OVERVIEW

Could you, or your organization, make use of **free policy analysis services** from a team of UC Berkeley Goldman School of Public Policy (GSPP) graduate students? Free policy consulting services are offered and supervised as part of the annual GSPP graduate workshop class Introduction to Policy Analysis (IPA). This memo is an invitation to you to submit a proposal.

The IPA workshop course has small teams of GSPP first-year graduate students, supported by faculty coaches, applying the tools of policy analysis to policy problems and opportunities confronting public and nonprofit agencies. Workshop clients have included city, county, state, and federal government departments, regulatory agencies, public service non-profits, consortia of service providers, policy analysis organizations, and, occasionally, private-sector businesses.

Projects arise from **problems, innovations, or opportunities** that have **significant impacts for the general public or the public sector**, for which **the client has (partial) responsibility**, and where **the path forward is not yet clear**. The student teams identify and weigh policy options to generate analysis and recommendations that they present to the client orally and in written reports.

The next IPA workshop course will be offered in the spring 2017 semester. Projects will run from late January through early May. We will be gathering proposals this fall with the goal of finalizing our list of projects in mid-November. Projects take some time to develop, so we encourage you to start thinking about this now and spreading the word to other organizations that might value our students’ assistance. Might you, or someone else in your organization or another organization, benefit from having a team of bright and dedicated graduate students analyze and develop recommendations regarding a policy decision, a programmatic choice, or an implementation problem?

WHAT OUR STUDENTS CAN DO

Admission to the Master of Public Policy program is very competitive. Our graduate students have strong undergraduate academic records and years of work experience under their belts. Before IPA, they will complete core courses in microeconomics, statistics, political analysis, legal analysis, and management, and will receive training in a systematic analytical approach to problem-solving for the public interest.

The IPA workshop provides MPP students the opportunity to apply their analytic training to real-world policy problems and opportunities. The course is one of four taken in the spring semester of the first MPP year. Over the three months, each student will spend approximately 80-120 hours on their IPA project, which
translates to roughly 300 to 450 hours per team, depending on whether there are 3 or 4 (or occasionally, 5) students on the team. IPA team members are expected to act professionally, to keep confidences, and to be respectful of people’s busy schedules. The IPA faculty coaches, Jane Mauldon ([jmauldon@berkeley.edu]), Amy Lerman ([alerman@berkeley.edu]), and Mia Bird ([miabird@berkeley.edu]), meet with each team about once every ten days, or more often as needed.

The final products are two: a rigorous and well-written project analysis, and an oral presentation of findings given at GSPP during class time in early May. Clients are invited to attend these presentations and offer comments. In addition, clients often invite student teams to present their results to their organizations, an opportunity that students generally welcome. The deadline for the final report to clients is the middle of May.

**IDEAL PROJECTS**

An ideal IPA project will include two or three key features:

- **It is relatively narrow, though complex.** We generally find that targeted projects which present interesting problems are more satisfying to both clients and teams than projects which are broad and analytically simple.

- **It is centered on a question (or questions) of policy choice or evaluation, implementation strategy, or options for program innovation or improvement.** Projects have come from: 1) public agencies looking to set policies; 2) advocacy organizations who wish to understand which among possible specific policies to advocate; and 3) non-governmental organizations that want to know how best to deliver services. Some successful projects have concerned organizational strategy. Occasionally we have taken other types of projects, as long as they had a strong analytic element.

- **The way forward is not clear at the outset.** The projects ask students to explore the advantages and drawbacks of a set of options, and to recommend one of them. In the process, students will encounter the thought-provoking conflicts and tradeoffs that are at the heart of policy design and implementation. Having to make a choice imposes intellectual discipline on the student team and motivates creativity in trying to find the most acceptable alternatives.

- **Excellent projects often call for a careful analysis of uncertainty** attached to the data describing the extent of, causes of, or projected effects of a policy choice. Students explore how to make the best use of information that is always incomplete and, quite often, inaccurate.

Circumscribed complexity, tradeoffs among policy or programmatic choices, and uncertainty about the effects of choices are the hallmarks of interesting policy problems that GSPP students can help your organization understand and resolve.
THE STUDENT TEAMS

In mid-December the IPA faculty assembles 3- or 4-person student teams for about 25 projects that, based on student preferences, have been selected from the full Project Menu of about 30 client proposals. For projects that are selected, teams will initiate contact with clients at the start of the spring semester (mid-January) and are fully engaged in their projects by February. Projects wrap up in early May. Instructors meet with each team on a regular schedule of about once every 10 days, or more often as needed.

The student groups produce two final products: a rigorous and well-written project analysis, and an oral presentation of findings given at GSPP during class time in late April or early May. Clients are invited to attend these presentations and offer comments. In addition, clients often invite student teams to present their results to their organizations, an opportunity that students generally welcome.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF A CLIENT

We rely on our IPA clients to actively engage with student teams. We ask each client to meet with their student team early in the semester -- in mid or late January or, at the latest, early in February -- and every two weeks (more or less) thereafter. At the first meeting, the client will explain the problem, suggest sources of information, and facilitate access to data and to others that students should talk to (interviewing within organizations and efficiently using information in problem analysis are two skills addressed in IPA). Finally, we expect that clients will read the final report and provide feedback to the students and the faculty advisor, as well as complete a brief evaluation of the overall IPA experience. Of course, many clients have much more interaction than this, sometimes meeting weekly with their student groups, but this is not required.

To prevent misunderstanding down the road, let us mention two hazards to effective relations between clients and project groups that we have observed in the past.

1. The client wants the group merely to gather information (i.e., act as a glorified research assistant) rather than synthesize information and make recommendations. We avoid projects that involve little more than collecting survey data, program descriptions, or information about possible funding sources. To put it another way, it is best to think of members of the project team as “consultants” with a fair degree of professional and analytical autonomy.

2. It sometimes happens that a client has a preferred solution to some problem and urges it upon students, either explicitly or implicitly. It is vitally important that clients bring an open mind to the project and take seriously the fresh perspectives that students, with the guidance of their faculty mentor, may offer.
NEXT STEPS

To get a project on the menu, please submit an IPA Proposal Form that describes the project, its significance, and the analytic questions students will investigate. Typical descriptions are one page in length. It is helpful if you briefly explain how your organization will make use of the students’ research and their final report. The earlier we receive project proposals, the better the chance the project will be included on the project menu and ultimately selected by our students.

You can download descriptions of projects from the Spring 2016 semester at https://gspp.berkeley.edu/assets/uploads/page/IPA_Project_Menu_Spring_2016.pdf. These descriptions emerged from a back-and-forth process of review and editing between IPA staff and project clients. Examples of completed projects from earlier years are also available upon request.

We do review on a first-come first-served basis, so the earlier we receive a project, the better the chance it will appear on the menu. However, we will give full consideration to any projects received by November 1. After that date, only projects that are needed to fill a gap in our project menu will be considered. We aim to finalize the project menu by the end of November so students can select projects.

IPA project teams are assembled by mid-December. Inevitably, a few of the proposals included on the menu do not receive enough student interest to be fielded. We realize that this is an inconvenience to clients who have worked to develop a proposal, and we do our best to select the menu to minimize the probability that a client will fail to garner a student team. But we are not able to avoid it entirely.

Teams initiate contact with clients at the start of the spring semester (mid-January) and by February are fully engaged in their projects, which wrap up in early May. Early in the semester each team develops a consulting agreement with their client to agree on the project scope of work and set other mutual expectations. At various points in the semester the team turns in outlines and drafts of the project report to their faculty coach, as well as meeting with their coach. The course concludes with the teams reporting their findings at GSPP during class time and, often, presenting to clients’ organizations as well.

If you have any questions about the process, please do not hesitate to contact us:

- IPA Course Coordinator: Lindsay Maple (lindsaymaple@berkeley.edu or 760-846-1876)
- Alternatively you can reach Jane Mauldon (jmauldon@berkeley.edu or 510-847-1619), Mia Bird at miabird@berkeley.edu, or Amy Lerman at alerman@berkeley.edu.

Finally, if the IPA workshop course will not meet your needs, please consider submitting instead an Advanced Policy Analysis project proposal. This is for a single, advanced student to focus more time (again, during Spring 2017) as a consultant to your organization (http://gspp.berkeley.edu/career-services/client-based-projects/advanced-policy-analysis-apa). You could also consider submitting a summer internship for a first-year GSPP graduate student for Summer 2017 (http://gspp.berkeley.edu/career-services/recruiting-services/internships).

Thank you for considering our policy analysis services. We wish you much success in the good work you do.