RPAD 540: PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS (Fall 2012)
Mon. 5:45-8:45 pm; Husted 217

Instructor: Erika Martin, PhD MPH
Office: Milne 300E
Contact: 518.442.5243; emartin@albany.edu
(The best way to contact me is via email–I check my email daily and will try to respond within 24 hours. To ensure that I see your email, write “PAD 540” in the subject line, and sign your full name so I know who you are.)

Office Hours: Tues. 2:00-4:00 pm, or by appointment

PREREQUISITES

RPAD 503 (Principles of Public Economics), RPAD 504 (Data, Models, and Decisions I), and RPAD 505 (Data, Models, and Decisions II); or equivalent courses that cover introductory microeconomics, introductory statistics, and basic decision modeling; or by permission.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The principal objective of this course is to strengthen problem solving, analytic, and professional writing skills that will enhance your understanding of the policy process and increase your ability to identify problems, enumerate solutions, evaluate alternative policies, and communicate results.

Knowledge of Policy Analysis: Students will learn how policy issues get on the agenda, rationales underlying policy interventions, different types of policy interventions, real-world political and bureaucratic influences on decision-making and implementation, and various disciplines and analytic tools used in policy analysis.

Skills of Policy Analysis: Assignments and in-class discussions will help students improve the effectiveness of their professional writing, including conveying complex ideas to general policy audiences; identify how to “measure” policy problems, including the strengths and limitations of different approaches; critically evaluate other policy analyses; evaluate the strengths and limitations of various technical tools; and develop a research design plan in response to a new policy issue, which includes defining a problem succinctly, choosing appropriate analytic methods, and identifying data.

Thinking Like A Policy Analyst: Students will be encouraged to approach problems with the mindset of a policy analyst, which includes anticipating how actors may define problems differently; appreciating how problem definition influences data analysis; taking a holistic approach to analysis, such as considering political obstacles and actors’ divergent goals and perspectives; foreseeing challenges with technical tools; and critically evaluating numbers and claims reported in the media and political debates.
REQUIRED TEXTS

The following texts are required for this course. Bring the relevant readings to class!
- Course pack, available at Mary Jane’s.

SYLLABUS CONTRACT

I will be prepared for class and will make my best effort to return graded assignments in a timely fashion (typically in the following week), provide written comments that will allow you to improve the quality of your work, and make myself available for office hours. You are responsible for meeting all of the course requirements set forth in this document. If I deviate from the course plan, I will notify you immediately of any syllabus modifications.

CLASSROOM PROCEDURE

This is not a lecture-dominated class in which students listen passively. Rather, students should engage me and each other in active discussion and debate about the material.

LECTURE SLIDES

PowerPoint slides will be posted to Blackboard 24 hours before class.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

Readings should be completed prior to class. You are expected to do them in their entirety, and expect that I will call on you in class to discuss them. Some readings may not be covered in detail during lectures. However, you are expected to integrate them in your written assignments (weekly commentaries, individual short policy papers, and the group project). All of your reading should be focused on learning major concepts and how they are applied to public policy analysis. Each week you will submit two comments or questions illustrating comprehension of the assigned material, described in more detail below.
# SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session–Date</th>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>What's Due (Individual)</th>
<th>What's Due (Group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1–Aug. 27</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Introduction to the course and the discipline of policy analysis</td>
<td>In-class survey (complete during class)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2–Sept. 10</td>
<td>Problem analysis</td>
<td>Agenda setting; rationales for public policy intervention</td>
<td>Reading commentary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3– Sept. 24</td>
<td>Problem analysis</td>
<td>Defining and measuring problems I; policy writing tips</td>
<td>Reading commentary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4– Oct. 1</td>
<td>Problem analysis</td>
<td>Defining and measuring problems II; identifying alternatives and policy goals</td>
<td>Reading commentary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5– Oct. 8</td>
<td>Solution analysis</td>
<td>Introduction to technical tools of policy analysis; conducting surveys and polls I</td>
<td>Reading commentary; short policy paper #1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6– Oct. 15</td>
<td>Solution analysis</td>
<td>Conducting surveys and polls II; sampling design</td>
<td>Reading commentary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7– Oct. 22</td>
<td>Solution analysis</td>
<td>Descriptive and inferential statistics; reading statistics in professional journals</td>
<td>Reading commentary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8– Oct. 29</td>
<td>Solution analysis</td>
<td>Finish statistics lecture; Presentation of case for group project; overview of proposal writing</td>
<td>Reading commentary; short policy paper #2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9– Nov. 5</td>
<td>Solution analysis</td>
<td>Forecasting techniques</td>
<td>Reading commentary</td>
<td>Group membership form; letter of intent; draft of specific aims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10– Nov. 12</td>
<td>Solution analysis</td>
<td>Qualitative data analysis</td>
<td>Reading commentary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11– Nov. 19</td>
<td>Solution analysis</td>
<td>Simulation modeling</td>
<td>Reading commentary; short policy paper #3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12– Nov. 26</td>
<td>Solution analysis</td>
<td>Cost benefit and cost effectiveness analyses</td>
<td>Reading commentary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13– Dec. 3</td>
<td>Solution analysis</td>
<td>Stakeholder analysis; political feasibility analysis</td>
<td>Reading commentary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 7, 5:00 pm</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Group project proposal due</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Final draft of written group project proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#14—Dec. 10</td>
<td>Wrap-up</td>
<td>Becoming a policy analyst; presentation and critique of group project proposals</td>
<td>Reading commentary; peer evaluation sheets</td>
<td>Powerpoint presentation, including any class handouts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All reading commentaries should be submitted to Blackboard 24 hours before class (Sunday at 5:45 pm), and short policy papers are due at the start of class (Monday at 5:45 pm).
ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Reading commentaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35%</td>
<td>Short policy papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Group analysis plan project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your grade will be determined by a weighted average of the points earned, using the weights described above. There is no extra credit. A grade of “A” reflects mastery of the material, with a strong and successful effort to think creatively about and go beyond the assigned material. A grade of “B” reflects a good, comprehensive awareness of the assigned material. A grade of “C” reflects knowledge of much of the material, but relatively weak preparation of a substantial share of it, and/or deficient preparation of written work. A grade of less than “C” reflects major gaps in knowledge or persistent lack of performance in the various aspects of the course.

A  93-100%  A-  90-92%  B+  87-89%  B  83-86%  B-  80-82%
C+  77-79%  C  73-76%  C-  70-72%  D  60-69%  E  <60%

Participation

Participation is based on consistent, high-quality contributions to the class discussion. You will not be graded on your ability to always provide the “right” answers, but on whether you are a civil and active contributor to class. You should come to class prepared, be willing to participate in class exercises, and exhibit general enthusiasm in engaging in class discussions. If I call on you, you should be able to discuss and synthesize the course material and readings. You should be able to respond to other students’ points, question other students in a constructive manner, and challenge your classmates by offering suggestions that may be counter to the majority opinion. I value quality over content – students who provide occasional insightful comments will receive higher participation scores than vocal students whose comments have little substance.

Attendance is required and will be reflected in your participation score. If you attend class 80% of the time, the maximum participation score you can receive is 80%. Being consistently late to class will also reduce your participation score. However, if you attend all class sessions but have minimal participation, do not expect a high grade.

Reading commentaries

In lieu of in-class exams and quizzes, you will submit two comments or questions illustrating comprehension of the assigned material each week. These commentaries are designed to: 1) hold you accountable for completing the required coursework, and 2) provide me information on things to clarify in lecture.

You can choose to submit two questions, two comments, or one of each. Comments can focus on something you find interesting, surprising, disagree with, etc. Additionally, comments may “connect the dots” between assigned readings we discuss throughout the semester. Importantly, the commentaries should not be summaries of the reading. Instead, they should reflect your thoughts and analysis on the week’s topic and cases. For example, why do you find a particular topic interesting? How does the reading help you understand the topic more effectively? Is there
something you disagree with and why? Questions can indicate a topic you find confusing and why you are unclear on the material.

**Commentaries are due 24 hours before class.** You will submit them through the Assignments area in Blackboard, in electronic form only. The assignments will expire on Sundays at 5:45 pm, so be sure to submit them in time. Each comment/question should be 4 to 10 sentences in length. Late commentaries will not be accepted, except in the extreme cases of a health or family emergency. Each commentary will be graded on a scale of 0 to 3 (3 possible points), with a total of 6 points possible for that week’s assignment. Submissions will be graded according to the following criteria: 1) did the student submit two comments/questions, 2) to what degree do the comments/questions represent independent analysis, and 3) to what degree do the comments/questions reflect the content of the reading?

*You will have two “free passes” on reading commentaries.* If you submit all commentaries, I will drop the lowest two scores from your final grade. Alternatively, you can choose to not submit commentaries in two weeks. If you decide to take a free pass, you do not need to tell me. I will drop those 0 scores from your final grade calculation.

**Short policy papers**

You will write three short policy papers (three to four pages, double-spaced) that correspond to the course material. Each paper will be weighted equally. Specific instructions on the assignments and grading will be distributed later in the semester.

**Group project proposal**

Your team will draft a project proposal (approximately 10 to 12 pages, double-spaced) to analyze a specific policy issue, which will be presented in class. The proposal will include the following components: executive summary, background, specific aims, a detailed description of the analytic methods you will use to address the research questions, limitations, and a technical appendix. You will present your proposal to the rest of the class during the last session. You will get a group grade (based on the written proposal and the presentation) and an individual grade (based on your teammates’ evaluation of your contribution and your participation in the Q&A session of the class presentations).

**OTHER CLASS POLICIES**

**Attendance**

Attendance is mandatory and is factored into the participation grade. If you will be absent from class, you are still responsible for submitting your reading commentaries by Sunday evening. In addition, if there is a short policy paper due, you should email that to me before the start of class. An absence will not be considered “excused” without supporting written documentation.

**Late assignments**

Late assignments (short policy papers and the group project) will be docked 10 percentage points, or one full letter grade, for every 24 hours they are late (e.g. B+ will be reduced to C+). As described above, *late reading commentaries will not be accepted except in the case of truly extenuating circumstances.* Papers emailed to me after class will be considered late. If you will
be absent from class, you are responsible for ensuring that your assignments are submitted on
time. Computer crashes, printer failures, rush-hour traffic, work conflicts, and planned travel are
not acceptable excuses for late assignments. Plan ahead.

**Excused absences**
I will not grant extensions on assignments. However, I do appreciate that you may experience
truly extenuating circumstances which would preclude your ability to attend a class lecture or
prepare an assignment by the deadline. In these cases, speak with me as soon as possible, provide
written documentation, and we will make alternate arrangements. Out of fairness to the rest of
the class, I cannot adjust deadlines without supporting documentation.

**Tardiness**
Class starts at 5:45 pm. I understand that sometimes it is difficult to arrive on time due to work
obligations. However, if you are consistently late, it will be reflected in your participation score.

**Electronics ban**
Please turn off all cell phones, pagers, iPods, instant messengers, email, laptops, and anything
else that beeps, jingles, rings, types, or plays music.

**Academic honesty**
I take academic honesty very seriously. Cheating in any form will not be tolerated. You are
required to be familiar with the university’s academic honesty policies; ignorance is not an
excuse. In all cases of cheating, a Violation of Academic Integrity Report will be submitted to
the Dean of Graduate Studies to be placed in your university file, with copies provided to you,
the department head, and the Dean of Rockefeller College. Additional penalties may include
some combination of the following: revision and re-submission of the assignment, reduction of
the grade or failure of the assignment, reduction of the course grade or failure of the course,
filining of a case with the Office of Conflict Resolution and Civic Responsibility, or expulsion.

**Grading and appeals for grade change**
If you are dissatisfied with your grade, you may make a written appeal that outlines why you
think your grade should be changed. This appeal should be typed and be delivered to me (in
person or by email) within 72 hours of receiving your assignment. Your grade may be lowered,
increased, or remain the same. I will not consider a grade appeal that is delivered orally; you
must type your appeal on a sheet of paper within 72 hours.

**Disability statement**
Please see me if you have a disability documented by the Office of Disabled Student Services (in
the Department of Student Life) to request accommodations.

**Course feedback**
I genuinely want to make this the best educational experience it can be for you and future
students. I am receptive to and grateful for all suggestions about the course. If you are not
comfortable providing me feedback in person, then you can put anonymous suggestions in my
faculty mailbox on the first floor of Milne. At the start of the semester we will appoint a student
ombudsman who you can also contact confidentially with any course concerns.
READINGS
All readings should be completed prior to class, and should be used to prepare your weekly reading commentaries. Bring all relevant readings to class.

Session 1. Introduction to the course and the discipline of policy analysis
3) Gupta. Chapter 2, The Analysts: Their Role and Their Tools, pp. 27-45.

Session 2. Agenda setting: rationales for public policy intervention
Agenda setting:
1) Gupta. Chapter 4, The Policy Process, pp. 75-100.

Rationales for public policy intervention:

There is a lot of assigned reading from the textbooks. **SKIM** these chapters to review market failures. You should have covered these topics in an introductory microeconomics class such as PAD 503. We will not do any textbook problems and you do not need to worry about technical details. However, you should re-familiarize yourself with these concepts and be prepared to discuss and apply them to new cases.

Session 3. Defining and measuring problems
Session 4: Defining and measuring problems; identifying alternatives and policy goals

Defining and measuring problems:

Identifying alternatives and policy goals:
2) Gupta. Section of Chapter 1, Government’s Goals and Their Impact on Public Policy, pp. 15-23.
3) Gupta. Section of Chapter 5, Setting Goals, pp. 104-109.

Session 5: Introduction to technical tools of policy analysis; conducting surveys and polls

1) Gupta. Section of Chapter 8, Primary Data: Conducting a Survey, pp. 179-190.

Session 6. Conducting surveys and polls; sampling design


Session 7. Descriptive and inferential statistics; reading statistics in professional journals

1) Gupta. Chapter 9, Making Sense of Numbers, pp. 203-224.
Session 8. Finish statistics in professional journals: presentation of case for group project

Additional examples of reading statistics in professional journals:


Introduction to group project:


Session 9. Forecasting techniques


Session 10. Qualitative data analysis


Session 11. Simulation modeling


**Session 12. Cost benefit and cost effectiveness analysis**


**Session 13. Stakeholder analysis techniques, political feasibility analysis**


**Session 14. Becoming a policy analyst; Presentation and critique of analysis plans**

2) Weimer and Vining. Chapter 18, Doing Well and Doing Good, pp. 448-449.
3) Gupta. Chapter 15, So You Want To Be an Analyst? Some Practical Suggestions, pp. 373-388.