

Public Policy Analysis

PUBP 6201

Course Detail	Information
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Introduction to Course

A fundamental principle of good governance is making decisions based on sound reasoning and good information. In this course we will develop the skill of analyzing public policies in a structured way using systematic logic and empirical evidence. Good policy analysis applies abstract theories in a practical way that generates insights useful to decision makers.

This course is based on two major themes of public policy and administration. The first is the concepts and process of public *policy analysis*, defined as “Client-oriented advice relevant to public decisions and informed by social values”. The second major theme is analytical methodology, including prospective tools and retrospective models used to make inferences about the likely or actual impacts of policies.

About Myself

I am an assistant professor in the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School of Public Policy at Georgia Tech. I earned my Ph.D. in public policy and management from the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University, as well as an M.P.A. and a B.A. in political science from Texas State University. My research interests include network governance, science and technology policy, and philosophy of public administration. If you are interested in looking at my publications, these can all be found at my [Google Scholar Profile](#).

Course Objectives

1. Apply policy analysis frameworks and theories to evaluate public problems
2. Work in a team setting to conduct analysis of a public policy problem
3. Write a formal policy analysis document

4. Present the findings of a formal policy analysis
5. Engage in policy discussion by articulating theory and evidence-based positions
6. Select and apply an appropriate analytical method to a public policy question.
7. Evaluate the quality, limitations, and causal implications of empirical evidence.

Books

These are the general textbooks will be used frequently in this course. The first is our main book. The rest I am just using chapters from, which will be posted on canvas.

1. *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*. Weimer, Vining (WV) (Required)
2. *Theory and practice in policy analysis*. Morgan (M)
3. *Handbook of Impact Evaluation*. Khandker, Koolwal, Samad (KKS). - FREE
4. *Impact Evaluation In Practice*. Gertler, Marti, Prem, Rawl, Verm (GMP) - FREE

You may want to buy a physical copy of WV, since it is a classic book that you will likely use in more than one course. That book is available in the bookstore, or anywhere you can find it. KKS and GMP are available for free on the world bank website. From M, will be focusing only on a couple of individual chapters. In addition, I will be providing other readings throughout the semester, which will be indicated in the Readings section in the weekly schedule. Other readings will appear below in the schedule which will correspond to files I upload to canvas.

Lectures

I will be delivering lectures on the topics for the week. Generally, I will be working on these up to the day that I deliver them, so I will post these on canvas after the class day they are delivered. These lectures are based on the readings. Do the readings before class.

Assignments

Grading

Final averages are rounded to the nearest whole number. A = 90–100, B = 80–89, C = 70–79, D = 60–69, and F = below 60. Georgia Tech does NOT use plus/minus grades.

I like to keep things simple. Every assignment is graded on a percentage basis, 0-100%, and every assignment contributes a certain amount to the overall percentage for the final grade (see breakdown below). Canvas is somewhat clunky and likes points. To facilitate this translation, every assignment thus has 100 points. For the correspondence between percentage to letter grade, I follow the general guidelines set by the institute. Lastly, I do rounding. For example, 89.5 will be rounded up to an A.

- Team activities: 10% (6)

- Attendance: 10%
- Final Paper Drafts: 10% (2)
- Exams: 30% (2)
- Final Paper: 30% (2)
- Policy Analysis Presentation: 10%

Activities

The activities grade will be assessed based on participation in the team based class activities. There will be certain deliverables based on activities that count toward this. These activities generally involve working on sections of the final paper with your team in class.

Attendance

The data show that a big part of success in this course is showing up to class consistently. I will take roll manually at the beginning of class. If you arrive after I take roll, it is your responsibility to notify me that you are present after the lecture or class activities are done.

Exams

We will have a mid-term and a final exam. These exams test content knowledge derived from the lectures and course materials. These will be in person, closed book, no device quizzes (basic calculator permitted). They are generally comprised of multiple choice, true/false, short essay questions. As a side note, I also like to do Kahoot quizzes in class that are useful and fun but are ungraded but help students prepare for the exams.

Paper Drafts

Paper drafts are early drafts of Final Paper Part 1 and Part 2. These will be turned for evaluation before the final versions are due. These allow me to ensure you are on the right track and to give you feedback before grading your final versions. Rough drafts are not perfect final papers. These are approximations that show the general structure and idea that gives me an idea of where the paper is going. This allows me to gauge the direction of your work and gives me a chance to ensure you are not off track.

Final Paper (Team Project)

This will be a team project. Team size will depend on enrollment, such that there will be approximately 6 teams per semester. I have structured this assignment as two parts, but both parts should fit together as a coherent whole by the end of the semester. Part 1 addresses theory and Part 2 presents the analysis.

Part 1: Theory. This part of the paper generally has the following headings 1) introduction, 2) market and government failures, 3) policy instruments and alternatives, 4) references. First, it identifies a policy problem in a specified case, explains the background and importance of the problem, and states a research purpose (decision making or explanation). Second, it identifies the specific market and/or government failures at play in the public policy problem, i.e. theoretically framed policy problem related to the status quo of the case. The key here is the problem is explained in terms of policy analysis theory. Third, it identifies relevant alternative policy proposals that are different from the status quo which could potentially address the public policy problem at hand. It evaluates in a logical way the arguments for and against each alternative. It also includes a summary table at the end of the alternative-instruments section that summarizes the pro-cons of each alternative. Fourth, it will include a list of APA references at the end.

Part 2: Analysis. This part generally has the following headings 1) methods, 2) results, 3) limitations, 4) recommendations, 5) conclusions, 6) references, and sometimes 7) appendix. This part of the final paper analyzes the policy alternatives in terms of evidence identified from public sources. You will use analytical tools that we have examined in class or otherwise. These might include, benefit-cost analysis, decision analysis, regression, quasi-experimental design, network analysis, etc. First, you identify the methods of data collection and methods of analysis used to analyze the data. Second, you present the results of the analysis, which usually includes tables and figures. Third, you discuss the limitations of the analysis, e.g. challenges to validity, lack of data collection, use of simulated estimates, etc. Fourth, you distill your analysis into a set of recommendations for the client, which are practical and impactful. Fifth, you conclude by providing a brief summary of the entire project from start to finish. Lastly, you list all your references. You may also have an appendix heading that includes any R code use in the analysis or anything else useful for understanding the analysis.

Each part should be around 10 pages, double spaced. Part 1 and 2 together will probably around 20 pages, not including title, bibliography, etc. It will use peer reviewed academic source material. It will use APA in-text citation and bibliographic style. You will generally have a bibliography for both.

Turning in the Final Paper Part 2. I will not regrade Part 1 when you turn in Part 2. However, when you turn in Part 2. Combine both parts into a single document. The ultimate goal is to produce a single coherent paper. I am having you turn them in sequentially though to maintain your team's cooperative momentum across the semester and to provide continuous feedback.

Topic Selection. I recommend you avoid broad topics that have been exhaustively researched. Please find something relatively original, that hasn't been analyzed too much before. This is easier than it seems if you start at the local or state level where context factors shape the policy context into something more unique. You can do national or international policy also, but these often tend to be well covered already. Also, keep in mind the question of whether you can find data on the topic under consideration.

Client Orientation. Policy analysis is generally client focused, meaning it is usually conducted on behalf of a client. For logistical reasons it is not feasible to have every team work on behalf of an actual client. However, this does not prevent you from writing in this perspective. In other words, it is a simple matter to simply posit a client, generate hypothetical client concerns, and write from that perspective. As such, projects should identify a client orientation from a real world case, e.g. local governments, public agencies, non-profits organizations, city council members, legislators, etc.

Presentation

You will present your policy analysis to the class. The presentation should be around 10 minutes long. It will be in power point or some similar alternative presentation format. It will take the general structure of the paper. Each team member will participate, it will not have too much text on slides, and presenters will not read scripts.

R Studio

We will use R Studio in this course to conduct our analyses, manage projects, and produce reports. I will be presenting tutorials in the form of R scripts and Quarto documents which is a markdown format in R Studio. If you are new to R, these are some examples of online resources for R.

- <https://posit.cloud/learn/recipes>
- <https://r4ds.hadley.nz/>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/>. The courses by Hadley and Poulson are good.

There are many ways to learn how to use R. AI tools (gpt, claude, etc) have become very good at code languages like R and can serve as an important learning tool. Gatech provides integrated AI support in R Studio by way of "copilot" pro connected through Github educational license, which is useful for code completion tasks on basic types of coding (less useful on more complex tasks). The educational package in github also provides you free access to datacamp resources.

Policies

Integrity and Plagiarism

Students are expected to follow the [Georgia Tech Honor Code](#) and [Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement](#). On plagiarism, presenting another source's words, ideas, or substantially similar material as your own without appropriate attribution may violate the Academic Honor Code. Suspected violations will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity. Use appropriate attribution practices when in doubt, including quotation marks, paraphrasing, in-text citations, and bibliographic entries, as appropriate to the chosen citation style.

AI Policy

Students are expected to follow the [AI policy guidance](#) established by Georgia Tech. AI tools may support information searches, brainstorming, and learning, but submitted assignments must reflect the student's own reasoning, analysis, organization, and writing. Presenting AI-generated or AI-rewritten work as one's own may constitute a violation of the Georgia Tech Academic Honor Code and will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity.

Course specific AI exception. In this course AI tools may be used for programming support for R and Python. You remain responsible for understanding, testing, and validating any AI-assisted code. Document substantive AI assistance by identifying the tool, its purpose, and how its suggestions were incorporated or revised.

Late Assignments, Absences, and Attendance

Late submissions will be handled on a case-by-case basis but generally will be deducted a letter grade if there is no justification for the late submission. If you miss an exam, makeup exams generally occur in my office (for ODS clients see Accommodations section on makeup exams). If you will miss an exam, email as soon as possible. Attendance in class is crucial. Aside from excused absences, absences will be counted in the attendance grade. The preferred method is to go through the institute approved system for submitting "proof" for excused absences, via the Dean of Student's [website](#). This avoids populating my inbox with, for example, your medical records.

Institute Approved Absences

Students who miss class because of approved Institute activities (such as field trips, professional conferences, and athletic events) will be permitted to make up the work missed during their absences. [Institute-approved absence requests](#) are reviewed by a faculty committee, and the student receives an official letter from the Office of the Registrar as documentation of an approval.

Verification of Participation

For ALL undergraduate and graduate classes that are for credit, billable, and gradable (this includes 7000 and 9000 level thesis hour courses for graduate students), instructors must report to the Registrar's Office and the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid whether they have students enrolled in their classes who are not engaged with the course. This is a Federal Verification of participation and a Federal Title IV requirement.

Incomplete Grades

An incomplete (I) grade will be considered only when, for non-academic reasons beyond the student's control, the student becomes unable to complete the course requirements, has satisfactory academic performance, has made significant progress in completing course

assignments, and the remaining work is appropriate for an I grade. If these conditions do not apply, the student will be counseled about other available options.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you require special accommodations contact the [Office of Disability Services](#) (ODS) to obtain an accommodations letter, which they will deliver to me. If you require accommodations, contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) and provide me with the Faculty Notification Letter through the ODS process. I will implement the accommodations specified in the letter. If you plan to take exams through ODS, follow ODS scheduling procedures and notify me so that I can complete the required testing agreement and submit the exam materials. If you miss a scheduled ODS exam, contact me and ODS promptly; any makeup will be arranged consistently with your accommodations and ODS procedures. If an emergency prevents you from taking the final examination, an incomplete may be assigned only if the Institute's incomplete-grade requirements are met.

Other Information

Communication Preferences

In person, emails, and video conferences are fine. I generally try to make office hours convenient for you by having them before or after class meeting time depending on when the class takes place. I am generally responsive to emails and attempt to respond in less than 24 hours. If it is the weekend, I may not respond until Monday. I will be logging into canvas frequently throughout the semester to monitor course progress. I will make my best effort to grade submitted assignments one week after the deadline. I will also communicate to you frequently through canvas announcements.

Electronic Devices

The use of laptops, tablets, or other mobile devices is permitted only for class-related work. Please mute all electronic devices during class. In the event of virtual sessions, keep your microphone muted when not speaking; camera use is encouraged but not required. Do not record class participants without permission, except as authorized through an approved accommodation.

Canvas

I will be using Canvas to distribute information about the course. I try to keep things simple here. The course will progress on a weekly basis with modules mapped to the schedule opening on the Monday of the week. I will also be posting a lot of PDFs and other things like R tutorials to Canvas modules. Aside from instances where holidays interrupt my flow, I like to do lectures on the first class day of the week and tutorials/activities on the second day of the week.

Syllabus Revision

The syllabus may be revised when circumstances require. Changes will be communicated through Canvas with reasonable time for students to adjust and will not be applied retroactively.