

Virginia Politics and Policy

Workshop Description:

What public policies will enable Virginia to flourish in the face of profound current and future challenges? How will coastal Virginia deal with rising sea levels? Will rural Virginia continue to get poorer while urban areas boom? Will public universities still be affordable for Virginia students? How can Virginia's economy diversify away from reliance on the federal government for jobs?

In this class, we will employ an open-inquiry approach to investigate three public policy problems in Virginia. This means that we'll choose which problems to focus on and then select content and activities for the class meetings that will help us learn about the problems. In other words, we'll write the syllabus together as we go. This way class time is focused on the topics we think are worth devoting a semester to understanding and analyzing. When you leave Batten, you will work on projects where there is no syllabus telling you what to learn about. Instead, you will have to take the initiative, create a plan, and become an autodidact, that is a self-teacher. You'll practice doing that here.

To successfully understand and address policy problems, we must acknowledge that policy making is a contact sport. In this class, we'll use academic frameworks to understand how policy makers are expected to behave and we'll meet the players personally to see how they cooperate and conflict over scarce resources. We'll ask them what role they play in the policy ecosystem and study why they are effective or ineffective. In the process, we'll learn what motivates them and who they fight for. In short, we'll see leaders in their element and reflect on what we see.

Finally, we'll blend our theoretical and practical knowledge by analyzing the problem using the policy analysis skills you also learned in *Introduction to Policy Analysis*. Much of your work will be in teams. Your team will define the problem having considered all the perspectives and recommend a course of action that will help Virginia overcome the challenges facing it both today and tomorrow.

Course Objectives: At the end of this class you will make progress in your ability to:

- Predict how the broad historical forces, institutional structures, and cleavages will shape public policy decisions in Virginia.
- Identify the important players in a policy domain, connect with them, and leverage them to become an expert on a particular policy problem.
- Develop and execute a plan/strategies for learning quickly about a new policy area.
- Work as a team to learn about, analyze, and propose solutions to a complex policy problem.
- Speak authoritatively about an important public policy problem(s) in Virginia and who constitutes the ecosystem surrounding the problem.
- Engage in reflective practices about your learning, your leadership, and the leadership of others.

- Recognize the important work of state and local governments, the people who work in it, and the impacted communities and individuals.

Course Overview:

Which challenges will we focus on this semester?

We'll decide as a class which three environmental challenges facing Virginia our teams will focus on. Our criteria for deciding include importance of the topic, accessibility to public officials, whether or not the topic is currently on the political agenda, ability to engage meaningfully in a semester, and the interest of the class. I am also open to other criteria.

What are we working toward?

Over the course of the semester your team will build a public policy document that summarizes and analyses your challenge. You will apply your policy analysis skills to this challenge, creating a document that communicates the research and thinking your team has done over the course of the semester. The document will be accessible and useful to policy makers working on your problem.

What are the advantages of an open inquiry approach?

When you leave Batten, you will work on projects where there is no syllabus telling you what to learn about. Instead, you will have to take the initiative, create a plan, and become an autodidact, that is a self-teacher. In this class, we will explicitly create that process and execute it. You and your team will learn how to pose good questions and find the people and documents that can help you answer them. After you do this, then you will reflect on what worked well and what can be improved so that next time, in your APP or in your job, you will be better at it.

What are the advantages of working in teams?

Teams exist because people can often accomplish more as group than they could individually. This is why every organization you will work for after Batten is organized into teams. Over the course of this semester you will only devote 45 class hours and 90 out of class hours to your project. That may sound like a lot but it is only three weeks of work in a professional setting. Working in a team multiplies the time, effort and skills that can be focused on your problem. Individuals can specialize in different areas (technical, political, legal, etc), the team can know more as a whole, and the problem is more likely to be effectively addressed. Of course, working in teams has drawbacks and creates its own work. We'll experience these tradeoffs and reflect explicitly on them over the course of the semester.

How will teams work?

Once the problems are finalized, the class will break up into teams. Ideally these teams will have a mix of strengths and backgrounds and be united by an interest in the problem itself. Your team will be responsible for organizing your process, assigning roles, and executing the

plan to complete your policy analysis. The only requirements are that there must be one team leader who has the final say on decisions. This leader will bear extra administrative and decision-making responsibilities, particularly communicating with me. How you divvy up particular tasks in pursuit of this goal is a team level decision. Early in the semester we will read some materials about teams to help you organize team roles and responsibilities so that we can begin moving quickly.

What will happen during each class?

Unlike most courses where the content for each class period is known months in advance, the content for most class periods will depend on the needs of each team, the needs of the class as a whole, and the learning opportunities in front of us. As you research you may identify knowledge, skills, or people that are particularly important for the team or class to understand. Bring these to the attention of your team leader and make the case for why group time or class time would be well spent on this idea or person.

Team leaders will meet with me on Mondays each week to hash out what content and activities will make the best use of class time. With four to five group members suggesting ideas, the ideas will quickly proliferate. “Pitch memos” will serve as quick ways to make your case for particular items that should make it onto the class agenda.

The following are a sampling of ways we might productively use class time.

Discussion of Background/Overview Readings: Some background information might be helpful for understanding the challenges and policy responses. As relatively new arrivals to the 229-year-old state, we will have a lot to learn about how history, political institutions, political dynamics, economic trends, and regional identities in Virginia are affecting the problem and those trying to respond to it. Readings may be a good way to help us quickly come up to speed.

Interviews: As you learn about the problem, you will quickly encounter individuals who can shed light on important aspects of the problem. You can help us learn about the issue practically by interviewing subject matter experts, public officials, interest groups, and other stakeholders during class. It is your responsibility to schedule and conduct these interviews. You should only use me in this process if I am able to make a connection or you need my gravitas to make the connection and/or land the interview.

Skill Development: As you work, you’ll realize you and your teammates are having trouble accomplishing certain tasks and need particular skills. Reflecting regularly on how the project is going will help you become aware of these needs. Being meta-cognitive about your work (that is thinking about your thinking) is a valuable skill in any setting. Teams are then responsible for enabling team members to learn relevant skills. Batten professors, readings from other classes a team member had taken, or other students and/or practitioners are good resources. Also, if you’re good at a crucial skill, propose setting aside some time to teach us about it.

Site Visits: Each group can propose site visits for the class to learn about the problem or the policy response to it. Funding for site visits is limited and class time is precious so choose

wisely. Team leaders will work with me to schedule these visits to maximize the return on our time. Ideal site visits will leverage the time of multiple teams by providing access to people, places, or events that each group will find valuable.

What will this experience mean to me personally?

At multiple points in the semester after you have completed various tasks, I will ask you to reflect on various aspects of your experience. During this course, you'll see your strengths and weaknesses as a learner, an analyst and a leader. You will also see strengths and weaknesses in your teammates, myself, the people we interview, and the people your problem affects. These are golden opportunities to become wiser about yourself and others. Reflective essays will help you capitalize on these opportunities.

Assessments & Assignments

Throughout the course you will be demonstrating your skills and knowledge about public policy, the process of learning about a policy problem in a team setting, and analyzing your particular problem. Assessment will help you understand how successful you are at achieving the objectives for the class, which after all are the reasons you should be enrolled. The specifics of each assessment are described on Collab alongside a rubric operationalizing the criteria.

Project:

Initial problem statement	
Ecosystems map	
Key aspects of the problem	(10%)
Scope of work	
Legislative and regulatory history	(10%)
Comparative analysis	(10%)
Action plan (individual)	(10%)
Two pager (individual)	(10%)
Final report	(20%)
Presentations	(10%)

Participation, small assignments & professionalism (20%)

- Making your group and the class better by suggesting and organizing classes around readings, interviews & site visits.
- Weekly memos answering three questions in a 1-page memo:
 - a) What did I do this week?
 - b) What is the plan for next week?
 - c) Are there any problems (group dynamics, or substantive) that I should know about?
- Reflections (3)

Participation: Effective participation includes being prepared for class and discussion, asking questions, answering questions, bringing related materials to the attention of the class,

and doing anything else that advances the agenda of learning the course material for the class as a whole.

Ineffective participation includes being unprepared for class, being absent or consistently arriving late, working on unrelated material during class time, failing to submit and/or make good faith efforts on reflection assignments, or performing any other behavior that is detrimental to the learning environment.

Course Plan

Meeting	Questions for the Day	In Class Tasks	Assignments
Week 1 August 30 th	<p>Why open inquiry learning?</p> <p>What challenges should we study?</p> <p>How should we organize our teams and our process for getting to the end goal?</p> <p>What do we want from a team?</p> <p>How will we organize our process?</p> <p>What skills and readings need to go on the agenda for class meetings?</p>	<p>Review course structure.</p> <p>Debate problem selection criteria.</p> <p>Discuss problem selection.</p> <p>Discuss team structures.</p> <p>Discuss process.</p> <p>Group meetings.</p> <p>Write formal team roles and policies.</p> <p>Write backwards timeline.</p>	<p>Write reflection.</p> <p>Write role pitch.</p> <p>Write topic pitch.</p>
Week 2 Sept 5 th	<p>Are there enduring questions about how politics or policy works that you think will be relevant to understanding your policy area?</p> <p>What interviews & or site visits do you need? Which ones rise to the level of class wide participation?</p> <p>How do I get interviews and make them useful?</p>	<p>Suggested readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - V.O Key, Virginia Chapter. - Teams. - Textbook. <p>Brainstorm and identify helpful interviews.</p> <p>Learn about interview best practices & networking in an organization.</p> <p>Practice and peer feedback on phone calls and outreach emails.</p>	<p>Begin executing research plan.</p>
Week 3 Sept 12 th	TBD		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initial problem statements due. - Ecosystems map due.

Week 4 Sept 19 th	Richmond Day	
Week 5 Sept 26 th	TBD	- Richmond Day Reflection - Key aspects of the problem due.
Week 6 Oct 3 rd	No class, work on assignments.	Scope of work due.
Week 7 Oct 10 th	TBD	Early feedback for team members.
Week 8 Oct 17 th		
Week 9 Oct 24 th		Legislative and regulatory history due.
Week 10 Oct 31 st		Comparative analysis due.
Week 11 Nov 7 th	Election Week	Action plan due.
Week 12 Nov 14 th	TBD	Two pagers due.
Week 13 Nov 21 st		Submit final report.
Week 14 Nov 28 th	Thanksgiving Break	
Week 15 Dec 5 th	Presentations	- Give presentations. - Submit final reflection.