modes of Thinking
  - Cost-Benefit, Cost-Effectiveness, & Multi-Attribute Analysis
  - Elimination of Dominated Alternatives: Ranking and Threshold Methods, Breakeven Analysis

- **Readings**
  - Bardach & Patashnik, “Step 6-Confront the Tradeoffs” and “Step 7-Stop/Focus/Narrow/Deepen/Decide!” pp 65-72.
  - Kahneman Interview - The Guardian, www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHmXPyX7czU. (All students should watch this four-minute video prior to class.)
  - Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Chapters 1, 2, & 3, 2011. (G)
  - 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 the Final Revisions to National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Ground-Level Ozone*, September 2015. (You only need to skim this reading to get a sense of EPA’s approach to estimating the costs and benefits of tighter standards for ozone pollution (i.e., smog). But please take a close look at Tables ES-5 through ES-10, as well as Table 6-1, and come to class ready to critique EPA’s approach.) (B)

- **Assignment Due:** PS#4 distributed; Topics for Groups E, F, G, & H distributed

Session 10 (April 4): Telling the Story

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

- **Readings**
  - Eggers and O’Leary, Chapter 8.
  - Levitt and Dubner, *Think Like a Freak*, “How to Persuade People Who Don’t Want to be Persuaded,” pp 167-188, 2014. (C)
  - Mintrom, *People Skills for Policy Analysts*, “Giving Presentations,” pp 90-117, 2003. (This reading will be helpful as you prepare for your group presentations.) (E)
  - Eblin, *A Five Step Plan for Speaking Truth to Power*, govexec.com, September 14, 2011. (The audio clip mentioned in this blog is worth a listen. (G)
  - Congressional Budget Office, *The Supplemental Nutrition Program: Infographic*, April 2012. (How would you improve, if at all, this infographic?) (H)
  - 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:** PS#4 due
Session 11 (April 11): First Round of Group Presentations (Groups A, B, C, & D)

Session 12 (April 18): Politics & Policy Analysis

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

- Readings
  - Lowenthal, Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy, 5th Edition, 2012, pp 2-5, (Could the norms for CIA analysts be relevant to policy analysts dealing with politicians in the unclassified world?) [A]
  - 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.) [B]
  - Case Materials: Clemons and McBeth, Public Policy Praxis, pp 81-84, 2009. (The Pocatello Prison Siting Story nicely illustrates the intersection of policy and political analysis.) [D]

- Assignment Due: None

Session 13 (April 25): Second Round of Group Presentations (Groups E, F, G, & H)

Session 14 (Wednesday, April 27): 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.) [E]
  - 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). [F]
  - Case Materials: Pew Center on the States, The Impact of Hawaii’s HOPE Program on Drug Use, Crime and Recidivism, January 2010, [G] and Governmental Accountability Office, Financial Education and Counseling Pilot Program, 2011. [H] (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 Friday, May 6.

Grading

- Four Problem Sets (10% each)
- Framing Memo (10%)
- Final Policy Analysis (20%)
- Group Project (20%)
- Class Participation/Engagement (10%)
Grading (cont’d)

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.

Written Work

Policy writing is different from academic writing. Getting good at it takes practice. Well-written policy analyses are concise, to-the-point, and written in Plain English.

Plain English (or Plain Language) is communication that your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it. Language that is plain to one set of readers may not be plain to others. Written material is in plain language if your audience can:

- Find what they need;
- Understand what they find; and
- Use what they find to meet their needs.¹

Before submitting written work for this class, please consult the “Writing Resources” on Blackboard. In particular, make sure that your writing meets the 2011 Federal Plain Language Guidelines. The table of contents for the Guidelines provides a nice summary of the key points.

Course Requirements

- **Problem Sets**: Four problem sets will test whether students have grasped certain core concepts. *Note that, after the fact, students often report that problem sets are harder than they look!* Students are encouraged (but not required²) 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.

² It is understood that competing time demands may make it hard for some students to schedule time to work in a group.
Framing Memo: In a memo of no more than 500 words, you will frame a policy problem for further analysis. It should comprise three distinct topics: 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.

Please use the word count feature of your word processing software and include the total word count on the first page of your submission. Citations should be on a separate page and do not count against the 500-word limit. Submissions should be written in memo format. Academic prose or an essay format is not appropriate; instead, apply the guidelines described above under “Written Work.” You will likely find the 500-word limit to be a significant constraint. It should not be construed as an invitation to provide a cursory or superficial summary. Rather, the limit is meant to push you to craft concise and to-the-point prose without sacrificing analytic rigor.

Start by identifying your client’s position (e.g., Mayor of Chicago, Assistant Secretary of Defense, US Senator, City Public Works Director, etc.). 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 briefly describe 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 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.

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 4,000 words; the first few pages should be a revised version of the framing memo. Include a 140-character tweet that captures the essence of your paper. Please use the word count feature of your word processing software and include the total word count on the first page of your submission. Citations should be on a separate page and do not count against the word limit.
Class Participation/Engagement: 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 will be called on by name when they are a discussant, or if class discussion bogs down or only a narrow range of perspectives is being heard.

Each student will be randomly assigned several readings from the syllabus. These assignments are made by group, with groups identified on the syllabus. Group membership will be posted on Blackboard by the end of the first week of classes. 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.

If there is no reading assignment on the syllabus for a particular reading, then all students (i.e., not just those in one of the reading groups) are expected to come to class ready to discuss that reading.

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.
- **Class Decorum**: Texting, side conversations, or using your laptop for anything other than taking notes is an inappropriate use of class time. Those who do these things may think their actions are unobtrusive, but they are actually quite conspicuous. It’s distracting both to me and to your classmates, and will result in a significant decrease in your class participation/engagement grade.
- **Turning Things In**: Assignments are due in hardcopy. Electronic submission is not permitted. Multi-page assignments should be stapled; covers are unnecessary. Pages should always be numbered.
- **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.
- **Collaboration**: Except for Problem Sets, students may not work together on any assignment.
- **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 me 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.
- **Religious Holidays**: Please let me know during the first week of the semester if you will miss a class to observe a religious holiday. You will be allowed to make up missed work without penalty.
- **University Student-Support Resources**: Help in addressing academic, social, and personal issues is available 24/7 through the University Counseling Service which can be reached at 202 994 5300.