

PA 511 – Public Policy Analysis

Spring 2025 | Tuesday 6:00pm – 8:45pm | 00205 Winston Hall

Instructor	Email	Office Hours	Office Location
Graham Ambrose	gwambros@ncsu.edu	Wednesday 12pm - 1pm	Winston 125

Course overview

Description

Public policy affects most aspects of our lives including, but not limited to, public health, education, economy, living environment, quality of life, and safety and security. Addressing and understanding public policy have become increasingly important considering rampant mis- information and mistrust of evidence. This course is designed to give master's students in public affairs a background in understanding critical issues and techniques used in public policy analysis. This course provides students with core skills and knowledge necessary to understand the causes and consequences of public policies. Students will conduct a systematic analysis of public policy issues by identifying a range of policy alternatives to address the policy issues and comparing the alternatives with respect to various public values including efficiency, feasibility, and social equity and justice. Students will learn using analytical tools, rationales, and knowledge to make sense of policy interventions and will practice effective delivery and communication of evidence, data, and policy recommendations at various levels of government.

This course is also designed to prepare students for their current and future careers in public service. By the end of the semester, students will be able to develop their ideas about questions such as:

- What are the proper roles of the government in society? What are theoretical justifications for public intervention?
- What are the political dynamics in defining policy problems and choosing policy alternatives?
- What are the analytic tools that can be used?
- How can we evaluate policy outcomes?
- How do you make convincing arguments for communicating your analysis?
- What are the limitations of policy analysis?

Learning objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify and analyze policy issues and problems
- Model and evaluate policy alternatives and tools
- Identify real-world examples of market and government failures
- Recognize difficulties in analyzing policy alternatives and negotiating interest-based resolutions with stakeholders
- Understand and explain rationales for public policy and government intervention, and apply the rationales to analyze real-world problems

- Conduct professional policy analyses on social, political, and economic implications of public policy
- Conduct basic cost-benefit analyses of policies and programs
- Understand and summarize findings from empirical studies examining the impact of public policies
- Prepare well-organized and understandable policy documents and give clear briefings of the documents
- Communicate policy analysis with the public based on ethical reasoning and democratic participation

The Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, And Administration (NASPAA) Competencies

MPA Target Competency	Relevant Course Activities
The student understands and is able to apply techniques for generating and selecting among policy alternatives	Analyzing policy alternatives for the policy memo; problem sets
The student is able to use data and apply ethical lenses, different perspectives, and assumptions to generate decisions among alternatives	Framing policy problems as market and government failures; problem sets; preparing and presenting the policy memo
The student understands the value of and can effectively foster and incorporate citizen participation	Discussing the role of citizens as policy analysts; presenting the policy analysis results
The student is able to set goals and use data, performance indicators, economic concepts and continuous improvement approaches to manage and lead in service of the mission	Analyzing market and government failures; problem sets; conducting cost-benefit analyses

Course Materials

Required

Title: Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice (6th Edition)
 Author: David L. Weimer & Aidan R. Vining
 Publisher: Routledge
 Publication year: 2017 (Earlier editions and e-books are also fine.)
 ISBN-13: 978-1138216518
 Available at: Amazon and other vendors

Online Resources

We will extensively use web resources including:

- Washington state institute for public policy: www.wsipp.wa.gov
- Vera Institute of Justice: www.vera.org
- Pew Research Center: www.pewresearch.org
- The Brookings Institution: www.brookings.edu
- Hoover Institution: www.hoover.org
- Urban Institute: www.urban.org

Optional Text (NO NEED TO PURCHASE)

- Meltzer, Rachel, and Alex Schwartz. Policy Analysis as Problem Solving: A Flexible and Evidence- based Framework. Routledge, 2018.
- Bardach, Eugene, and Eric M. Patashnik. A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving. CQ press, 2019 (6th eds.).
- Wildavsky, Aaron B. Speaking Truth to Power: Art and Craft of Policy Analysis. Routledge, 1987 (2nd eds.).
- Lindblom, Charles Edward and Woodhouse, Edward J. The Policy-Making Process. Prentice-Hall, 1993 (3rd eds.).
- Boardman, Anthony E., David H. Greenberg, Aidan R. Vining, and David L. Weimer. Cost-benefit analysis: concepts and practice. Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Stone, Deborah. Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making. New York: ww Norton, 2012 (3rd eds.).

Software and Tools

You will need Microsoft Excel or similar to complete some assignments in this course.

Assessments

Problem Sets

Students will be asked to apply the concepts from the textbook and lectures to analyze examples. A few rules:

- Students are encouraged to work together to understand course materials and assignment questions. However, students must write their own solutions themselves in their own words.
- You must show how you got the answer. Clearly but briefly show how you derived the answer.
- Answers should be well-organized, understandable, and legible. Make sure your answers are presented in the order of the questions and include question numbers.
- Although I will accept handwritten answers, typed mathematical expressions and computer-generated graphs are preferred. If you have to scan your handwritten answers, please make sure your answers are easy to read.
- One PDF submission per assignment. Do not submit multiple documents for one assignment.

In-Class Midterm Exam

- This 2-hour in-class midterm exam is intended to make sure students understand the key concepts in public policy analysis.
- This is an open-book test, but you are not allowed to search the internet during the exam.
- The exam will include true-false, matching, short-answer, mathematical derivations, and essay questions.
- You are allowed to use a computer to write and submit your answers electronically on Canvas. Handwritten answers are also fine. Papers will be provided during the exam. Please bring pens and/or pencils for calculation.

Final Project – Policy Analysis

Students are highly encouraged to work as a group of 2 or 3 to complete the following four parts of the Final Project – Policy Analysis.

- Part 1. Proposal: The purpose of this assignment is to help students define and articulate a policy problem to focus on. Briefly discuss your policy issue and provide a brief sketch of the context. (2 paragraphs)
- Part 2. Framing A Policy Problem: Frame a policy problem as a market or government failure and build a rationale for government action. (up to 1,000 words)
- Part 3. Presentation: You will share your policy memo with your classmates (5-7 minutes).
- Part 4. Policy memo: You will prepare a policy memo which includes i) the definition, description, and background of the policy problem, ii) framing of the policy problem, iii) at least three policy alternatives, iv) and recommendations and implications. (2,500 - 5,000 words plus references and appendices)

Grading

Assessment	Points
Problem Sets	45 Total
Problem Set 1. Pre-Requisite Test	5
Problem Set 2. Competitive Market	10
Problem Set 3. Market Failures	10
Problem Set 4. Government Failures & Policy	10
Problem Set 5. Cost-Benefit Analysis	10
In-Class Midterm Exam	15
Final Project – Policy Analysis	25 Total
Part 1. Proposal	1%
Part 2. Framing a Policy Problem	4%
Part 3. Presentation	5%
Part 4. Policy Memo	15%
In-Class Presentations & Participation	15 Total
1. Policy & Public Values	5
2. In-Class Discussion	5

Students can earn a total of 100 points in this course. The percentage of points earned by students will be used to calculate their course grades. The following grade scale will be used.

94–100 = A; 90–93 = A-; 87–89 = B+; 84–86 = B; 80–83 = B-; 77–79 = C+; 74–76 = C; 70–73 = C-; Below C- = Failing

I reserve the right to make changes to the weekly discussion, reading schedule and course syllabus to meet the learning needs of the students and to accommodate other professional expectations which may include research activities, professional conferences and unplanned obligations. Thank you very much for your understanding and cooperation.

Late Assignments

Late work will be docked 2 points per 24-hour period. Each assignment will be posted on Moodle and should be submitted on Moodle. A late assignment submission may be negotiated between the student and the instructor on an as-needed basis in response to students' professional or personal circumstances. Students should notify the instructor as soon as possible if s/he anticipates a late assignment submission.

Course Schedule

Schedule of classes and assignments is subject to change. In the event of any change in assignment, topic or due date, I will post announcements on Moodle and upload a corrected syllabus.

Week	Readings/Videos	Discussion	Activities Assigned
Week 1 - 1/7 Introduction To Policy Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 1. Preview - W&V. Ch 2. What Is Policy Analysis? - VIDEO: "What is policy analysis?" by David L. Weimer (2014) 	None	Problem Set 1. Prerequisite Test
Week 2 – 1/14 Public Values & Professional Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 3. Toward Professional Ethics - SB20-217 Enhance Law Enforcement Integrity Act - VIDEO: "What Just Happened SB20 217 Enhance Law Enforcement Integrity Act" by Colorado Organization for Victim Assistance (2020) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "How can we improve police accountability in the US?" by Brookings Institution (2020) - VIDEO: "Larimer sheriff furious about speed of police accountability bill" by Next 9NEWS (2020) 	In-Class Presentation 1. Policy & Public Values
Week 3 – 1/21 Idealized Competitive Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 4. Efficiency and the Idealized Competitive Model 	None	Problem Set 2. Market Competition
Week 4 – 1/28 Market Failures #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 4. Efficiency and the Idealized Competitive Model 	None	None
Week 5 – 2/4 Market Failures #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 4. Efficiency and the Idealized Competitive Model - VIDEO: "Carbon pricing: how does a cap-and-trade system work?" by Canada's Ecofiscal Commission (2020) - VIDEO: "Asymmetric Information and Used Cars" by Marginal Revolution University (2015) - VIDEO: – "Moral Hazard" by Marginal Revolution University (2015) 	None	Problem Set 3. Market Failures

Week	Readings/Videos	Discussion	Activities Assigned
2/11 Wellness Day - No Classes			
Week 6 – 2/18 Government Failures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 8. Limits to Public Intervention: Government Failures - The Economist. (2014). What's Gone Wrong With Democracy. 	None	Final Project – Policy Analysis Part 1. Proposal
Week 7 – 2/25 Distributional Effects of Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 6. Rationales for Public Policy: Other Limitations of the Competitive Framework - W&V. Ch 7. Rationales for Public Policy: Distributional and Other Goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Mayor Bloomberg Announces New Initiative to Connect Low-Income NYers with Economic Opportunities” by Mayor Bloomberg (2013) - VIDEO: “Center for Economic Opportunity: Innovator’s Focus” by Harvard Ash Center (2013) 	None
Week 8 – 3/4 Framing Policy Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 9. Policy Problems as Market and Government Failure: The Madison Taxicab Policy Analysis Example 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VIDEO: “Will regulation of rideshare apps leave passengers stranded?” by PBS NewsHour (2018) - VIDEO: “State of the Union 2023” by PBS NewsHour (2023) 	None
3/11 Spring Break - No Classes			
Week 9 – 3/18 Midterm exam (In class)			
Week 10 – 3/25 Types Of Government Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 10. Correcting Market and Government Failures: Generic Policies 	None	Problem Set 4. Government Failures & Policies
Week 11 – 4/1 Doing Policy Analysis - How to Write a Policy Memo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 14. Gathering Information for Policy Analysis - W&V. Ch 15. Landing on Your Feet Organizing Your Policy Analysis - Bardach & Patashnik (2019). Part 1 The Eightfold Path 	None	Final Project – Policy Analysis Part 2. Framing a Policy Problem

Week	Readings/Videos	Discussion	Activities Assigned
Week 12 – 4/8 Cost Benefit Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 17. Cost-Benefit Analysis: Assessing Efficiency - Boardman, Greenberg, Vining & Weimer. (2017). Ch 1. Introduction to Cost Benefit Analysis & Ch 2. - Conceptual Foundations of Cost Benefit Analysis† Washington State Institute for Public Policy. (2019). Benefit-Cost Technical Documentation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Head Start: Pre-K to 12 Education,” Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2019) - “What’s the legacy of Head Start 50 years on?,” PBS NewsHour (2015) 	Problem Set 5. Cost Benefit Analysis
Week 13 – 4/15 Government Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 13. Government Provision: Drawing Organizational Boundaries - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The pros & cons of public-private partnerships,” Denver7 (2016) - “CDOT, private company working to figure out why US 36 collapsed, next steps in rebuild,” Denver7 (2019) 	None
Week 14 – 4/22 Doing Well and Doing Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&V. Ch 19. Doing Well and Doing Good - Wildavsky. (1987). Ch 1. Introduction: Analysis as Art, Ch 3. Policy As Its Own Cause, & Ch 5. Between Planning and Politics: Intellect vs. Interaction as Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kelly Brough (Denver mayor runoff candidate 2023) Homelessness & Housing Policy - Mike Johnston (Denver mayor runoff candidate 2023) Homelessness & Housing Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Final Project – Policy Analysis Part 3. Infographic & Presentation - Final Project – Policy Analysis Part 4. Policy Memo
FINAL – Policy memo presentation: 4/29 7:00pm			

Course Policies

Assignment Submittal Guidelines: Any written work except for in-class exams is expected to be typed, 12-point standard font (double spaced), on 8.5" x 11" page size with 1" margins. American Psychological Association (APA) 6th edition style, formatting, and references must be used. All work should be uploaded to Moodle. E-mailed work will not be accepted. Late work will be docked 1 point per 24-hour period.

Attendance Policy: Attendance at all sessions, and for the duration of all sessions, is expected. If you miss a class session, you should obtain any notification of change of future assignments or other course material from a class member—not the faculty member.

Course Modifications: The instructor reserves the right to make modifications to the syllabus and course schedule throughout the course, thus the syllabus is not a contract and may be modified at their discretion. Any changes will be announced in class, on Moodle and/or email; it is the responsibility of the student to adhere to these changes.

Note on Class Meeting Time: Should an emergency or unforeseen circumstances arise for the instructor, it may be necessary to cancel a class meeting. Should the faculty member not be able to meet the class at the regularly-scheduled time, the class will be notified via Moodle and/or email, with as much advance notice as is possible. Alternative online activities or class sessions will be provided within 24 hours of the cancellation to provide content and activities as originally planned for the class meeting. Be sure to check announcements and/or Moodle email on the days of class.

University Policies

NC State University Policies, Regulations and Rules: Students are responsible for reviewing the PRRs which pertain to their course rights and responsibilities. These include:

<http://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-04-25-05> (Equal Opportunity and Non-discrimination Policy Statement),

<http://oied.ncsu.edu/home/> (Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity),

<http://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-11-35-01> (Code of Student Conduct),

<http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-50-03> (Grades and Grade Point Average),

<https://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-15> (Credit-Only Courses),

<https://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-04> (Audits), and

<https://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-50-03> (Incompletes).

University Non-Discrimination Policies: It is the policy of the State of North Carolina to provide equality of opportunity in education and employment for all students and employees. Accordingly, the university does not practice or condone unlawful discrimination in any form against students, employees or applicants on the grounds of race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, or veteran status. See <https://policies.ncsu.edu/category/campus-environment/non-discrimination>.

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must register with Disability Services Office in Suite 2221, Student Health Center, Campus Box 7509, 919-515-7653.

<https://dso.dasa.ncsu.edu/> . For more information on NC State's policy on working with students

with disabilities, please see the Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Regulation (REG02.20.01) <https://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-01> .

Writing and Speaking Tutorial Services: If writing is difficult for you, please visit the Writing and Speaking Tutorial Services to review drafts of assignments before they are due. The Service offers free one-on-one consultation with experienced tutors who can help with all levels and stages of writing. There are six locations around campus that offer drop-in services. For more information go to: <https://asc.dasa.ncsu.edu> .

Academic integrity: The University's Code of Student Conduct (<https://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-11-35-01>) specifically addresses academic integrity in parts 7-9. Students should familiarize themselves with this policy. Plagiarism is of particular concern. In any case, any instance of plagiarism will result in a failing mark for the assignment. Other forms of misconduct outlined at this site will be similarly addressed. This list of resources and authorities is neither exclusive nor exhaustive, and any violation of academic integrity as traditionally understood in the American scholarly context will be referred for University action.

Academic dishonesty includes the following offenses:

1. Claiming as your own work a paper written by another student;
2. Turning in a paper that contains paraphrases of someone else's ideas but does not give proper credit to that person for those ideas;
3. Turning in a paper that is largely a restatement in your own words of a paper written by someone else, even if you give credit to that person for those ideas. The thesis and organizing principles of a paper must be your own;
4. Turning in a paper that uses the exact words of another author without using quotation marks, even if proper credit is given in a citation, or that changes the words only slightly and claims them to be paraphrases;
5. Turning in the same paper, even in a different version, for two different courses without the permission of both professors involved.

If a student is found to have committed one of the above offenses, he/she will receive a failing grade on the assignment or exam. The case may also be sent for University action concerning the student. Please note that I may use Turnitin as a part of this course to help me ensure the academic integrity of submitted works.

Technological Requirements and Electronically-hosted Course Components: Expectations are that students will have both a computer and reliable internet connection to support access to course resources (i.e., Moodle). If you need access to additional technological support, please alert the instructor or contact the Libraries' Technology Lending Service (<https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/devices>).

Furthermore, students may be required to disclose personally identifiable information to other students in the course, via electronic tools like email or web postings, where relevant to the course. Examples include online discussions of class topics, and posting of student coursework. All students are expected to respect the privacy of each other by not sharing or using such information outside the course.

Health and Well-Being Resources: These are difficult times, and academic and personal stress

are natural results. Everyone is encouraged to take care of themselves and their peers. If you need additional support, there are many resources on campus to help you:

- Counseling Center ([NCSU Counseling Center](#))
- Student Health Services ([Health Services | Student](#))
- If the personal behavior of a classmate concerns or worries you, either for the classmate's well-being or yours, we encourage you to report this behavior to the NC State CARES team: ([Share a Concern](#)).
- If you or someone you know are experiencing food, housing or financial insecurity, please see the Pack Essentials Program ([Pack Essentials](#)).

Need Help?

If you find yourself in a place where you need help, academically or otherwise, please review these Step-by-Step Help Topics.

Other Important Resources

- Keep Learning: [Keep Learning](#);
- Academic Success Center (tutoring, drop in advising, career and wellness advising): [Academic Success Center](#);
- Introduction to Zoom for students: <https://youtu.be/5LbPzzPbYEW> ;
- Learning with Moodle, a student's guide to using Moodle: <https://moodle-projects.wolfware.ncsu.edu/course/view.php?id=226> ;
- NC State Libraries [Technology Lending Program](#).