

PUBP 8510 Syllabus

Logic of Policy Inquiry, JR, 3 Credits

Fall 2026

Instructor Information

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General Course Information

Description

The course examines the role of knowledge claims in policy formulation and analysis. It assesses the merits of grounding policy analysis on the ideal of a scientific method. To appreciate the basis for this aspiration and its limitations, the course engages the evolution of studies in the philosophy and sociology of science and its implications for policy inquiry and analysis from mid-twentieth century to the present. The failure of strictly logical reconstructions of scientific practice to account for the creation of scientific knowledge is traced to the emergence of holistic approaches. Policy formulations have embedded knowledge claims, and the course will prepare students to assess the validity of arguments, the relevance and quality of evidence in policy knowledge claims and the role and merits of their assumptions.

Course Learning Outcomes

Understanding the nature of rationality and knowledge claims.

Ability to assess the assumptions of policy formulations, a fundamental aspect of policy analysis.

Familiarity with the literature on the nature of scientific knowledge and its relation to policy analysis.

Acquire special skills in the epistemological aspects of policy analysis and social science in general.

Required Course Materials

What is This Thing Called Science? by A. F. Chalmers, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2013, 4th edition (ISBN: 978-1624660382). (Available for purchase in the application Perusall).

The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, T. S. Kuhn, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970 (ISBN: 978-0226458120). (Available from the Georgia Tech Library).

Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction, edited by Nancy Cartwright and Eleanora Montuschi, Oxford University Press, 2014 (ISBN: 978-0191030086). (Available online from the Georgia Tech Library).

Philosophy of Social Science, Alexander Rosenberg, Westview Press, 2016, 5th edition (ISBN: 978-0813349732). (Available through the Georgia Tech Library).

Economics – Mathematical Politics or Science of Diminishing Returns? A. Rosenberg, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994 (978-0226727240). (Available through the Georgia Tech Library).

Handbook of Public Policy Analysis (HPPA) edited by F. Fischer, G. Miller and M. Sidney. CRC Press 2006. (ISBN: 978-1351564373). (Available online from the Georgia Tech Library).

Grading Policy:

The course requirements include three written assignments and class participation. Two of the assignments will be take home essay exams and the third a term paper. The due dates are indicated on the weekly schedule

Grade distribution:

Class Participation: 15%

Midterm exam: 25%

Term paper: 35%

Final exam: 25%

Description of Graded Components

Class Participation:

The course will be conducted in a seminar format with online interactive preparation before each class meets. The interactive part will be carried out using the text comment software Perusall, available in Canvas. You will be expected to read the assigned sections of texts and articles and make comments based on the rubric published for each week's reading. This will count as class participation, and it is a major component of this class. Discussion in class will be the next component of class participation in which students will share their views and interact with colleagues with whom they may disagree and do so in a professional manner.

Midterm Exam:

A series of questions on the first half of the semester from which three must be selected by the student to write an essay response for each. It is an open book, take-home, individual exam to be completed within one week.

Term Paper:

The topic of the term paper should be a controversy or dilemma over a public policy issue of your choice that depends significantly on the validity of knowledge claims (i.e. empirical claims). The controversy should not be either over moral values or just the quality of data. These issues may be present but should not overshadow the role of knowledge claims. The controversy should contain a fundamental disagreement over the appropriate perspective, paradigm, research program, or other appropriate theoretical structures, to use in formulating the alternative policies. The controversy should include disagreement over the characterization of the problem and what counts as valid and relevant knowledge to diagnose it and solve it.

You must discuss the selection of your topic with the instructor before beginning to gather and analyze data about it. The final version of the paper must be approximately 2500 words in length (i.e. 10 typed double-spaced pages). You must document all your sources completely.

Final Exam:

A report on a current policy issue will be provided, and the exam consists in developing the following responses:

Part One: Sketch a general outline of the orientation and approach that each of the perspectives developed in class is likely to follow.

Part Two: Successively adopt the point of view of each one of the four types of policy research and analyze the problem presented, indicating what are relevant facts in this case; what theoretical models explain those facts; and finally, what would be the menu of policy options that each perspective is likely to generate, given the orientation of each policy school.

The written assignment must be between 1500 and 2000 words in length and delivered within one week of the beginning date. It is an open book, take-home, individual exam.

Course Policies

Attendance and/or Participation

Attendance is critical to success in the class, as reflected in the graded class participation.

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. Review [Georgia Tech's Honor Code](#) and the student [Code of Conduct](#).

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarism on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, [contact the Office of Disability Services](#) (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. [The Student-Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial

interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Pre- &/or Co-Requisites

Even though there are no official pre-requisites, it is difficult to succeed in this class without taking the previous doctoral level course in Scope and Theory of Public Policy.

Collaboration, Group Work, and Use of Generative AI

You are allowed to work in groups on all out-of-class assignments, but any work you submit must be written in your own words. You may use AI for consultation purposes, but your own thinking must be reflected in the work you submit. Pasting AI generated content into a graded assignment is considered cheating. AI generated content cannot be considered a published source, even if cited within a submission. If you find AI produced content interesting or useful, you must validate it by finding and citing additional published sources that support it.