POLS 669: Public Policy Analysis
Tuesday 6:00 - 8:45 PM
Armstrong Hall 215
Instructor: Dr. Kevin Parsneau
Office: Morris Hall 204 B
Office Hours: Monday 4:00-5:30 PM, and Tuesday 8:30-10:00 PM
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Course Description:
The world of public policy is complex, and the job of the policy analyst is to isolate important considerations in policy-making, apply the concepts and tools of policy analysis to aid decision-makers by assessing policies, predicting policy outcomes, evaluating performance, simplifying and articulating complex issues.

This course is intended to provide a set of concepts and tools to consider the design and development of public sector policies, and to aid in the understanding of public policies and making decisions about policies. It also provides insight into the assessment of policies and the feasibility of policies, and it examines the perceived divisions between politics and policy administration.

Courses and textbooks on public policy analysis include a diverse range of methods and approaches to understanding the connections between the public interests, decision-makers, policy goals, policy design, policy implementation and policy assessment. Some courses emphasize quantitative and statistical training in public policy analysis, while other focus on individual policy areas. This course will address both of these areas, but its primary purpose is to provide the skills to define problems, and then analyze and present policy alternatives to decision-makers.

This course makes explicit the connection between disagreements over the public interest and the implementation and assessment of public policies. The goals of policies, means to achieve goals, and the evaluation of the means can not be separated from the ideological beliefs and political assumptions of the political actors or even the policy analysts the professionals performing the analysis. However, the concepts and techniques introduced in this course will enable policy analysts to identify key considerations for everyone involved in the policy process, and present the most relevant considerations to decision-makers.

The skills learned in this course can be applied to a wide range of public policy issues across a range of levels of dealing with politics. This class and the concepts and tools provided in it will improve students’ abilities whether they become specialists in narrow policy fields, generalists across many fields, or simply desire to better understand public policies and their impact.

In addition to analyzing public policies and policy options, a professional analyst and researcher must be able to articulate their conclusions to decision-makers, stakeholders and the public. This course also will hone students’ skills in communicating the most essential aspects of policy decisions and the analysis of their effects.
**Text Books:**


Most weeks also include short supplemental readings which will be available on-line or as class handouts. Additional readings may be added to address questions and issues that arise during class. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of changes and be prepared to discuss readings.

**Grades:**
Your final grade will be based upon an in-class exam, a policy analysis paper, an in-class presentation about the paper’s conclusions, two reading short summaries given in class, and a short writing assignment. Each will be weighted as follows:

- Mid-term Exam: 30%
- Policy Analysis Paper: 30%
- In-Class Presentation: 20%
- Reading Summaries: 10%
- Writing Assignment: 10%

**Grade Scale:**

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Grades are not based upon a curve, but rather upon reasonable expectations for learning and a standard of the understanding of American politics that each student should have after completing this course. As of the first day of class, I would happily give everyone in the class an A, provided each person earned one. That said, students should recognize that a C represents an average score that meets basic requirements.
To receive an A, students must have achievement that is “outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.” Do not assume that you will get an A unless you are willing to put in the work necessary to reach that standard.

**Class Assignments:**
The two most prominent requirements for this course are a mid-term exam and a policy analysis paper. The mid-term will include the materials from the first half of the course. While there will not be a final exam, students will be expected to incorporate the materials from the first and second halves of the class in their policy analysis paper.

Each student will write a policy analysis paper that applies the concepts and methods of the course to the analysis of a policy issue. In addition to the paper, each student will give an in-class presentation to the rest of the class on the analysis they do in their policy paper. Detailed description of the requirements for the policy analysis project will be handed out later in the course, and the final paper will be due on the last day of class.

Each student will sign up to be the “primary discussant” for one or two weeks of class and the “secondary discussant” for another week or two (depending upon enrollment). Prior to each class meeting each, the primary discussant will prepare a brief introduction to the week’s topic and reading materials. At least a day in advance, he or she will e-mail a brief paragraph about themes or issues of the week and then 3-5 questions to provoke discussion or thought. Remember, the paragraph and questions are not meant to capture the entirety of the readings, but to isolate interesting or noteworthy issues. The secondary discussant will be responsible for giving a brief initial response, and, when appropriate, offering additional discussion points or questions.

Each student will also sign up to give a brief summary of two of the key readings in the class (marked with a ‘*’ on the syllabus). These summaries should be no longer than 5-7 minutes and should include a brief summary of the reading itself, a few statements about how the reading relates to the other readings in the course (either for that week or previous readings) and an important question it raises about policy analysis.

Finally, each student is expected to read the book *How to Lie With Statistics* and find three examples of a deceptive or improper use of statistics. Students will be required to write a short paper about why the example is improper or deceptive, and how the presentation could be improved.

**Class policies:**
Students are expected to take the exams on the dates listed. If you cannot take an exam on the scheduled date, you must make arrangements with me at least a week in advance. *Do not assume that you have made arrangements unless I have responded and agreed* in person, by phone or via e-mail.

Other assignments are due at the beginning of class on the scheduled date. Late papers will be penalized one letter grade per day that they are late. Except in unusual circumstances, I will not
accept e-mailed assignments. Students are responsible for keeping all returned copies of their assignments in case errors happen.

Unless otherwise noted, all written assignments must be typed and double space in 12-point, Times New Roman font with 1” margins. Any paper that fails to meet this requirement will be graded down. This policy is not meant to be punitive, but rather to ease the task of grading. It becomes difficult to grade papers of the various fonts, font sizes and margins, and it feels insulting when people try to deceive me by changing spacing, fonts and margins. If this requirement presents a problem for you or your computer, talk to me.

I am highly skeptical of using computer problems as an excuse for late assignments, and will not accept this as a valid excuse. Students should take all reasonable precautions, make multiple backups of any notes or assignments, and print hard copies of work as a protection against computer malfunction.

Readings are listed on the syllabus and you are expected to read the material prior to class so that you can participate in class discussions. Anything in the assigned readings is fair game for the tests, because I will not cover everything in course lectures.

Attendance is expected. Students are not specifically graded on class attendance, but there will be information presented in the class that is not available elsewhere and it will be on the exams. I am willing to discuss and clarify course contents, but not as a substitute for attendance.

No cheating or plagiarism will be tolerated, and such acts of academic misconduct will be punished according to established university rules. If you have any questions regarding cheating or plagiarism, please discuss them with me or consult university rules.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:
I appreciate the contribution of students with disabilities and encourage you to take advantage of support from the university. Minnesota State University provides students with disabilities reasonable accommodation to participate in educational programs, activities or services. Students with disabilities requiring accommodation to participate in class activities or meet course requirements should first register with the Office of Disability Services, (Memorial Library 132, telephone 289-2825, TDD 711) to establish an accommodation plan and then contact me as soon as possible.

Questions about Grading:
I do not use surprises on tests to measure students’ knowledge of the course materials. I make the contents of the tests and the requirements for papers as clear as possible. If students have attended each class and done the assigned readings, they should do well on the test. If you have any questions about expectations, please ask as soon as possible.

Because I am clear about the contents of tests, my test questions are straightforward and requirements for papers are clearly stated, I am confident in the fairness of my exams and assigned grades.
However, if you feel that you have been graded unfairly, I will personally re-grade your test or paper. To provide the best environment for all students to be treated equally, I have two requirements prior to reconsidering a grade. First, there is a 24-hour waiting period, so that the student can also reconsider their work rather than reacting out of anxiety or frustration. Second, students must provide a written explanation of why their work fully meets the question or requirements. In addition to being unfair to fellow students, simply explaining why you want a better grade is not sufficient reason to change a grade.

Finally, whenever I re-grade, I reserve the right to raise or lower the grade if I feel it has received an unwarranted grade. Remember, the most important result of any class at is the knowledge gained from the class and not the grade received. Even if you are disappointed in a grade, it is most important to learn the material and understand the subject of the course for your development as a student, citizen and scholar.

**Week 1: (January 12) Introduction**

**Week 2: (January 19) Issues in Policy Analysis**


**Week 3: (January 26) Scientific Method and Policy Analysis**


“Two Studies, Two Results, And a Debate Over a Drug.” *New York Times*. June 3, 2004. pg. C.1

**Week 4: (February 2) Precinct Caucus Night. No Class.**

**Week 5: (February 9) The Policy Process**


**Week 6: (February 16) Defining the Problem**

Huff, Darrell. How to Lie with Statistics.


**Week 7: (February 23) Critical Thinking and Research Design**


“Link Between Aspartame, Brain Tumors Dismissed by FDA, Cancer Group,” cnn.com, November 18, 1996.


Week 8: (March 2) Operationalization and Measurement
Gupta. Analyzing Public Policy, p. 149-175.


“Behind the SAT,” Newsweek, September 6, 1999.


“A's Near Par for the Course in College” Chicago Tribune. Apr 28, 2000. pg. 1


Spring Break (March 9)

Week 9: (March 16) Some Basic Statistics
Gupta. Analyzing Public Policy, p. 102-121.

Week 10: (March 23) Probability, Confidence and Margins of Error


Week 11: (March 30) Correlation and Multivariate Techniques

W. Phillips Shivley. The Craft of Political Research. Chapters 8* and 9.*

Week 12: (April 6) Exam
Week 13: (April 13) Generating Courses of Action  


Week 14: (April 20) Interpretation and Analysis of the Data  

“Rethinking Thinking,” The Economist. December 18, 1999.*


“The Insignificance of Statistical Significance,” by Donald McCloskey.*


Week 15: (April 27) Articulating Recommendations, Implementation and Beyond  


Final Exam Schedule: Tuesday, May 4 at 6:00 PM-8:45 PM

Policy Analysis Paper and “How to Lie With Statistics” Assignment Due

I reserve the right to change this syllabus as needed.