

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.