Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy
University at Albany
State University of New York

RPAD 615: STRATEGIC AND SYSTEMS PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

or

Why things seem not to work in the public sector and what to do about it!

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Draft One

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Tuesday 4:30-5:30 PM
Thursday 2:00-3:00 PM
Or by Appointment

Origins of This Course
My background and training is in System Dynamics simulation modeling. Here at Albany, we began the practice of group model building, constructing simulation models directly with client groups in the room. These exercises had much in common with strategy planning exercises. Some years ago, George Richardson and I began to work with John Bryson, Colin Eden, Fran Ackermann, and Charles Finn on the points of linkage between group model building and their models of strategic planning. Hence, this course is designed to integrate systems thinking with strategic planning. We use group mapping methods in all of our modeling.

Course Purpose and Overview
The course presents a set of concepts and tools for thinking through complex system-wide problems that challenge government managers’ ability to design and manage cross-agency and intergovernmental policies and programs. Students will learn to diagnose and solve complex system-level problems by applying strategy planning and systems thinking tools to case examples.

The course begins by teaching some of the classic approaches to diagnosing complex problems in the public sector including stakeholder analysis, goal mapping, action set mapping, and mapping resources within the system. Subsequent skills taught include analyzing evidence about behavior over time to create system reference modes, defining system level stocks and flows, discovering and analyzing reinforcing and balancing feedback loops, and using Senge’s system archetypes to diagnose and solve complex system level problems. In addition to case studies, lectures and readings, this course will draw on several system simulation exercises as well as gaming environments.

Client-Centered Group Project
In addition to readings, problem sets, and case studies that are due on a week-to-week basis, this course entails a group project. The group project is designed to have students
work with a client group on a problem selected by the client group. Student groups may work with a client team that is known to one or more of the members of the group. For example in the past groups have worked with a Girl Scout Regional Office or a Church Group as a client group. If a group does not have a client group ready and at hand, I will work with that group to locate a suitable client group, often here on campus. Three group products include a preliminary problem definition, a mid-semester report, and a final and presentation due at the end of the semester.

**Course Organization**
Each week the first half of the class will cover a substantive topic related to strategic or systems thinking in the public sector using traditional lecture, discussion, and case analysis. Readings will be assigned for these substantive sessions. The second half of the class will typically focus on a case example, simulation, or other experiential exercise designed to teach one or more systems thinking and mapping skills. Expect that each week a written problem set or case study will be due. A final written class project will draw together all of the points made during the course of the semester.

**Syllabus of Topics**
The course will be roughly broken into four modules as follows (topics will overlap between stated time modules in a fluid fashion):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Groupings of Class Topic</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 31</td>
<td>Getting Started. Course Introductions and Overview. Strategy as vision,</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 7</td>
<td>Resource-based strategy, Strategy as Trend response, Strategy as response to</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 28</td>
<td><strong>FALL BREAK—NO CLASS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>October 5</td>
<td>Why study systems thinking? What is systems thinking? Sketching reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 12</td>
<td>modes and base dynamics. Reinforcing and balancing feedback loops. Mapping</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 19</td>
<td>System Stocks and Flows. Sketching causal loops for multi-loop systems.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 26</td>
<td>System archetypes. (Midterm Point is March 10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2</td>
<td>Prepared cases and examples. Examples and cases from the news. Work on</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 9</td>
<td>Group and Individual Projects. Review of Key Concepts from the Semester in</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 16</td>
<td>the Context of Actual Strategy and System Thinking Projects.</td>
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<td>November 23</td>
<td><strong>THANKSGIVING—NO CLASS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>November 30</td>
<td><strong>Part IV: Presentation of Class Projects (November 23-December 7)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>December 7</td>
<td>Presentation of Group and Individual Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 14</td>
<td>All Assignments and Papers Due Today (Please hold this exam day for a final)</td>
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System Dynamics Group Model Building

The material covered in “Part II: Integrating Systems Thinking Tools and Approaches” presents a qualitative approach to integrating systems thinking concepts (as discussed in Senge) into strategic planning processes. Students who have completed PAD 624 or another course in system dynamics modeling can use this course as an introduction to group model building for system dynamics model. If this is your intention, you will need to work with a specially-selected client group and get in touch with the course instructor right away.

Required Texts and Readings
Several books have been placed on order at Mary Jane Books:
3. Weekly readings will be assigned from the reading list. Most readings will be passed out in class or made available on E-Res.

Supplemental Texts
From time to time, I will draw material from two other texts that have been ordered at Mary Jane books, but ARE NOT required:

Software
The work in the text by Ackermann and Eden will make use of their Decision Explorer Software. The department has purchased a class license for this product and you will be allowed to use it on your personal PCs for the semester. You will need to borrow a DVD to install your working copy. In addition, the Systems Thinking and mapping portions of the course will be supported by Vensim, a software package that can be downloaded for free.

Grading Policies
Grading is based on the following weights
Weekly Written Work 60%
Final Class Project  25%
Class Participation  15%

Time Commitment for this course
This is a four credit graduate course. Hence you should plan on spending four hours per week in class plus approximately eight hours per week doing the reading and preparing class assignments. If you discover that you are spending more time than this on the course, please let me know so that we can discuss it.

Policy on Plagiarism and Cheating
Due to the intensive nature of this course, students are encouraged to form study groups and to work together on assignments. Learn by interacting with one another--support and help one another. However, some work such as in-class or take-home exam assignments will be clearly expected to reflect individual effort. For these assignments you are expected to neither give nor receive assistance from anyone. **As a policy for this course, plagiarism or cheating will result in a failing grade for the whole course.** In addition, as instructor, I will pursue further disciplinary action at the University level. For the purposes of this course, the following are taken as evidence of plagiarism or cheating:

- Material reproduced from another source without any or adequate citation.
- Identical answers being turned in by two or more students.
- A pattern of unusually similar answers being turned in by two or more students.
- Written answers or solutions that a student can not logically explain verbally.
- Other evidence of collaboration between students on an in-class or take-home assignment that was intended to reflect individual effort.

Since this is such an important matter, if you have any questions about this course policy, you should ask the module instructor and the instructor of record for any clarification that you may need.

Use of cell phones, smart phones and laptops not permitted in class. Please do not use cell phones, smart phones, or laptops during class. If you carry a portable electronic device to class, please make sure that it is turned off. If you need to make a phone call, text a message, check your e-mail, etc. please leave the class to do this so that you will not disturb others in the class. Of course, this policy should be relaxed when we are engaged in a specific class activity that requires online computing. Please see me if you have any questions about this policy.

Class Listserv and E-Res. Most readings for this class are available on the University at Albany E-Res System under David Andersen as instructor for PAD 615. The password that will give you access to the E-Res system is

pad615

In addition, a listserv has been set up to support class communications. The name of the listserv is:

PAD615F11@listserv.albany.edu
In order to subscribe to this listserv, send a message to listserv@listserv.albany.edu include nothing in the subject line. In the body of the message you should write:

Subscribe PAD615F11 YourFirstName YourLastName