

The BS in Public Policy is a multidisciplinary program that emphasizes a variety of perspectives on public policy problems – economic, ethical, political, organizational, etc. Throughout their core and elective coursework, undergraduate students are introduced to many tools, methods, and approaches for understanding policy issues. At the conclusion of the program, students are presented with an opportunity to apply these skills to a policy question taken from the real world outside the classroom. The Policy Task Force is a *two-semester* capstone project in which teams of students formulate, analyze, and recommend policy options.

The Policy Task Force experience prepares students for various post-baccalaureate opportunities by requiring them to work in teams under real deadlines and with the same challenges in information availability that they are likely to discover in normal policy settings. It requires them to organize, lead, and cooperate on a complex task, and to constantly subject themselves to mutual and external evaluation and criticism.

POLICY TASKS

The Policy Task Force project is intended to provide practical hands-on experience in addressing a real policy problem. To the extent possible, a Task Force problem will be taken from a client who would benefit from the efforts of the project. Each problem will have a clearly defined audience, and an outside evaluator (either with the client organization or with experience and expertise in a problem area) will be sought to provide occasional oversight and feedback to student project teams, and to evaluate the final reports. As in actual government and business organizations, strict milestones and deadlines will be established and must be met.

INSTRUCTOR

The role of the instructor in the Policy Task Force is primarily that of a facilitator. The faculty member will provide a reasonable starting point for the student projects, including background information and readings, and some of the concepts and tools that might be appropriate. But students will incorporate techniques, questions, and perspectives, so the faculty member will serve largely as a guide: reminding students of the complexities of the problem, helping with organizational obstacles, and providing regular feedback and assessments of student and team performance.

GROUPS AND MEMBERS

Students will work in subgroups of 4-5 people, with an appropriate number of subgroups given the nature of the problem; typically, a total of about 15 students will be assigned to a problem (and usually 3-5 subgroups per problem). When possible, students will choose among the projects available for each iteration, but this will not always be possible (as in real life). Subgroups are likely to be formed along various dimensions of a problem, such as political, analytical, economic, etc. For this reason, it will be desirable to integrate the Policy Task Force project when appropriate with other capstone courses elsewhere at Georgia Tech through the subgroup process; for example, a policy project focusing on a project with an engineering component might bring together the efforts of policy majors with those of engineering students working on a related or coordinated capstone design project.

Each group will shape its own agenda, assigning milestone assignments such as draft reports. Each member of the group will write a substantive paper about the project; this paper will be presented and defended before the group and the instructor or outside evaluator. The objective for each group member is to develop and demonstrate through written and oral communications a broad understanding of the project task and specific expertise on at least one aspect of the policy question.

MILESTONES AND ASSIGNMENTS

All students will complete a short paper of 3-5 pages within two weeks of the beginning of the project, demonstrating their writing abilities and the possible need for assistance. Within a specified time (usually a few weeks), each project team will produce a work plan, identifying the specific tasks of each subgroup, a timeline for interim projects and reports. Each group will develop a working annotated bibliography that accumulates throughout the project. Each student will provide a preliminary draft of his or her individual report before the end of the first semester. Other members of the group, as well as the instructor and, for externally-derived projects an outside evaluator, will provide detailed comments.

During the second semester of the Policy Task Force, individuals will revise, extend, edit, and coordinate their individual reports to create a final report in which each student effort will constitute a chapter. During this phase students will discuss, reconcile, and negotiate as they identify various policy options and their consequences. At the end of the project the group will cooperate on writing a final chapter to their report that will convey their conclusions and recommendations. If a consensus is not attained, dissenting reports can be attached to the final report. Professional-quality writing, formatting, and presentation will be required. The final report will be delivered in a professional presentation to the client. Each project team also will prepare a poster presentation that will be displayed in an appropriate venue for comments and responses.

This course is an introduction to the public policy process in the United States. At its heart, the policy process is about combining individual preferences about a public problem into a collective decision that promotes the public interest. In this course we focus on the political aspect of that prospect: the traditions, institutions, and procedures by which our choices and values are aggregated into public decisions. Our focus is both on the “why” (models and theories about why the process works as it does) and the “how” (knowledge about how - as a citizen and a professional – you can be more effective as a policy analyst or advocate).

The course will incorporate many examples from real-world policy making, but this is not a casual survey of current events. Students are expected to understand the policy process and to approach actual policy issues with a critical (not cynical) perspective. After exploring what "political" and "public policy" mean we will then consider why some problems reach the public agenda, why some solutions are adopted and others rejected, and why some policies appear to succeed while others appear to fail. We will primarily examine policymaking at the national level, but we will look at examples at the state and local level as well.

Students will be expected to complete assigned readings presenting various concepts and models of policymaking. Lectures and classroom discussion will highlight important issues and controversies. Also, students will select a policy issue or area to focus on during the semester to assess the relevance of the general concepts to particular case studies, discussing how their case study is addressed through important stages of the policy process.

Suggested Course Outline

Introduction: What is “political” and what is “public policy”? What is “the policy process”?

Context and Structure of Policymaking

- The purposes of government: constitutional, political
- Policy goals: order, liberty, security, equity, efficiency, effectiveness
- Political goals: democracy, representation, fairness
- Markets, politics, and values
- Domestic and international policy

Models and Theories of the Policy Process

- Systems, frameworks, networks
- Individual decision making
- Groups
- Rational choice and game theoretic models

Policy Making Institutions

- Constitutions
- Federal branches
- Federalism

Problem Definition and Framing

- What is a “public problem”?
- Narratives and frames

Agenda Setting

Policy Adoption

- Legislative
- Regulatory

Budgeting

Policy Design and Implementation

Policy Evaluation and Analysis

Policy Advocacy (citizens, groups, experts)

- Communications
- Strategies