RPAD 540: PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS (Fall 2011)
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 an analysis 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. Note that the textbooks are both new editions, and the coursepack has been updated from last year. Do not purchase last year’s coursepack.

- Course pack, available at Mary Jane’s.

SYLLABUS CONTRACT

This syllabus serves as a written 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. I reserve the right to deviate from the course plan, if necessary. 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 (response papers, 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 and administration. Weekly response papers (described below) are designed to help you focus on the main points of the reading and prepare you for class discussions.
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<tr>
<th>Session–Date</th>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>What’s Due (Individual)</th>
<th>What’s Due (Group)</th>
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<td>#1–Aug. 29</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Introduction to the course and the discipline of policy analysis</td>
<td>In-class survey (complete during class)</td>
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<td>#2–Sept. 12</td>
<td>Problem analysis</td>
<td>Agenda setting; rationales for public policy intervention</td>
<td>Weekly Response Paper 1</td>
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<td>#3–Sept. 19</td>
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<td>Defining and measuring problems I; policy writing tips</td>
<td>Weekly Response Paper 2</td>
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<td>#5–Oct. 3</td>
<td>Solution analysis</td>
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<td>Short Policy Paper 1</td>
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<td>#6–Oct. 10</td>
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<td>Conducting surveys and polls II; sampling design</td>
<td>Weekly Response Paper 4</td>
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<td>#7–Oct. 17</td>
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<td>Descriptive and inferential statistics; reading statistics in professional journals</td>
<td>Short Policy Paper 2</td>
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<td>#8–Oct. 24</td>
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<td>Finish statistics lecture; Presentation of case for group project; overview of proposal writing</td>
<td>Weekly Response Paper 5</td>
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<td>#9–Oct. 31</td>
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<td>Forecasting techniques</td>
<td>Weekly Response Paper 6</td>
<td>Group membership form; letter of intent; draft of specific aims</td>
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<td>#10–Nov. 7</td>
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<td>Qualitative data analysis</td>
<td>Weekly Response Paper 7</td>
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<td>#11–Nov. 14</td>
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<td>Simulation modeling</td>
<td>Short Policy Paper 3</td>
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<td>#12–Nov. 21</td>
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<td>Cost benefit and cost effectiveness analyses</td>
<td>Weekly Response Paper 8</td>
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<td>#13–Nov. 28</td>
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<td>Stakeholder analysis; political feasibility analysis</td>
<td>Weekly Response Paper 9</td>
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<td>Dec. 2, 5:00 pm</td>
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<td>Final draft (submit hard copy to folder outside Milne 300 office suite)</td>
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<tr>
<td>#14–Dec. 5</td>
<td>Wrap-up</td>
<td>Becoming a policy analyst; presentation and critique of analysis plans</td>
<td>Peer evaluation sheets</td>
<td>Powerpoint presentation, including any class handouts</td>
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ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Grading:  
10%  Participation  
25%  Weekly response papers  
35%  Short policy papers  
30%  Group analysis plan project  

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.

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 the course material and readings. I value quality over content – a student who provides occasional insightful comments will receive a higher participation score than a vocal student 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%.)  

Weekly response papers: In lieu of in-class exams and quizzes, there will be a weekly response paper (one to two pages, double-spaced) due each week (except the first week). There will be a total of 9 response papers, although only the highest 8 scores will be counted. Consider this “free pass” to be an insurance policy in case you have an unexcused absence or a particularly difficult academic week. You do not need to tell me why you are using a free pass.  

Papers will be graded on a “check, check plus, check minus” basis. Specific topics will be distributed at the end of each class, and you will have one week to prepare your assignment. The goal of these papers is to help you focus on the main points of the reading and prepare you for class discussions. Response papers are due at the start of class—late papers will not be accepted.  
For any given class, you may be called upon to present and discuss your assignment. Specific instructions and grading will be distributed in a separate handout.  

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 analysis plan project: 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 analysis plan 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).

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory and is factored into the participation grade. If you will be absent from class, email me before the start of class and include your weekly response paper as an attachment. An absence will not be considered “excused” without supporting written documentation. Weekly response papers emailed after class will not be accepted—consider your two “free passes” to be your insurance policy in case something happens.

**OTHER CLASS POLICIES**

**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 weekly response papers will not be accepted under any circumstance. If you will be absent from class, you must email me your weekly response paper before the start of class or it will receive a 0. All assignments will be due by the beginning of the class period (5:45 pm). Any assignments submitted after this time will be considered late. 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 the written 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. Email me before class if you have an extenuating circumstance that will require you to be late. 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:** Academic honesty is something I take 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 for dishonest behavior. 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, filing 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 at least one-half page in length (typed) and must 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.

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**READINGS (TO BE DONE PRIOR TO THE RELEVANT CLASS SESSION)**

**August 29: Introduction to the course and the discipline of policy analysis**

- Weimer and Vining.
  - Chapter 1, Preview: The Canadian Salmon Fishery, pp. 1-22.

- Gupta.
  - Chapter 2, The Analysts: Their Role and Their Tools, pp. 27-45.

**September 5: No class (Labor Day)**

* Catch up on last week’s readings. *

**September 12: Agenda setting; rationales for public policy intervention**

**Agenda setting:**

- Gupta.
  - Chapter 4, The Policy Process, pp. 75-100.

Section of Chapter 3, Policy Formation: Problems, Agendas, and Formulation, pp. 87-95.

- Chapter 5, Problems, pp. 90-115.


*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.

Weimer and Vining.

Gupta.

**September 19: Defining and measuring problems; policy writing tips**

*Defining and measuring problems:*

- Portz, J. *Plant Closings, Community Definitions, and the Local Response*, pp. 32-49.


- Chapter 2, Policy Images and Institutional Venues, pp. 25-38.
- Chapter 4, The Construction and Collapse of a Policy Monopoly, pp. 59-82.

*Policy writing tips:*

Review sample papers, which will be distributed at the end of the September 12 class. Make comments in the margins about sections that are clear or unclear to you. We will discuss these in class.
**September 26: Defining and measuring problems; identifying alternatives and policy goals**

*Defining and measuring problems:*


*Identifying alternatives and policy goals:*

Weimer and Vining.

Gupta.
- Section of Chapter 1, Government’s Goals and Their Impact on Public Policy, pp. 15-23.
- Section of Chapter 5, Setting Goals, pp. 104-109.


**October 3: Introduction to technical tools of policy analysis; conducting surveys and polls**

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

- Chapter 4, Survey Research, pp. 99-124.

- Chapter 8, Questionnaire Design, pp. 183-200.


October 10: Conducting surveys and polls; sampling design

  - Chapter 6, Sampling, pp. 89-110.


October 17: Descriptive and inferential statistics; reading statistics in professional journals

Gupta.
  - Chapter 9, Making Sense of Numbers, pp. 203-224.


Weimer and Vining.
  - Chapter 17, When Statistics Count: Revising the Lead Standards for Gasoline, pp. 424-447.

October 24: Finish statistics in professional journals; presentation of case for group project

Additional examples of reading statistics in professional journals:


Introduction to group project:

Weimer and Vining.

Miscellaneous newspaper articles on evaluating teacher quality, which will be posted to Blackboard.
October 31: Forecasting techniques

Gupta.
- Chapter 11, Projection Techniques: Analysis of Historical Data, pp. 249-269.
- Chapter 12, Projection Techniques: The Methods of Simple and Multiple Least Squares, pp. 271-318.
- Appendix B, Models of Causal Prediction: Multiple Regression, pp. 412-446.


November 7: Qualitative data analysis

Weimer and Vining.
- Chapter 14, Gathering Information for Policy Analysis, pp. 325-339.

- Chapter 1, The Nature of Qualitative Inquiry, pp. 3-29.

- Section of Chapter 5, Primary Data Collection: Qualitative and Observational Research, pp. 107-117.

- Chapter 11, Qualitative Methods, pp. 252-270.


November 14: Simulation modeling

- Chapter 1, Learning in and about Complex Systems, pp. 3-39.


**November 21: Cost benefit and cost effectiveness analysis**

Weimer and Vining.

Gupta.


**November 28: Stakeholder analysis techniques, political feasibility analysis**

Weimer and Vining.
- Chapter 11, Adoption, pp. 263-285.

- Section from Chapter 7, Evaluating Alternative Policies, pp. 301-316.


**December 5: Becoming a policy analyst; Presentation and critique of analysis plans**

Weimer and Vining.
- Chapter 3, Towards Professional Ethics, pp. 39-53.
- Chapter 18, Doing Well and Doing Good, pp. 448-449.
Gupta.
- Chapter 15, So You Want To Be an Analyst? Some Practical Suggestions, pp. 373-388.