**Advanced Policy Analysis**
Goldman School of Public Policy
Taylor Section – Wednesday 1-4 pm (sometimes 2-5 pm)
Spring 2005

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-2:30 and by appointment
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**<u>Objectives</u>:** This class has two main objectives. One is a product: a first-class consulting report for the client who has retained you; in the ideal, it will serve as your "calling card" for future endeavors. *As the guidance to APA clients states, it "represents three-fourths of a student's full-time workload in the spring semester. It is to be a major effort."* The second objective is to learn about the process of putting together a policy analysis "from soup to nuts," thus deepening our understanding of what good and effective public policy analysis requires.

We will achieve these course objectives collaboratively, working together to focus, improve, and advise each other's work. Some of this collaboration will take place through class discussions, and some through your private discussions with classmates outside of class. Grades will be based on how outstanding the overall project is, as well as on class participation in both discussion and written assignments. Just keep in mind: everyone can excel in these projects!

**<u>The Product</u>:**

***The Big Picture*:** Over the years faculty advisers in APA seminars have concluded that, while the average level of work is good, there is too much variability. A troubling minority are just glorified term papers instead of excellent consulting products. Although many consulting products are far from excellent – except in glossiness, perhaps – APA's should emulate those that meet the highest standard. The APA product is to be a thesis, yes, but it is to be more than that. It must also be a first-class professional report. This is the right standard even if the client happens to have lower expectations. What does this imply for the tests of quality you should put to your product?

- It should address the problem your client *thinks* he or she has – even if one of your objectives turns out to be modifying the client's conception of the problem.

- It should give clear, concrete advice, if the client wants advice. If the client wants only clarification of the options, you should make clear and concrete – quantitative whenever possible – predictions about what is likely to happen for each of the options you analyze.

- It should be *responsible*. Suppose somebody took your advice – what trouble could this cause and to whom if you turn out to be wrong?

- It should be easy to read, digest, and remember. The client should find reading your product relatively *interesting*. The client should find it easy to explain in a sentence or two to someone else exactly how your analysis has been helpful to him or her, and why this someone else should also find it helpful.

***Presentations***: Late in the semester, this section of APA holds formal presentations for you to share your analysis and recommendations. Under the theory that it is better to go out with a bang than a whimper, I encourage you to invite your family/friends, client, and the GSPP community at large to participate in the audience with your classmates.

Your analysis benefits from the fresh perspective a new audience brings to the work, particularly when you are focusing on writing your final product in a way that can be easily read and remembered by your client. And each of the members of your audience benefits in a different way, from your family/friends, who get to see a bit of what you've been working so hard on in graduate school, to your client, who gets a different type of product, to the GSPP community – especially the first years – who get to see what APA is all about.

***The Final Report***: The deadline for your final written product is May 11th at 1 pm. Please send me the papers by e mail attachment and bring a hard copy with you to Jupiter's, where we'll meet for a little post-APA refreshment. GSPP requires a standard disclaimer to appear on the final paper. I will provide this in due course.

**<u>The Process</u>:**

***The Big Picture***: There are two ways this class should help you learn about the policy analysis process. First, there's what happens in the seminar meeting. You should learn how to make use of your peers as advisers, sounding boards, coaches, consultants. You should also learn how to play these roles constructively for others. Most policy analysts have reason to be both producers and consumers of good analysis, and this class helps you to prepare for these professional roles.

**A common failure stems from students' reluctance to criticize the work of their friends and classmates. But constructive criticism is invaluable. It's especially important if someone seems to be unwittingly biased or to be working from unrealistic assumptions. You don't have to be assaultive and mean when venturing constructive criticism. Just ask questions, and keep at it until the answers satisfy you, or you decide you have to come back to the matter with this classmate/colleague privately, outside of the seminar.**

The recipient of constructive criticism should also learn not to take criticism personally (unless it really is meant to be personal). A thin skin is a professional liability. Moreover, the critic could be wrong (very wrong!). So stand up for yourself. Ask your own questions back.

Beyond this, there are numerous opportunities to learn about the policy analysis process from the successes and failures of your seminar colleagues.

Second, there's your own personal process. You should use your own experience as a chance to learn. Be self-conscious. Reflect on what you're doing and why. What works and what doesn't? What are you learning about yourself? About the process of doing analysis more generally?

***Assignments***: There are two types of assignments for this class that should help with learning some of the process aspects of policy analysis: (1) status reports that help with time management training and (2) other assignments that provide policy analysis process milestones along the route to completing your final product. Both types of assignment are due by noon on Mondays as attachments in the discussion board on the class's Blackboard site. We will go over details on how to post things, etc., on the first day of class. Note that the Monday deadline is important because it allows time for myself and other class members (particularly buddies) to read and digest these before our Wednesday meeting time.

<u>Status Reports</u>**:** Until the sentence outlines are due, each week everyone in this section will post a status report on work completed in the previous week. This status report should be thought of as a research log that gives particular insight into the sticky research problems you run into as you work on the project, as well as your effectiveness at time management.

Basically, each status report should have a cover page with the following information: (1) the current iteration of the problem statement, in it's shortened form; (2) the goals/tasks you laid out for yourself at the beginning of the week, including your initial assumptions as to the priority you gave the task and the time you expected the task to take you; and (3) the actual goals/tasks you accomplished at the end of the week (in rough order), including the actual amount of time they took you. I know this seems like an artificial exercise, but one of the key things to learn about the policy analysis process is how to work under deadline pressure, and that includes how to overcome our natural underestimation of how long tasks will take. I'd also encourage you to start the next week's table re: goals for the week at the time you complete the previous week's table re: actual time tasks take.

For the inner page(s) of the status report, please write an overview of your feeling of the week's progress. There are two other completely optional items you may want to include with the status report. (1) You may want to include a page with a daily research log (this is a nice habit to develop, especially when it comes to determining billable hours if your career brings you to an analyst position in a consulting firm or to becoming an independent consultant). (2) You may want to occasionally include a revised work plan, as you may find yourself doing "triage" on your initial plans as monkey-wrenches crop up.

I'll provide an excellent example from last year that you can use as a status report template.

<u>Other Assignments</u>**:** Milestone assignments that will help provide structure to the analysis process (length will vary). These are described in more detail according to the class date in the schedule below. I will be happy to comment on drafts, notes, anything you want me to as the semester proceeds. **However, a fairly detailed sentence outline is due to me on April 11th.** I will try to react to it within two or three days at the most. Before this date, I will get you a copy of instructions on sentence outlines.

One assignment deserves special attention, however. That is the "*one-week project*" APA assignment we will do in the 7th week of class (starting February 24th and ending March 3rd, with no class on March 2nd). Like the "48-hour project" in IPA, the idea of this project is to help build your confidence in policy analysis by imposing a quick deadline for you to operate under in structuring, analyzing, and communicating your product. Unlike the IPA project, however, this exercise is directly useful to your semester-long project. Besides providing you with an early writing opportunity that you can probably use excerpts from in your final draft, the project helps you "try on" your problem definition and see how it fits by the time you try to tell your story. It also forces you to confront unanswered analytical and theoretical questions that help you set priorities for the rest of the semester.

***Buddy Group Responsibilities:*** It helps to have one other person who will work intensively with you as a "buddy" (and vice versa). It is not essential to work with someone who has the same subject matter interest as you do. In fact, it could be an advantage not to do so. **You are on your own to form buddy groups. Please do so before the January 26th class and let me know by email what the results are**. Groups of two are probably best, but larger groups are not forbidden and for some people may be advantageous.

Buddies can work out their own system of making either verbal or written comments or both, with one exception. Buddies **must** comment in writing on the drafts being produced for the one-week project due March 3rd, as well as for the April 11th sentence outline deadline; these comments are for the buddy as well as for Margaret. In the case of the one-week project, they should be prepared before the March 9th class (ideally to Margaret by March 7th).

***Class-Time*:** The main work of the seminar meetings involves giving advice to individual students. Exactly who gets on the advice-receiving agenda, and when, is something we figure out as we go along. Normally, seminar participants request a slot at the meeting preceding the one where they want to be on the agenda.

Running in tandem with advice-giving is group discussion of thematic issues associated with the policy analysis process, such as how to deal with troublesome clients, how to weight criteria, how to keep redefining your problem in a constructive way, etc. We will stop having required class time for a couple of classes in April, although students can make appointments for consultations and otherwise use the seminar room during class time on those dates.

***Food***: GSPP wisdom says that to make work pleasant and fun, sharing food and a little drink never hurts. Translated to an afternoon APA section, that means that we'll have a sign-up sheet for individuals to bring snacks for the seminar and everyone will help clean up afterwards. Margaret will start us with this on January 19th, and we should have the schedule for this established and operating by January 26th. The schedule of classes below shows that we have ten class sessions, not counting the presentations, so everyone should have to prepare only one "food day" during the course of the semester.

**Helpful Materials**: I've attached to the bottom of this syllabus a couple of things that might be useful for the class. The first is basic contact information to get us started. The second is information on a project tracking capability embedded in Excel which you may or may not find useful for this class or for future consulting endeavors. In general, if you run across (or derive) material like this through the course of your project work, please send it along to the whole group.

**Schedule:** The following is a schedule of the class topics and assignments we will undertake this semester. This schedule can be modified as needed by the group as a whole.

**January 19, 2004**

Go over Chapters 2 & 3, Weimer and Vining; Luke Tonachel APA from 2004 (documents sent via email on Monday, January 17, 2005). Classroom logistics and introductions.

Reading: *for January 24th*: Appendix 10A, Weimer and Vining; Bardach on "Assemble some Evidence," "Gathering Data for Policy Research" (in latest edition, titled "Assembling Evidence").

*for January 26th*: pp. 253-274 Weimer and Vining on Problem Analysis; Bardach on "Define the Problem"

Assignments: (1) *Status Report*

(2) *Sources*: This is an initial **annotated** bibliography, divided into categories of information provided/likely to be provided that will be relevant to your topic (you will continue to build this as the semester progresses). I want you to try to list published as well as unpublished sources, such as people you might interview. Also, start drafting ongoing list of acronyms and a glossary for technical words.

**January 26, 2004**

Go over sources assignment. Go over problem analysis reading. Consultations.

Assignments: (1) *Status Report*

(2) *Problem Analysis*: Follow the Weimer and Vining methodology. More details to come.

**February 2, 2004**

Go over problem analyses. Consultations.

Reading: *forFebruary 9th*: pp. 275-295 Weimer and Vining; Bardach steps 3-8.

Assignment: (1) *Status Report*

(2) *Workplan*: Put together a Gantt chart for your project, as well as accompanying descriptive text. This will require you to take first stabs at the questions to be answered in the project; the specific tasks you think you will need to complete to answer these questions; and the prioritization and estimates of time needed to complete tasks.

**February 9, 2004**

Go over solution analysis reading.  Go over work plans.  Consultations.

Assignment: (1) *Status Report*
(2) *Goals/Alternatives Matrix:* Set up this matrix through a two-step process that follows Weimer and Vining.  Begin by specifying relevant criteria for assessing how well each alternative contributes to each of your policy goals as you laid them out in the problem analysis.  Continue by providing a detailed specification of policy alternatives.  If you have valuations you can fill in inside the matrix, begin to do so; more likely, this will help you structure the rest of your solution analysis.

**February 16, 2004**

Go over goals/alternatives matrices.  Consultations.

Assignment: (1) *Status Report*
(2) *Show and Tell*: Different APA products look different, depending on the client and the context of the analysis.  Find a model format for the presentation of your final written product and provide some commentary on why you chose the one you did.  You can look in many different places for an ideal format.  For instance: a RAND report, a CBO report, a JPAM article, an Urban Institute report.

**February 23, 2004**

Discuss the APA report formats.  Prepare for the one-week project.  Consultations.

Assignment: (1) *One-week project (due March 3rd)*
(2) *Comments on buddy's one-week project (due March 9th at latest – ideally March 7th)*

**March 2, 2004**

No class. One-week project underway.

**March 9, 2004**

Discuss one-week projects and comments.  Do you want to revise your problem statement and/or work plan?  Are there any other reassessments you need to make? Consultations.

Assignment: *Status Report.  If any reassessments are in order, include reference to such (or actual products) as part of status report.*

**March 16, 2004**

Consultations.
Assignment: *Status Report*

**March 23, 2004**

No class, Spring Break.

**March 30, 2004**

Consultations.

Assignment: *Status Report*

**April 6, 2004**

Consultations

Assignment: (1) *Status Report*
(2) *Sentence Outline*

**April 13, 2004**

No class. Optional consultations by appointment.

**April 20, 2004**

No class. Optional consultations by appointment.

**April 27, 2004**

20 minute presentations, with 10 minutes for Q&A.

**May 4, 2004**

20 minute presentations, with 10 minutes for Q&A.

**May 11, 2004**

Final report due, 1 pm.

**Class Members**

| Name | Email | Phone/Other |
|---|---|---|
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**Project Management Tool of Potential Use?**

## Using Excel to Make Gantt Charts

A sample Gantt chart (.pdf format) made using Microsoft Excel appears in the figure which accompanies this document. If today's date were May 13, Task A would be behind schedule, Task B ahead and Task C right on schedule. The events marked by fat dots are milestones.

Gantt charts made with Excel are easy to update and maintain. Here's how to do it.

On a piece of scrap paper, make a list of tasks and assign each task tentative start and stop dates (or durations) and the people responsible for the task. Also list important milestones and their dates. If you have more than 15 or 20 tasks, split your project into main tasks and subtasks, then make an overall Gantt chart for the main tasks and separate Gantt charts for the subtasks which make up each main task.

Decide what resolution to use in the timeline. For projects of three months or less, use days, for longer projects use weeks or months, and for very short project use hours. For these instructions, we will assume you have chosen a resolution of days.

Fire up Excel. Under Page Setup, select landscape orientation, and then select the options to center the chart horizontally and vertically on the page. Also under Page Setup, activate the "fit to one page" button. (Note that if the text comes out too small, you may have to print your chart on two pages and paste together. Even better, adjust the resolution of your date scale or drop less important tasks to make your chart fit comfortably on one page.) Still under Page Setup, set header and footer to be blank. (It's better to write the title right on the spreadsheet rather than use the header for the title. Finally, under Page Setup, turn off the option to print gridlines.

Set up the cells. You can use the sample (found elsewhere on this web page) as a guide. Use the border command to draw boxes around the appropriate cells. Enter your scheduling data. To make the gray bars which indicate length of task, select the appropriate cells, then the fill command (one of the buttons near the top).

As the project progresses, fill in the gray bars with black to denote the fraction of a task that is complete.