Our increasingly complex society confronts us with more and more difficult policy problems that are not easily solved. These policy problems are characterized by imperfect information regarding causality, severity, and projected outcomes, by disagreement over the criteria to judge and choose alternatives, by political and organizational constraints, and by affected and interested citizens who care about or have something at stake in how problems are solved. The goal of this course is to help students develop the skills of policy analysis to grapple with these difficult policy problems. These skills take three general forms: (1) Critical thinking skills – thinking comprehensively and powerfully about policy problems and solutions; (2) Quantitative skills – applying specific methods/techniques to analyze policy problems; and (3) Communication skills – writing and discussing about complex policy issues. Students will develop these skills by working on exercises and a course project and by writing and presenting their results in class.

Students will also develop a better understanding of the methods of policy analysis, the limitations of those methods, and the present state of the field. We shall identify criteria of good practice and apply those criteria to examine recent applications of various decision-aiding methods, such as benefit-cost analysis and multi-criteria analysis. We shall also confront ethical, political, and technical questions about these methods and their shortcomings. More practically, this course will offer Master of Public Administration students an opportunity to learn and apply the skills often used in capstone projects.

If you are a PhD student, come see me for a description of additional expectations.

Instructor Information
Instructor: Professor Chris Weible
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Required Readings
3. Electronic copies of readings are available on Blackboard.

Grading Components
1. Class Activities and Participation 20%
2. Two Issue Papers 20%
3. Policy Analysis Research Project 60%
Class Activities and Participation
This course will have very little lecture and focus on hands-on learning. Policy analysis requires the ability to think critically, to communicate clearly and convincingly, and to work cooperatively. Research confirms that being actively involved in working problems is a better way to learn to think critically and to do analysis, synthesis, and writing. Thus, most of the class time will be spent working on exercises and discussing them. I will lecture very little and only when I think it is necessary. Your active attendance and participation is expected. The class participation grade will be based on the quality of your in-class participation, including class presentations, small-group activities, and discussions. Some small-group activities will be assigned as homework. To help me assign the class participation grade, you are required to turn in a participation report that summarizes your involvement in the course. The participation report is due December 8.

Two Issue Papers
Students are asked to write two issue papers. Issue papers are very short papers in a memo format focusing on (often responding to) a specific aspect of policy analysis or a policy problem. The basic idea is to provide students the chance to develop their ability to write briefly and clearly on complex issues. In brief, issue papers have a three page maximum and should follow guidelines on memo writing¹. You may write the issue papers alone or in groups of two or three. More details on the assignments will be provided during the semester.

Policy Analysis Research Project
Students are asked to undertake a comprehensive policy analysis project consisting of: problem analysis, identification of alternatives for addressing the problem, and evaluation of alternatives using one or more of the decision-aiding methods to be examined in the course. For some of you, treat this as a practice run for your capstone. Like a capstone, the page limit is 25 double spaced pages (Times New Roman Font, one inch margins). You must do your project in groups of two or three. More direction on the project will come.

Topics and Readings
(subject to change)

Class 1. August 25. Class introduction. What is policy analysis?
Weimer and Vining (2010) Chapter 2

Class 2. September 1. Positive and Post-Positive Approaches to Policy Analysis.

Due Sept 1 Start of Class: Finding a Problem Assignment

Class 3. September 8. Review of Microeconomics & Market Failure
Weimer and Vining. Chapter 4-6.

Class 4. September 15. Limits of Intervention & Market and Government Failures
Weimer and Vining. Chapter 7-9.

¹ Download at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p_memo.html.
Due Sept 15, Start of Class: Project Topic and Problem Definitions

---NO CLASS. SEPTEMBER 22---

Class 5. September 29. Benefit Cost Analysis Overview
Weimer and Vining Chapter 16


U.S. Department of Transportation. 1996. Exploring the application of benefit/cost methodologies to transportation infrastructure decision making. *Searching for Solutions: A policy Discussion Series* #16. Federal Highway Administration, the Transportation Research Board, and the American Society of Civil Engineers. (Blackboard)

Class 8. October 20. Other Techniques: Cost Effective Analysis, Equity Analysis, and Risk Analysis
Weimer and Vining Chapter 1.

Due October 20, Start of Class: First Half of Projects

Class 9. October 27. Tools of Government
Bardach, Appenix B.
Weimber and Vining, Chapter 10.

Weimer and Vining Chapters 14 and 15  
Bardach Chapters Part II and III

Class 12. November 10. Student Project Presentations  
Class 13. November 17. Student Project Presentations

-NO CLASS NOVEMBER 24-

Class 14. December 1. Ethics and the Policy Process  
Weimer and Vining Chapter 3  
Weimer and Vining Chapters 10 and 11  

Class 15. December 8. Class Closure. How can policy analysts influence the policy process?  

Due December 8 Start of Class: Final Projects