

PUBP 501: POLICY AND ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

Spring 2007

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Office Hours: Thursday 6:00 – 7:00 pm (in Arlington main office) or by appointment (in Fairfax or Arlington)
Course Day/Time: Thursday at 7:20 pm
Course Location: Arlington Campus, Room 251

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on the analytical tools required for making good policy decisions. Emphasis is placed on collecting and manipulating quantitative data, analyzing data objectively, drawing conclusions from complex and contradictory information, measuring costs and benefits, and using data appropriately and persuasively to influence and/or support policy. This course will also stress the importance of clear writing and effective presentation skills. This course is not intended as a rigorous statistics course—rather, the course is designed to prepare students to assess critically statistical and other information and to use data to support policy recommendations.

Specific course objectives include:

- Developing a conceptual understanding and operational capability regarding common analytical methods employed in public policy analysis;
- Writing purposeful policy memoranda and reports that require collection and analysis of data and formulation and presentation of research findings; and
- Mastering presentation skills required for effective communication of analytical findings to public officials, their professional staff, and the general public.

COURSE MATERIALS

Best, Joel. 2001. *Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politics, and Activists*. Berkeley, VA: University of California Press. (ISBN: 0-520-21978-3)

Economist staff. 2003. *Guide to Economic Indicators: Making Sense of Economics* (5th Edition). (ISBN: 1-57660-145-5)

Koosis, Donald J. 1997. *Statistics: A Self-Teaching Guide* (4th Edition). New York: John Wiley & Sons. (ISBN: 0-471-14688-9)

Weimer, David and Aidan R. Vining. 2004. *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice* 4th Edition. Prentice Hall. (ISBN: 0131830015)

Recommended:

Hacker, Diana. 2004. *A Pocket Style Manual* (4th Edition). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's. (ISBN: 0-312-40684-3) – or another style guide

Additional readings will be provided by the instructor during the course.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

- **Three 2- to 4-page policy memos (40% of grade – 10% for first one, 15% for second one, and 15% for third one): DUE 3/1, 3/29, 4/12**

Being able to write a concise policy memo is essential for policy analysts. The three memos will focus on one policy issue (of your choosing). Each memo will emphasize a particular policy analysis goal—providing background on the policy issue, discussing alternatives, and making recommendations. The memos will be evaluated based on the quality and clarity of your writing, the appropriate presentation of data and information, and the overall organization of the memos.

Memo #1: Background Memo. Summarize background on policy issue. Gather information on the issue and present data as appropriate in charts, graphs and tables. This memo should be as objective as possible; however, competing information should be presented to give the full picture of the issue.

Memo #2: Policy Alternatives. Describe at least three public policy alternatives to address the issue defined in Memo #1. Discuss pros and cons of each alternative, including a discussion of the groups that may support one alternative or another.

Memo #3: Policy Recommendation. Discuss the criteria you use to evaluate the merits of the policy alternatives in Memo #2. Create a visual (e.g., table, matrix, graph) to show a comparison of the alternatives. Summarize your recommendation in text.

- **Mid-Term Exam (10% of grade): HANDED OUT 3/8, DUE 3/22 (after Spring Break)**
This short mid-term exam will assess your knowledge of the basic statistical techniques covered in the first half of the course.

- **Presentation on policy topic (20% of grade): 4/19, 4/26, 5/3**

You will present the findings from your policy research during a 20-minute in-class presentation (15 minutes for your presentation, 5 minutes for questions). You must prepare a Power Point show and bring it with you on disk or memory stick. You must prepare a briefing handout for each member of the class. A laptop and LCD projector will be available.

- **Final Exam (30% of grade): HANDED OUT 5/3, DUE 5/10 BY 5:00 PM**

The final exam will be a take-home exam. It will cover the material discussed over the entire course and will consist of short answer and essay type questions. Evaluation will be based not only on the accuracy and completeness of your answers, but also on the clarity of your writing and the organization of your responses.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR A DISABILITY

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

SPP POLICY ON PLAGIARISM

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of public policy inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the School of Public Policy. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable.

Plagiarism is the use of another's works or ideas presented as one's own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another's work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one's professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.

The faculty of the School of Public Policy takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of "F." This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student's transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (e.g. F-1, J-1, or J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.

To help enforce the SPP policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student's work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The SPP policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace or substitute for it.

(<http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook/aD.html>)

NEW VOICES IN PUBLIC POLICY

I will consider nominating the very best papers in this course for publication in New Voices in Public Policy. New Voices is a student- and faculty-reviewed journal that shares SPP's finest student work with the rest of the world.

COURSE OUTLINE

1/25 Introduction to Policy Analysis

Weimer and Vining, Ch. 1 - 3

2/1 Rationales for Policy Analysis

Weimer and Vining, Ch. 4 - 7

2/8 Process of Policy Analysis: Defining the Problem, Actors and Alternatives

Weimer and Vining, Ch. 13-14

Lakoff, George and Sam Ferguson. 2006. "The Framing of Immigration." The Rockridge Institute. <http://www.rockridgeinstitute.org/research/rockridge/immigration>.

"Dealing with illegal immigrants should be a top priority of the war on terror," National Review Online debates, February 12, 2003. <http://www.nationalreview.com/debates/debates021203.asp>

Johnson, Hans P. "Illegal Immigration," *At Issue* published by the Public Policy Institute of California. http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/atissue/AI_406HJAI.pdf

2/15 Role of Statistics in Framing Policy Issues

Best, Entire Book
Economist, Ch. 1-2

McClain, John and Lisa A. Fowler. 2006. *Need for Affordable/Workforce Housing in Fairfax County*. Prepared for the Fairfax County Department of Housing and Community Development.

2/22 Characteristics of Quantitative Data

Koosis, Ch. 1
Economist, Ch. 3-5

Review some data sources on the Internet (examples below):

U.S. Census Bureau – www.census.gov
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics – www.bls.gov
U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics - <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/cp.htm>

International Data (general) – www.worldbank.org
International Conflict and Cooperation Data - <http://garnet.acns.fsu.edu/~phensel/intlconf.html>

Excel – in-class tutorial

3/1 Inference and Interpretation

Koosis, Ch. 2-3

Kuhns, Carole Logan. 2002. *Fairfax Welfare Reform Evaluation Study: Client Characteristics, Experiences, and Employment Outcomes*, Center for Public Administration and Policy at Virginia Tech. <http://www.nvgc.vt.edu/ippr/jan02report/fxjan02.pdf>

MEMO #1 DUE

3/8 Hypothesis Testing and Statistical Significance

Koosis, Ch. 4-5

Weimer and Vining, Ch. 18

Downs, Anthony. 2002. “Have Housing Prices Risen Faster in Portland Than Elsewhere?” *Housing Policy Debate* 13(1): 7-31.

Jun, Myung-Jin. 2006. “The Effect of Portland’s Urban Growth Boundary on Housing Prices,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 72(2): 239-243.

MIDTERM HANDED OUT

3/15 Spring Break

3/22 Forecasting

Koosis, Ch. 7

The Economy in Transition, Economic Forecast presentation given by Dr. Stephen S. Fuller, January 11, 2007.

MIDTERM DUE

3/29 Evaluating Policy Alternatives I: Cost-Benefit Analysis

Weimer and Vining, Ch. 16-17

Munger, Michael C. 2000. *Analyzing Policy: Choices, Conflicts, and Practices*. Chapter 11.

Kolbe, Philip et. al. 1998. *Affordable Housing in Memphis: Revenue Sources and Cost-Benefit Analysis*. <http://planning.memphis.edu/REDC/p910.pdf>

Diamond, Peter A. and Jerry A. Hausman. 1994. "Contingent Valuation: Is Some Number Better than No Number?" *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 8(4): 45-64.

MEMO #2 DUE

4/5 Evaluating Policy Alternatives II: Other Methods of Evaluation

Program Evaluation
Benchmarking
Qualitative Analysis

Readings TBD

4/12 Strategies for Good Policy Briefings

RAND. *Guidelines for Preparing Briefings*.
http://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate_pubs/2005/CP269.pdf.

Power Point – in-class tutorial

MEMO #3 DUE

4/19 Presentations

4/26 Presentations

5/3 Presentations

Final Exam Handed Out (due 5/10)