

**PUPOL 400: Public Policy Capstone Seminar**  
Hunter College: Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute  
Spring 2025  
Thursday 10am-12:45pm  
Classroom: Roosevelt House 304

Instructor: Elizabeth M. Marcello, Ph.D., Doctoral Lecturer  
Email: [elizabeth.marcello@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:elizabeth.marcello@hunter.cuny.edu)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Roosevelt House's Public Policy Capstone course serves as the culminating educational experience for students pursuing the 18-credit Public Policy minor and/or 27-credit certificate. During this semester-long seminar, each student will develop a substantive project that integrates the practical skills and topical knowledge learned in the Public Policy Program. The Capstone presents students the opportunity to investigate real-world policy questions and ideas, with the aim of discovering, developing, and refining individual policy interests and goals, mobilizing public opinion, and creating strategies for a policy 'win.'

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Each student will:

- Improve their ability to think critically about policymaking—understanding stakeholder interests, questioning assumptions, evaluating competing approaches, and assessing evidence and existing data to develop and articulate pragmatic recommendations for a real-world decision-maker;
- Develop creative, viable, reasoned, and ethical policy recommendations—grounded in critical thought, empirical analysis, and frameworks that address the public good—to solve dynamic and complex challenges that are often characterized by social, political, economic, scientific, or technological change in the contemporary world. We will read about and discuss the range of loci—local, municipal, state, federal and international—at which policy changes are made as well as the range of key stakeholders and agents of change, including elected representatives, legislative bodies, courts, community and social movement organizations and policy think tanks; and
- Communicate analyses and arguments about complex issues clearly and effectively, both in written assignments and oral presentations.

**GRADING and LATE POLICY**

I give you a grade to ensure that you complete course requirements, as a way to monitor the quality of your work, and to track how you progress as a student over the course of the semester.

Grades are a required component of any university-level course and are not meant to be something that keeps you awake at night or to be a form of undue punishment. That said, I expect all assignments to be handed in by the time-stamped deadline that I give you. This is particularly important in the capstone as the assignments build on one another.

All late assignments are subject to reduced points. Late assignments will be reduced by 3 points each day. Lateness of the final is subject to greater penalties. Please do not submit late work. If there is something affecting your ability to complete work on time, please contact me at the earliest sign of a problem so that we may discuss options to keep you on track and to make sure you don't lose any unnecessary points.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Both attendance and participation are essential components of this course. Discussion and group work are the “laboratory” for learning the application of the course content and therefore cannot be “made up.” Attendance is necessary unless extreme circumstances prevail.

You are allowed two absences during the semester. Any absences beyond this will result in your overall grade lowering by one step per absence (e.g., A lowered to A-, B+ lowered to B, etc.).

## **LAPTOPS**

Research shows that use of cell phones, laptops, and other devices causes distraction and impairs learning not only for the person using the technology but also for people near to the person using the technology ([Wood et al., 2012](#); [Carter, Greenberg, and Walker, 2016](#); [Hall et al., 2020](#)). Therefore, **no technology use of this kind is permitted during class sessions**. If you need to access readings, you may open your laptop but otherwise, **plan to take notes by hand** and bring hard copies of any notes you have taken to prepare for class.

Note: If you have accommodation needs around technology that have been registered with the Office of AccessABILITY, let me know.

## **COURSE FORMAT and REQUIREMENTS**

The Public Policy Capstone seminar consists of lectures, class discussions, outside speakers, and student presentations, all in support of students' successful completion and communication of individual policy projects

Your grade will be based on the following:

**1. *Class Participation - 10%***

Students are expected to read and discuss the readings on a weekly basis. That means coming prepared to engage the class, with questions and/or comments with respect to the reading. I encourage people to engage with questions and comments in class. I reserve the right to call on people in class. Simply coming to class and sitting quietly will merit any participation points. Part of being a good scholar and engaging in public policy questions is learning to express your ideas and assert yourself in discussions.

**2. *Bloggng - 5%***

Each student must write one blog post for the Public Policy Program website of approximately 500 to 750 words. The blog post can be either an op-ed analyzing a contemporary policy issue (it could include your Capstone topic) or an analysis and commentary piece on key points presented at a Roosevelt House public program. Blog posts allow students to communicate their own perspectives but are not punditry and must be evidence-based. Each student will be assigned their own deadline for this assignment.

**3. *Brief the Stakeholders and Brief the Decision Maker - 10%***

You are the Capstone Seminar's dedicated expert on your chosen research topic. Twice during the semester (5% each) you will be called upon to provide an attention-grabbing and compelling 3-minute briefing on recent developments pertaining to your policy issue. Included in this briefing should be timely updates and relevant insights on your policy issue. Doing well on these assignments requires ample practice on your part before the class meeting. (Timing yourself when you practice is strongly encouraged as is writing out your presentation, keeping in mind that you do not want your presentation in class to come across as "scripted" or rote.)

**4. *Public Policy Project - 75%***

Every assignment must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins on all sides. You may exercise your own creativity—and good judgment—in formatting your Public Policy Project report. Priority should be placed on communicating clearly and effectively. All written work must adhere to APA or Chicago Manual of Style citation guidelines, and should be consistent.

**Research Question Memo (5%)** – You will be graded on your research question and a short explanation of its significance, in addition to how well you communicate your ideas in single-page memo form. Professional communication requires one to know their audience and write accordingly.

**Research Proposal & Methodology Memo (10%)** – This 3-5-page memo will serve as your roadmap for the semester. Considerations include a policy landscape analysis, temporal considerations, stakeholder identification, potential empirical work, and qualitative and/or quantitative data analysis. Included will be a thoughtful articulation of research strategy and a clear plan for completing the Public Policy Research Project.

**Outline (10%)** – This 5-7 page document will serve as your roadmap for writing both the full Public Policy Project report and the more succinct Briefing Memo.

**Draft Paper (5%)** – This is a draft of your final report. It does not have to be complete, but it has to be well-written and include proper citations. The more you include in your draft, the more I can give you feedback on.

**Report (15%)** - The Public Policy Project report should do the following: 1) clearly articulate and frame a relevant policy question; 2) explain the significance of your question; 3) succinctly explain your methodology; 4) identify any assumptions and define any key concepts without jargon; 5) provide empirical evidence to support your assessment; 6) provide a path for implementation; and 7) address potential obstacles to implementation. The final report should be 5,000-6,250 words (roughly 20-25 pages), excluding figures, citations, and appendices.

**Citation Requirements for the Final Report:**

You must use at least 10 sources:

- two books;
- two academic journal articles;
- two policy papers or research reports (see below)
- two newspaper or magazine articles (see below)

Cite all sources properly, according to Hunter College Reading/Writing Center APA or Chicago Manual guidelines (see links to each under Required Course Readings and Materials, page 2).

The following are acceptable outside sources:

**Books:** The most relevant books are generally scholarly books published by university presses, or books in which the author provides citations for their evidence. Avoid polemics published by the popular press.

**Academic journal articles:** These articles should primarily come from public policy, economics, geography, political science, public administration, or other academic journals most relevant to your particular policy analysis. Avoid simply selecting the first article with the name of your policy issue or topic that comes up in a Google, Google Scholar, or JSTOR search; some articles are more relevant and/or authoritative than others. Good places to look for resources (books, journal articles, primary sources, and news or magazine articles) are citations from relevant policy analysis, reports, and articles.

**Research institution policy papers and reports:** Respected think tanks—such as the Brookings Institution, Urban Institute, Institute for Women’s Policy Research, Catalyst, National Women’s Law Center, Legal Momentum, RAND, the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), Cato, American Enterprise Institute and Resources for the Future (RFF)—publish scholarly articles and reports on contemporary public policy challenges. Also useful are government and nongovernmental reports from the US Congressional Budget Office, the US General Accounting Office, the President’s Council of Economic Advisers, the World Bank, and the United Nations, to name just a few.

**Primary sources:** Examples include public hearing transcripts, legislation, memoirs, interviews, etc.

**News or magazine articles:** You should use major national papers, such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal*, and major magazines, such as *The Economist*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, and *Foreign Policy*.

As a general rule, unacceptable sources include the following:

- Blogs
- Facebook and Twitter/X
- Web content not from any of the acceptable types of sources described above

There can be exceptions, such as when one is studying the use of technology for political organizing, citing a partisan or special interest group, or charting public participation and response to ongoing events. When in doubt, ask.

**An important note on citations:** A URL is not a citation, nor is a list of URLs a bibliography. You must use real citations and provide real bibliographies/works cited lists. The Purdue University Online Writing Lab has a particularly helpful guide for these things. (I use it, too!)

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/resources.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html)

**Briefing Memo (10%)** – This document serves as the “just the facts, ma’am” version of the full report—an executive summary. A busy decision-maker should be able to

understand your issue and your evidence-based recommendations in no more than two pages, including figures, citations, and appendices. The memo should be addressed to the key decision-maker you identify as having the ability and authority to effect change as you describe. A well-written briefing memo will serve as a useful tool if and only if it can quickly and easily provide the reader with the knowledge required to act in the moments before walking into a critical meeting on your topic.

**In-Class Final Presentation (10%)** - This 5-8-minute oral briefing is your opportunity to present your work as if the identified decision-maker is in the room. Following the briefing is a 2-minute period for questions and answers. You will be graded on your ability to professionally communicate your policy question, empirical work, findings, and recommendations.

**Public Presentation (10%)** – This end-of-semester celebration will be a chance to feature students' projects before an audience of faculty, friends, family and others. This will be an opportunity to showcase your learnings over the course of the semester and present your work as an "expert." The event will end with a festive lunch.

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Academic dishonesty is prohibited in The City University of New York. Penalties for academic dishonesty include academic sanctions, such as failing or otherwise reduced grades, and/or disciplinary sanctions, including suspension or expulsion.

Academic integrity is at the core of a college or university education. Faculty assign essays, exams, quizzes, projects, and so on both to extend the learning done in the classroom and as a means of assessing that learning. When students violate the academic integrity policy (i.e., "cheat"), they are committing an act of theft that can cause real harm to themselves and others including, but not limited to, their classmates, their faculty, and the caregivers who may be funding their education. Academic dishonesty confers an unfair advantage over others, which undermines educational equity and fairness. Students who cheat place their college's accreditation and their own future prospects in jeopardy.

See:

<https://hunter.cuny.edu/students/student-affairs/office-of-student-conduct/academic-integrity/>

## **MISCONDUCT**

In compliance with the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual

harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of sexual violence on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College.

a. Sexual Violence: Students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-610-7272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444).

b. All Other Forms of Sexual Misconduct: Students are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John Rose (jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123.

CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct Link:

<http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/la/Policy-on-Sexual-Misconduct-12-1-14-with-links.pdf>

### **AccessABILITY**

In compliance with the ADA and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational access and accommodations for all its registered students. Hunter College's students with disabilities and medical conditions are encouraged to register with the Office of AccessABILITY for assistance and accommodation. For information and appointment contact the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room E1214 or call (212) 772-4857 /or VRS (646) 755-3129.

### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

Session	Date	Topic	Deadline (Fridays at 11:59pm)
1	1/30	Introduction and Reflections on the Role of Government	
2	2/06	Public Policy Terminology and Big Issues	
3	2/13	Defining Policy Problems	Make an appointment with a librarian  Deadline to identify a faculty advisor

4	2/20	What To Do With Data and How To Make An Argument	Research Question Memo
5	2/27	Brief the Stakeholders Presentations	
3/06: No Class, classes follow a Wednesday Schedule			
6	3/13	Constructing Alternatives	Research Proposal and Methodology Memo
7	3/20	Evaluation and Outcomes	Public Policy Project Report Outline
8	3/27	Brief the Stakeholders Presentations	
9	4/03	Can Public Policy Make a Difference?	
10	4/10	Telling a Story	Submit draft paper  Make an appointment with instructor
Spring Recess: No Class			
11	4/24	No Class	Meet with instructor one-on-one
12	5/01	Impact Studies	
13	5/08	Final In-Class Presentations	Public Policy Project Report
14	5/15	Final Public Presentations	Briefing Memo

## COURSE READINGS and IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES

- **Session 1: Introduction to the Capstone Seminar and Reflections on the Role of Government**

Ansell, C., Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic as a game changer for public administration and leadership? The need for robust governance responses to turbulent problems. *Public Management Review*, 23(7), 949-960.

Chotiner, I. (2023, September 20). How the US Lifted Children Out of Poverty and Then Threw them Back Into It. *The New Yorker*.

- **Session 2: Public Policy Terminology and Big Issues**

“The Way Forward” in Stiglitz, J. E. (2012). *The Price of Inequality*. United Kingdom: Allen Lane.



“Introduction” in Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Lasswell, H. D. (1927). The Theory of Political Propaganda. *The American Political Science Review*, 21(3), 627–631. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1945515>

“From Topics to Questions” and “Finding and Evaluating Resources” in Booth, W., et al. (2024). *The Craft of Research*. (5th Edition). Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Visit from Librarian, Professor Stephanie Margolin

- **Session 3: Defining Policy Problems**

“Coming up Short” in Hacker, J. S., Pierson, P. (2016). *American Amnesia: How the War on Government Led Us to Forget What Made America Prosper*. United Kingdom: Simon & Schuster.

Britton-Purdy, J. We’ve been thinking about America’s trust collapse all wrong. *The Atlantic*. (2024, January 8).  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/01/trust-democracy-liberal-government/677035/>

“Part I” in “The Eightfold Path” in Bardach, E. and Patashnik, E.M. (2020). *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*. (6th Edition). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Make an appointment with a librarian; deadline to identify a faculty advisor.

Discussion of topics and research questions

- **Session 4: What To Do With Data and How To Make an Argument**

Fry, Hannah. (2021, March 22). What Data Can’t Do. *The New Yorker*.

Baum, S., and Akers, B. (2021). The Fallacy of Forgiveness: If the Feds wipe out student debt, who will benefit the most? *Education Next*, 21(1), 80-85.  
<https://www.educationnext.org/tailor-debt-relief-those-who-need-it-most-fallacy-of-forgiveness-forum/>

Zewde, N. and Hamilton, D. (2019, October 14). Cancel All the Student Debt: It’s About Economic and Racial Justice. Rewire News Group.

<https://rewirenewsgroup.com/2019/10/14/cancel-all-the-student-debt-its-about-economic-and-racial-justice/>

“Step 2: Assemble Some Evidence” in Bardach, E. and Patashnik, E.M. (2020). *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*. (6th Edition). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

“Making Good Arguments” and “Making Claims” in Booth, W., et al. (2024). *The Craft of Research*. (5th Edition). Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Research Question Memo Due

Discussion of public policy research questions, 1-minute elevator pitches

- **Session 5: Brief the Stakeholders Presentations**

- **Session 6: Constructing Alternatives**

“Step 3: Construct the Alternatives” in Bardach, E. and Patashnik, E.M. (2020). *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*. (6th Edition). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

“Devising Alternative Policy Options” in Meltzer, R. & Schwartz, A. (2019). *Policy Analysis as Problem Solving: A Flexible and Evidence-Based Framework*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

“Op-eds” in Pennock, A. S. (2023). *The CQ Press Writing Guide for Public Policy*. United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.

Research Proposal and Methodology Due

Be sure you have met with the librarian before today

Discussion of works in progress and op-eds

- **Session 7: Evaluation and Outcomes**

“How much time and money are New York City subway riders losing to delays?” (2017, October). *New York City Independent Budget Office*.

<https://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/we-are-being-held-momentarily-how-much-time-and-money-are-new-york-city-subway-riders-losing-to-delays-october-2017.pdf>

Hu, W., Ley, A. Castle, S. Anderson, C. (2023, December 2). Congestion pricing’s impact on New York? These 3 cities offer a glimpse. *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/02/nyregion/new-york-congestion-pricing-london-stockholm-singapore.html>

“Here’s how we’ll know that congestion pricing is working” (2024, December 9). *Streetsblog*.

<https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2024/12/09/komanoff-congestion-pricing-will-work-and-heres-how-well-know>

“Step 4: Select the Criteria” and “Step 5: Project the Outcomes” in Bardach, E. and Patashnik, E.M. (2020). *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*. (6th Edition). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Public Policy Project Report Outline Due

- **Session 8: Brief the Stakeholders Presentations**

- **Session 9: Can Public Policy Make a Difference?**

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “The Unacceptable Costs of Appeasing MAGA Nation” in *The New Republic*, December 21, 2020.

<https://newrepublic.com/article/160654/trump-supporters-white-supremacy-appeasement>

Selections from Alexander, M. (2012). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. United Kingdom: New Press.

“Manner of Walking Along a Roadway” in Rose, T. (2024). *Metaracism*. Basic Books: New York.

- **Session 10: Telling a Story**

Jorgensen, P.D., Song, G. and Jones, M.D. (2018). Public Support for Campaign Finance Reform: The Role of Policy Narratives, Cultural Predispositions, and Political Knowledge in Collective Policy Preference Formation. *Social Science Quarterly*, 99: 216-230.

Serwer, A. (2024, September 18). The real reason Trump and Vance are spreading lies about Haitians. *The Atlantic*.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/09/trumps-campaign-immigrants-springfield-ohio-haiti/679913/>

Su, Y. (2024, September 12). Beyond the Harris-Trump debate: How politicians use anti-immigrant rhetoric to mask systemic failures. *The Conversation*.  
<https://theconversation.com/beyond-the-harris-trump-debate-how-politicians-use-anti-immigrant-rhetoric-to-mask-systemic-failures-238851>

Draft paper due

Make an appointment with the instructor

- **Session 11: No Class**

Students meet with instructor for feedback on final papers

- **Session 12: Impact Studies**

Chapters 1 and 8 in Desmond, M. (2023). *Poverty, By America*. Crown: New York.

- **Session 13: In-Class Presentations**

Public Policy Project Report Due

- **Session 14: Final Public Presentations**

Briefing Memo Due