Course Description:

This is a course on policy implementation, the stage of the policy process during which decisions are supposed to get translated into actions intended to produce results. We will treat implementation as a problem that people must deal with across policy areas. Thus the course will cover case studies in a diverse set of problem areas: unemployment, welfare reform, environmental protection, democratization and war.

The study of policy implementation began over thirty years ago with the publication of Pressman and Wildavsky’s classic study. Since then, work in this field has taken a number of forms and involved many disciplines. Like many areas in the policy sciences, two different goals propel efforts: a practical concern with improving policy outcomes and a scholarly interest in understanding why implementation outcomes vary.

The practical portion of this course is centered on answering a simple set of questions: “Why is it so hard to get things done and what can be done about it?” Implementation has been called the most problematic part of the policy process because of the difficulties encountered in translating policy into action. To do something about implementation problems requires a better specification of the difficulties at the outset. It also requires a sensitivity to the dynamic elements of the processes of policy making, implementation and evaluation. The readings are directed toward providing students with the background to deal with the questions posed.

On the scholarly side, implementation research has dealt with a variety of topics including the development of conceptual frameworks for understanding the process, case studies of specific implementation activities, and the exploration of approaches intended to improve the fit between what policy makers intend and what happens.

Scholarly interest in policy implementation crosses disciplines. The work produced has reflected the diverse backgrounds of the researchers. Political scientists have typically focused on questions of how power concerns shape
what happens and why, public administration specialists have looked at organizational routines and strategies to improve the process, and people in specific social policy areas (such as education, health care and criminal justice) have sought to develop a body of problem-oriented applied research such as a search for best practices and more robust policy tools.

In addition, there are many different -- but not mutually exclusive -- understandings of how the world works underlying the different approaches mentioned above. Those who accept the micro-economic paradigm stress the role of incentives and disincentives, those with a more sociological orientation emphasize the part played by values, norms and social structures, those who think in terms of information processing models pay most attention to how feedback shapes behavior. A students of public management stress the role of new public managers in infusing their organizations with purpose and direction.

Each view of how the world works is also the basis for an analysis on why a particular policy failed to achieve implementation and what might be done about it. Poorly structured incentives, fix the incentives. Insufficient commitment or acceptance of values supportive of policy, deal with this through selection, training, and monitoring. And so on.

We will also look at a variety of approaches which have been developed to help counter implementation problems. These include greater attention to policy design and the implementation requirements of alternative designs, a greater emphasis on the role of leaders and public managers and providing them with tools necessary to shape the implementation process, and the use of alternative ways of delivering on public policy goals (privatization, contracting out, etc.).

This course has three main practical goals. First, to acquaint students with the major approaches and problems found in implementation research. Second, to show how these techniques may be combined to better analyze cases and to identify the factors associated with successes and failures. And third, to help practitioners better identify potential implementation pitfalls as well as to identify the conditions under which different countermeasures would be useful.

Required Readings:


Robert Nakamura and Thomas Church, Taming Regulation, Brookings Institution Press, paperback.

George Packer, Assassins Gate, paperback.

Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, Implementation, University of California Press. paperback

Malcolm Sparrow, Regulatory Craft, Hopkins, paperback.
There are additional readings indicated on the syllabus as e reserve. To access these, you have to go to the University Library website, e reserve section and follow the instructions. The password for this course will be announced during class.

Grading:

Grades will be based on the following:

1. Quality of discussion questions submitted for the assignments (due dates noted). 10%
2. A prospectus for the term paper. 15%
3. An oral presentation of the term paper research. 15%
4. A term paper based on an original case study in policy implementation. 45%
5. Class participation. 10% (worth a half grade up or down)
Spring 2010 Weekly Assignments

Week 1  Introductory Session, Thursday, January 21
Fill out information sheet
3 discussion questions on Pressman and Wildavsky will be due by e mail
(m382@csc.albany.edu) by Thursday midnight following week.

Week 2.  Implementation Begins with Pressman and Wildavsky, Thursday, January 28
3 discussion questions due by via e mail by midnight the day before.
Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, Implementation.

Week 3.  A General Framework for Studying Implementation, Thursday, February 4
3 discussion questions due by via e mail by midnight the day before.
Robert Nakamura and Frank Smallwood, The Politics of Policy Implementation (e reserve)

Week 4  Policy Making and Policy Implementation: Rational Comprehensive
(Linear), Incrementalist and Political Models of the Policy Process and Their
Implications for Implementation. Thursday, February 11
3 discussion questions due by via e mail by midnight the day before.
Lindblom, The Science of Muddling Through (e reserve)
Kingdon, selection (e reserve)
Nakamura, The Textbook Policy Process (e reserve)
Weimer and Vining, Market and Government failure articles (e reserve)

Week 5  The Complexity of Joint Action, Implementation Games, and the Fixer
Solution, Thursday, February 18
3 discussion questions due by via e mail by midnight the day before.
Eugene Bardach, Implementation Game (e reserve)

Week 6. Fixing and the New Public Management, Thursday February 25
Discussion questions due by via e mail by midnight the day before.
Robert Behn, Leadership Counts
PROSPECTUS DUE

Week 7  Policy Tools and Their Implementation Implications, Thursday, March 4
Salamon, Selection from the Tools of Government, e reserve
Elmore, Policy Implements, e reserve
3 discussion questions due by via e mail by midnight the day before.
MAKE APPOINTMENTS THIS WEEK TO DISCUSS TERM PAPER
PROSPECTUS

Week 8  Research Design, Thursday, March 11
Church and Nakamura, Cleaning Up the Mess (e reserve)
3 discussion questions due by via e mail by midnight the day before.

Week 9  Implementing Regulatory Policy Reform, Thursday, March 18
Nakamura and Church, Taming Regulation

Week 10  Implementing Regulatory Policies, Thursday, March 25
Sparrow, The Regulatory Craft

April 1 NO CLASS

Week 11  Implementing the Iraq War, Thursday, April 8
George Packer, The Assassins Gate

Week 12  STUDENT PRESENTATIONS
Thursday, April 15

Week 13  STUDENT PRESENTATIONS
Thursday, April 22

Week 14  STUDENT PRESENTATIONS
PAPERS DUE
Thursday, April 29  LAST CLASS
1. Name

2. Print E mail address

3. Graduate program and specialization

4. Other policy courses.

5. What policy areas (if any) are you interested in?

6. Other Relevant policy background (employment, etc.):