IDS 4931: Applied Policy Research
Fall 2025
August 21 - December 12, 2025
Location: MAT 0018
Time: MWF, Period 4 (10:40 - 11:30 AM)

Instructor: Dr. Teresa Cornacchione
Office Location: 234 Pugh Hall
Office Hours: Tuesdays & Wednesdays 1:00 PM - 2:30 PM; or by Appointment through Calendly
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Course Description

Prerequisite

POS 2041, or equivalent.

Overview

This is an upper-level course designed to introduce students to the practice of applied policy research. This course will cover how public policy practitioners approach real problems. Students will be required to identify, research, and proposed a solution to real world public policy issue. Much of the course will focus on refining policy analysis, research, and writing skills.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course students will:

- Be well-versed in theories of policy change

- Be able to differentiate, compare, and contrast academic research and applied research

- Have developed their own original applied policy research project

- Obtain tools for reporting and presenting policy research

Many of the articles we read come from the discipline of political science and public policy analysis, and the methods used may be entirely new to you. I do not expect you to familiarize yourself or understand all the methodological tools used in the readings. It is my hope that through readings and lectures, you will have the tools necessary to evaluate the arguments. After you leave the class at the end of the semester, the material will give you a much deeper understanding of the public policy process and the role of research in the policy development.

Readings

There are no required textbooks for this course. Texts will consist of scholarly articles, current news articles, policy papers, and online resources. These will appear in the online Canvas course shell. All readings are listed in the course schedule below, under the weeks for which they are assigned. All scholarly articles can be accessed through the UF Libraries website or Canvas, if you need help navigating the library website, tutorials are available at this link. From your computer, you will need to be on the UF VPN Network.

Suggested Texts

The works below represent quality writings and research in the field of public policy. These readings are NOT required, but they are recommended to enhance your understanding of course material. These are also great places to start, if you find yourself wanting to learn more about public policy and/or policy analysis.

- Baumgartner, F.R., Jones, B.D. and Mortensen, P.B., 2018. Punctuated equilibrium theory: Explaining stability and change in public policymaking. Theories of the policy process, pp.55-101.

- Weimer, D.L., and Vining, A.R, 2017. Policy analysis: Concepts and practice. 6th Ed. Taylor & Francis.

- Weible, C.M. ed., 2023. Theories of the policy process. Taylor & Francis.

- Knill, C. and Tosun, J., 2020. Public policy: A new introduction. Bloomsbury Publishing.

- Wholey, J.S., Hatry, H.P., Newcomer, K.E., eds., 2010. Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation. Jossey-Bass.

Grading Policy

Your grade in this class will be based on several components: attendance & participation, Perusall Readings, and a complete policy proposal project (including drafts and a presentation). All assignments will be submitted via Canvas or in person. Late Assignments will not be accepted without a university-approved excuse and instructor approval. Every component is worth 100 points, the weight of each is listed below:

Attendance & Participation	10%
Perusall Readings	20%
Research Workshops	20%
Project Drafts	10%
Final Project	30%
Presentation	10%

Attendance & Participation

Given the nature of this course, your attendance and active participation is mandatory. Because this course is a seminar style course, where you will be expected to read material in advance, discuss, and present research progress, your regularly attendance is of critical importance to your academic success. **Each student is permitted a maximum of two (2) unexcused absences throughout the semester** without penalty to their grade. In certain circumstances, I reserve the right to excuse an absence; but I will only do so if provided documentation of a university-approved excuse (military service, documented illness, jury duty, university-approved activity, etc.). Also, please note that I will not necessarily make my slides available online. Please do your best to attend class regularly. To read more about UF's attendance policies, visit this thislink

In addition to being physically present, you are expected to be an active participant in class. This means you are regularly reading the assigned readings, prepared to ask questions or make comments in class, and regularly engage in the classroom environment. I will holistically evaluate your participation throughout the semester using the criteria below:

- Poor Participation (D or F): The student rarely or never offers comments and questions in class, and/or does not appear to be regularly paying attention to lectures, presentations, or in-class activities. The student may only participate if prompted;

- Fair Participation (grade of C): The student occasionally offer comments and questions in class, and/or is mostly engaged in class, paying attention to lectures, presentation, and in-class activities. The student may occasionally have to be prompted to participate;

- Good Participation (grade B): The student regularly offers comments and questions that demonstrate more than surface level understanding of course material, and the student regularly pays attention to lectures, presentations, and in-class activities. The student rarely requires prompting to participate;

- Excellent Participation (grade A): The student regularly offers comments and questions that demonstrate more than a surface level understanding of course materials, the student regularly pays attention to lectures, presentation, and in-class activities. The student never requires prompting to participate.

Research Workshops

Over the course of the semester certain meetings will serve as research workshops. These workshops are designed for you to practice your research skills, work with your research partners, and advance your research project. It is essential that you participate in the activities of the designated research workshop days. Designated days are listed in the course schedule. Each session will focus on a particular aspect of the applied research process and require you to informally present your work in progress, and obtain feedback from peers and the instructor. The associated assignment must be completed in class.

Perusall Readings

You will read and annotate at least two (2) academic reading per week on Perusall. Perusall is interactive software that allows you to read and annotate a text along with your peers. You can highlight, ask questions, and respond to your classmates' comments and questions. You can earn extra credit for annotating more than the minimum required. Note that any additional Perusall annotations must be completed by the indicated due dates.

Research Project and Presentation

The overarching goal of this course is for you to produce original applied policy analysis/research. To this end, you will be paired into small research groups for the duration of the semester. Each group will be tasked with providing a policy proposal based on extensive research. Your specific question will be provided by the instructor, and will reflect a potential policy concern of a fictitious legislator.

I will assign your groups based on an introductory survey that assesses your interests and skills. You and your group will conduct the research necessary to provide a policy recommendation,

formatted into a policy paper. You will present your findings and proposal to the class at the end of the semester, as if you were presenting the information to legislative committee.

To facilitate this process, your project will be laddered, and you will submit drafts of the project, incorporate feedback, and then submit the final product. The components are listed below and you will receive instructor and peer feedback on each step. Note that a full description of each step is listed in the Syllabus Appendix. Full details, instructions, and examples are available on Canvas.

Step/Draft	Due Date, @11:59 PM
Scoping Document	September 22
Research Plan & Strategy	October 13
Rough Draft Policy Proposal	October 27
(Background, Findings, Recommendations)	
Presentation Slides/Deck	November 15
Completed Policy Proposal	**December 9**

Extra Credit

Typically, I am not a fan of extra credit. If you make an effort throughout the semester, you should not need extra credit. HOWEVER, there may be occasions when I will offer extra credit to the ENTIRE class to attend a guest lecture, view a program, etc. I will not offer individual extra credit.

Late Assignments

Late assignments will only be accepted with instructor approval and may be subject to a 1-letter grade deduction per day late, up to a maximum of three days late. After the assignment is 3 days late, I will no longer accept it.

Grading Scale

I adhere to the following letter-to-grade conversion chart for all exams, papers, assignments, quizzes, and final grades. **I reserve the right to round grades up or down a half of a letter grade (for example, A to A-, or vice versa) based on my assessment of your effort and engagement throughout the semester**.

93 or above=A*	90-92=A-	87-89=B+	83-86=B	80-82=B-	77-79=C+
73-76=C	70-72=C-	67-69=D+	63-66=D	60-62=D-	0-59=F

*An A is the highest grade you can earn in this class

Grade Changes

I am certainly open to and actively encourage you to challenge me both in class as well on disputed test questions/essay points. Sometimes, I make mistakes and sometimes, it is possible that more than one answer or perspective is correct. If you present an empirically-defensible case

as to why your answer/assumptions are also correct (for which I originally took off points), I will gladly give back partial or full credit, depending on the quality of your argument.

However, at the end of the semester, there are inexorably a handful of students who send me a late-night email requesting (and sometimes incoherently demanding) that I raise their final grade, whether from a D+ to a C-, or a B+ to an A- or anywhere in between. Two remarks on this rather bold and questionable strategy.

I try to be charitable in terms of the grading scheme already, both the attendance & participation grades, and Perusall readings (30% of your final grade) are designed to give your grade a "cushion." Secondly, the "But I NEED a/an (insert grade here)," or "can you just raise my grade x-number of points" arguments reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of grades. Implicit in this statement is the assumption that grades are capriciously handed out on the instructor's whim or fancy and are not based on the student's demonstrated mastery of the material. Grades reflect your mastery of the course material. There are many things YOU can do to enhance your mastery of the material, and consequently, your grade.

- Attend class regularly

- Be present: pay attention in class and participate

- Read materials

- Ask questions: either in class or during office hours or over email

- Do not procrastinate on assignments.

I will not respond to emails asking for extra points, or for grades to be bumped up. If a student wishes to dispute a grade on an assignment or test, the student must request an appointment or come during office hours and present a compelling case as to why extra points should be awarded.

This course complies to all UF academic policies. For more information on those policies and for resources for students, please visit this link.

Final (and perhaps reiterative) Notes on Course Protocol:
Arriving late or leaving early is disruptive to all of us who made it a priority to get to class time and be here. Please enter and exit the classroom quietly within minimal interruptions and take a seat close to the door. Please keep private conversations private. Discussions with your neighbor are distracting for me as well as other students. If you have a thought on course material or a question, speak up! Please feel free to share your thoughts on the lecture topic with all of us. I reserve the right to dismiss individual students from the classroom for disruptive behavior, and report them to the Dean of Students. I do not tolerate academic dishonesty in any form, and will pursue the full penalties for violations thereof. For your reference, the University of Florida Academic Honor Policy is listed above.

Syllabus Change Policy

Except for changes that substantially affect the parameters of evaluation, including grading and the scheduling of the final exam, this syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. I will provide you with advance notice in class and via your university registered email contact.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings & Assignments
Part I	**Intro. to the Course**	
August 22	Intro to the Course	Syllabus
August 25	What is applied research?	Springer et al 2017, Chp. 1
August 27	Applied Research as a Field	Yoshioka-Maxwell 2022
		NCSL, Youth Homelessness Overview
August 29	Applied Research as a Field	Haas, "Deinstitutionalization & Community
		Services in Virginia: A Policy Assessment
Part II	**Applied v. Academic Research**	
Sept 1	**No Class**	**Labor Day**
Sept 3	Policy analysis in the real word	Guest Speaker: Dr. Eryn Jones
		Legislative Policy Analyst,
		Florida House of Representatives
		Policy Survey Due
Sept 5	Important Considerations:	Kreitzer et al 2022
	Public Opinion & Implementation	Wholey, Chapter 27
Sept 7	**Policy Groups Announced**	**Topics Assigned**
Sept 8	Trends in Public Policy:	**Group Meet & Greet**
	Program Evaluation	Wholey, Chapter 28, "Trends in Program Evaluation"
	& Accountability	Kennedy 2023
Sept 10	Trends in Public Policy:	Sale & Springer 2015
	Exploring New Policy	OPPAGA 2024,
		Affordable Housing Policies in Florida
Sept 12	**NO CLASS**	**APSA Conference**
Sept 15	**NO CLASS**	**APSA Conference**
Sept 17	Questions & Scoping	Wholey, Chp. 1, Planning a Responsive
		and Useful Evaluation"
Sept 19	Research Workshop 1	Question & Scoping Practice
Part III	**Policy Analysis & Research**	
Sept 22	Policy Analysis 101	**Step 1 - Scoping Due**
		Springer, Chp. 3
Sept 24	Diagnosing the Problem	Springer et al, Chp. 2
		Wassmer, "What to do about Scrap Tires?"
Sept. 26	Methods & Practices	Wholey et al, Chp. 2 & Chapter 23
	Who, What, and Where of Data	Springer, Chp. 4
Sept. 29	Methods & Practices	AAPOR Best Practices
	Surveys & Interviews	Knott et al 2022
Oct 1	Methods & Practices	Grossman et al 2021
	Databases & Tools	NCSL Prescription Drug Database
Oct 3	Methods & Practices	Taherdoost 2022
	Qualitative v. Quantitative	Wholey et al, Chapter 8
Oct 6	Methods & Practices	Norris et al 2017
	Qualitative v. Quantitative, cont'd	Hicks et al 2021
Oct 8	Research Workshop 2, Day 1	No Readings, In-Class Assignment
Oct 10	Research Workshop 2, Day 2	No Readings, In-Class Assignment

Course Schedule, cont'd

Date	Topic	Readings
Part IV	**Drafting and Crafting**	
Oct 13	Professional Writing for Public Policy	**Step 2- Plan & Strategy Due** Wholey, Chapter 25
Oct 15	Making Sense of Data & Findings Proposal Crafting: Backgrounds	Lee et al 2021 Norton, "The Use of Applied Policy Research to Inform & Reform Statewide Dropout Rates"
Oct. 17	**NO CLASS**	**HOMECOMING!**
Oct 20	Proposal Crafting: Organizing Findings	Springer et al, Chp. 5 OPPAGA 2024, "Biennial Review of AHCA's Oversight of Fraud & Abuse in Florida's Medicaid Program
Oct 22	Proposal Crafting: Offering Solutions	Wholey, Chapter 24 Sale & Springer, "The Dropout Prevention Mentor Project"
Oct 24	Research Workshop 3	No Readings, in class assignment
Part V	**Public Policy Presenting**	
Oct 27	Presenting for the Public Good Data Visualization	**Step 3 - Rough Draft Due** Otten et al 2015
Oct 29	Condensing Information	*Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children* OPPAGA **Report**, 2025
Oct 31	Condensing Information	*Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children* OPPAGA **Presentation**, 2025
Nov 3	Research Workshop 4	Group Consultations
Nov 5	Presentation Advice	TBD - GUEST SPEAKER - or SPEECH LAB
Nov 10	Research Workshop 5	No readings, in class assignment
Nov 12	Peer Review Day 1	No readings, in class assignment
Nov 14	Peer Review Day 2	No readings, in class assignment
	SLIDES DUE ON CANVAS	**NOVEMBER 15**
Nov 17	Presentations	Peer Evals
Nov 19	Presentations	Peer Evals
Nov 21	Presentations	Peer Evals
No Class	**Nov 24 - 28**	**Thanksgiving Holiday**
Dec 1	Final Research Workshop	
Dec 3	No Class	Extended Office Hours
Dec 5	**No Class**	**Reading Day**
December 9	**Complete Project Due**	**@11:59PM**

Appendix: Policy Project Details

Your main project this semester is to craft a comprehensive policy analysis based on an inquiry from a fictional state legislator. In your group (assigned by the instructor) you will craft a response to the legislator's inquiry, citing relevant policy and academic research, providing policy recommendations, and presenting your findings to the class.

In the first week of class, you will be required to complete a survey that asks about your self-perceived skills and your overall interests regarding policy. I will use the results from this survey to place you in a research group where interests and skills are balanced. Each group will then be given a question from a fictional state legislator. This question will represent a potential policy problem.

You will complete the project in steps reflecting the real-world policy analysis process adopted by the research wings of many state legislatures. Each step of the project is described below. You will also be given instruction and class time to work on each step. Examples are provided on Canvas.

Step 1: Question Refinement and Scoping.

The first step of the policy proposal is to refine the question and scope of your project. Often, legislators, and other clients, ask questions that are broad in scope, vague, or otherwise have the potential to "grow" into a question that is unrealistic to answer within a limited amount of time. For example, a legislator may want to know the best way to combat climate change. However, that is a question that doesn't have one simple straight-forward answer. It is incumbent upon the researcher(s) to refine the question into something that *can* be answered succinctly and within a reasonable amount of time.

To that end, it is appropriate for you to take your question, and scale it so that it is more manageable. This can include limiting its *scope*. You may decide to apply your question to a particular county or region, or reduce the question to a singular aspect. For example, if a legislator *did* ask about ways to mitigate climate change, you could decide that you will specifically address soil erosion in Gulf of Mexico communities. This is perfectly acceptable, and will result in a more manageable, coherent policy proposal. Remember, in applied policy research, the client (i.e. a legislator) is often not an expert on the topic, which is why they have enlisted the support of a policy analyst.

Your Scoping Document will require your research group to refine the question asked by your legislator, and then define the parameters of the question, i.e. what geographic area, what time frame and context, etc.

Step 2: Research Plan & Strategy .

The second step of the the policy proposal will be a detailed plan of how and when you will answer your question. You can think of this step as similar to the research methods/design aspect of a classic academic paper.

This section is essentially your "plan of attack." It will detail how you would plan to answer the question. For example, your research plan could be a hefty literature review of best practices in a particular field. Or, you may consider that you would want to survey a particular population to assess how a policy has been implemented in the past. You may

decide that conducting interviews with stakeholders, such as private companies or government agencies, may be the best plan. Or you may believe that cataloging data on an event would best serve your needs. You may also pursue a variety of approaches.

It is important to remember that beyond conducting a literature review, you will **not** be expected to actually execute the research plan, e.g conduct a survey or contact people for interviews. However, it *is* expected that you will think carefully about what you would do and explain why you would approach the question in that way.

Step 3: Rough Draft.

The rough (and I do mean rough) draft is an incomplete draft of what you have so far. You will have three components to the rough draft. I do not expect this to perfect and polished, but rather, it should be a representation of what you anticipate will be in your completed/final draft. The rough draft will contain the following sections:

Background

Provide some background research on your question/topic. While conducting the research for this step, you should consider the following:

1. **What is the current policy/practices regarding this topic?** It is important to explain what the current state of affairs is regarding your particular topic. Is there a policy in place currently? If so, how would you characterize its performance? When was the last time it was updated?

2. **What are the best practices in that given field?** For example, if you are making recommendations about a new government policy on childhood vaccinations, what would the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend?

3. **What have other states/entities pursued regarding this topic?** Often policy makers want to know what other policy makers have done in other areas. What policies have peer states or communities adopted?

4. **What is the broad consensus about this topic from academic and other reliable research?** While this is an applied research project, it is appropriate and encouraged to use academic research to support eventual findings and recommendations.

Preliminary Findings.

Here, you will take all the information you have gathered thus far and succinctly discuss what you have found regarding your question. Here, you should number your findings, and head them with the main takeaway point. For example, in your research you may have found that the current policy in place does not match current best practices as established by professional and other organizations. In this case you could lead with "The State of Florida's Currently Policy on Heart Transplants is Outdated," and then proceed to explain what you found.

It is also acceptable to include tables and graphs in this section *if* they help illustrate your point and overtly relate to the topic.

Preliminary Recommendations

In this section, you will provide some preliminary solutions to address the findings you enumerated in the previous section. As with the *Findings* section, you will number them, and lead with the main takeaway point.

These should be actionable, clear steps that could become part of a future bill. You should consider timelines for implementation, any necessary ordering of implementation, i.e. first, the state should do..., etc.

List of References

Please provide a list of references used thus far. At the end of the project, you will be required to have at least ten (10) credible sources. Here, it is acceptable to have fewer. You should use endnotes, and list references both within text, and at the end of draft. References should be listed in the order in which they appear in the draft. You may use any citation style, so long as it is consistent.

This section may not be as polished as other sections - and that is OK!

Step 4: Presentation.

As part of your project, your group will be expected to make a 7-10 minute presentation on your project. Here the goal is to hit the highlights of your findings, and not necessarily go into every detail and aspect of your project. Your presentation will model what is often given at a legislative committee meeting, meaning that you may not have a lot of time and you will be speaking to a "lay" audience, one that is not as technically versed on the topic as you will be.

This will also be an opportunity for the audience to ask questions, and for your peers (and your instructor) to provide you with some additional feedback prior to the submission of your completed policy project.

Slides are due on Canvas by 11:59 PM *Regardless of when your group is presenting.* **Please only upload slides in .ppt or .pdf format.**

Step 5: Completed Policy Proposal.

Your completed policy proposal will combine your previous drafts, with incorporated feedback, into one cohesive policy report/proposal. The completed project will be formatted as follows with appropriate section headings:

1. Title Page.

    Simple title (nothing creative or fancy-should be plain and descriptive)

    Names of all project team members

2. Executive Summary. This is a 1- 1 1/2 page synthesis of the project, and a preview of the main findings and recommendations, you also incorporate your step 2(research plan) into this section.

3. Background. This should be from your polished Step 3.

4. Findings. This should be from your polished Step 3.

5. Recommendations. This should be from your polished Step 3. From your research you will write a 1-2 page list of formal policy recommendations, along with a justification for each recommendation.

6. References. This will be in form of endnotes, with each entry appearing in the reference page in the order it appears in the report.