

**The Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration  
Fall 2023**

**Course Number:** PPPA 6085

**Course Title:** Evidence Building in Government: Cultivating Learning Cultures in the Public and Nonprofit Sectors

**Course Description:** This course is designed to give students knowledge and skills to work effectively with the policies and requirements currently shaping the demand and supply for “evidence-based policymaking” in the public and non-profit sectors. The course content and exercises will develop students’ skills in leading change and developing organizational learning cultures, and using “Big Data” to build policy-relevant evidence.

**Prerequisites:** PPPA 6002 or equivalent basic course on research design and statistics

**Professor:** Dr. Kathryn Newcomer  
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Office hours: I am available to chat everyday, so please feel free to email me to tell me when you want to chat.

**Required Readings:**

Anthony S. Bryk, Louis M. Gomez, Alicia Grunow, and Paul G. Le Mahieu. 2016. *Learning to Improve: How America’s Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*. Harvard Education Press.

Newcomer, Kathryn and Nick Hart. 2022. *Evidence Building and Evaluation in Government*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage. **(Book will be provided first day of class and is on blackboard)**

Newcomer, Kathryn, Quentin Wilson and Allyson Criner Brown. 2022. *Engagement for Equitable Outcomes: A Practitioners' Playbook*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. **(Book will be provided first day of class.)**

Oliver James, Donald P. Moynihan, Asmus Leth Olsen, and Gregg G. Van Ryzin. 2020. *Behavioral Public Performance*. Cambridge University Press **(entire monograph on blackboard)**

Pahlka, Jennifer. 2023. *Recoding America: Why Government is Failing in the Digital Age and How We Can Do Better*. Metropolitan Books.

Matthew J. Salganik. 2018. *Bit by Bit*. Princeton University Press. (Book is **free online** at <https://www.bitbybitbook.com/en/1st-ed/asking-questions/linking/enriched-asking/>)

Colin Talbot. 2013. *Theories of Performance: Organizational and Service Improvement in the Public Domain*. Oxford University Press. **(entire book on blackboard)**

**The only book you need to buy or check out of a library is the Bryk et al book!**

The many academic articles, reports and other readings by a diverse set of authors are provided by the instructor on blackboard. Also see articles from the Center for Implementation at <https://thecenterforimplementation.com/our-resources>

### **Student Learning Objectives:**

Through course discussions, readings, and assignments, students will develop knowledge and skills to enable them to:

- 1) develop initiatives, programs and policies using principles of human centered design;
- 2) develop theory of change and program logic models;
- 3) inclusively engage with diverse stakeholders to lead change efforts, design programs and implement programs to promote equity;
- 4) work with stakeholders to develop organizational learning cultures;
- 5) develop learning agendas for public agencies;
- 6) understand the function and requirements of knowledge brokering to connect evidence producers and evidence users;

- 7) understand how to analyze digital services to ascertain public policy implementation issues;
- 8) understand and address the ethical considerations involved with using “Big Data;”
- 9) strategize to use “Big Data” to develop relevant evidence to inform public policy.

### **Method of Instruction:**

The environment in which public servants, contractors, and grantees conducting work for government has become more confusing, and even intimidating, as policymakers and commissioners of evaluation expect different types of “evidence,” and simultaneously employ different criteria in judging the quality of evidence. The theories of how to improve government performance through the use of “evidence,” and the practice on the ground are sometimes greatly disconnected. Thus, the lack of coordination in practice contributes to an inability to satisfy key goals of supporting accountability and improving performance, and limits the ability for evidence to be used to promote learning. These challenges and opportunities are explored by class participation in both in-class and written exercises.

### **Classroom Expectations:**

Higher education works best when it becomes a vigorous and lively marketplace of ideas in which all points of view are heard. Free expression in the classroom is an integral part of this process and works best when all of us approach the enterprise with empathy and respect for others, irrespective of their ideology, political views, or identity. We value civility because that is the kind of community we want, and we care for it because civility permits intellectual exploration and growth.

### **Respect for Diversity:**

It is my intent that students from all backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. I strive to create an inclusive classroom and present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity including gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture, and political affiliation. **Your suggestions on how to help me succeed with this are encouraged and appreciated.**

### **Acknowledging Historical Realities about GW:**

### GW and Slavery:

“Although additional work remains to be done, initial research into Columbian College [GW’s predecessor] clearly shows that the practice of slavery influenced the school from the president down to enslaved servants. The college was located in a slave-owning city, financed and led by slave owners and men who profited from the slave economy, educated pro-slavery students, and depended on the labor of enslaved people” ([library.gwu.edu/slavery-columbian-college](http://library.gwu.edu/slavery-columbian-college)).

### GW & Native American Lands

“George Washington University's Foggy Bottom Campus in downtown Washington, D.C. ... resides on the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Piscataway and Anacostan peoples. ... The District borders the confluence of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, a historic center of trade and cultural exchange between several tribal nations. For generations, the Piscataway and Anacostian Peoples have resided in this region and served as stewards of the local land and waterways” ([cipp.cps.gwu.edu/land-acknowledgement](http://cipp.cps.gwu.edu/land-acknowledgement)).

### **Assigned Readings:**

Assigned readings are selected to give students a representative sample of both the academic and professional literature, well as to expose them to the sorts of issues which arise in the context of government.

### **Assignments: Please bring all written assignments to class the day due, thank you!!**

**1. Class Participation: Attendance is required for successful completion of this course.** Students are expected to have completed required readings prior to the class meeting for which they are listed. Class discussion on the required readings will be expected, and small oral assignments regarding the readings will be provided for students to discuss in class several times. (20% of grade).

**NOTE: Due dates are firm for all written assignments, and late papers will be penalized by lower grades.**

**2. Equity Efforts Critique:** Students will review the social and racial equity assessment capacity/efforts in two federal, state or local government agencies. **Due December 12, 2023.** A template for the questions to address will be provided by the instructor and co-developed with the students. (35% of grade). Students will present a synopsis of their research in class via powerpoints and then in a written paper. Students may work in teams of two.

4. **Memoranda.** Three focused brief memoranda will be due and will be spaced out across the semester to address the topics addressed in class. Guidance on writing clear memoranda can be found on Blackboard. (45 % of grade). Students will be given the topics and intended audiences for each memorandum at least one week before each is due. The memoranda will be due on **Sept 19, Oct. 24 and Nov. 28.**

### **Class Schedule and Assignments**

#### **Session 1 (Aug. 29)**

##### **Introduction to the Course**

Readings:

Newcomer and Hart, Chapter 1  
Newcomer and Brass Chapter, on BB  
Urban Institute Paper on Structural Racism

#### **Session 2 (Sept. 5)**

##### **Theories of Performance in the Public Domain**

Readings:

Talbot book chapters 1, 2 and 3 on BB

#### **Session 3 (Sept. 12)**

##### **Inclusive Engagement of Stakeholders to Promote Equity**

Readings:

Newcomer, Wilson and Brown, Chapters 1- 4  
Scoring Federal Legislation for Equity (on BB)

#### **Session 4 (Sept 19)**

##### **Evidence-Building in Government**

## **Readings**

Newcomer and Hart chapters 2-3  
Cartwright chapters on Evidence-Based Policy on BB

### **Session 5 (Sept 26)**

#### **Developing Learning Agendas and Knowledge Brokering in Government**

Readings:

Newcomer and Hart chapters 4-7 on BB  
Olejniczak et al. article on BB

### **Session 6 (Oct. 3) NOTE: No class on Oct. 10**

#### **Leading Change in Public and Nonprofit Agencies**

Readings:

Newcomer, Wilson and Brown, Chapters 5-7  
Heath and Heath book chapters on BB  
Kee and Newcomer Book Chapters on BB

And Scan  
*Applying Design Thinking To Public Service Delivery*. The IBM Center for the Business of Government on BB and at <http://www.businessofgovernment.org/report/applying-design-thinking-public-service-delivery>

### **Session 7 (Oct. 17)**

#### **Developing and Sustaining Learning Networks**

Readings:

Bryk et al. book chapters 1-4

### **Session 8 (Oct. 24)**

#### **Developing and Sustaining Learning Networks , continued**

Readings:

Bryk et al. book chapters 5-7

**Session 9 (Oct. 31)**

**Performance Measurement Improvement**

Readings:

James et al. Monograph (*Behavioral Public Performance*)

**Session 10 (Nov. 7)**

**“Big Data” - What do we do with it?**

Readings:

Salganik book chapters 1 – 4  
Skim IBM Report on Big Data and Thick Data

**Session 11 (Nov. 14) NOTE: No class on Nov. 21**

**“Big Data” and Ethics in Research**

Readings:

Salganik book chapters 5-7

**Session 12 (Nov. 28)**

**Assessing Digital Services in Government**

Readings:

Pahlka book

**Session 13 (Dec. 5)**

**Class Overview and Student Presentations**

## **Policies in The Trachtenberg School Courses:**

1. Incompletes: A student must consult with the instructor to obtain a grade of I (incomplete) no later than the last day of classes in a semester. At that time, the student and instructor will both sign the CCAS contract for incompletes and submit a copy to the School Director. Please consult the TSPPPA Student Handbook or visit our website for the complete CCAS policy on incompletes.
2. Submission of Written Work Products Outside of the Classroom: It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that an instructor receives each written assignment. Students can submit written work electronically only with the express permission of the instructor.
3. Submission of Written Work Products after Due Date: Policy on Late Work: All work must be turned in by the assigned due date in order to receive full credit for that assignment, unless an exception is expressly made by the instructor.
4. Academic Honesty: Please consult the “policies” section of the GW student handbook for the university code of academic integrity. Note especially the definition of plagiarism: “intentionally representing the words, ideas, or sequence of ideas of another as one’s own in any academic exercise; failure to attribute any of the following: quotations, paraphrases, or borrowed information.” All examinations, papers, and other graded work products and assignments are to be completed in conformance with the George Washington University Code of Academic Integrity. See the GW Academic Integrity Code (<http://www.gwu.edu/~integrity>).
5. Changing Grades After Completion of Course: No changes can be made in grades after the conclusion of the semester, other than in cases of clerical error.
6. The Syllabus: This syllabus is a guide to the course for the student. Sound educational practice requires flexibility and the instructor may therefore, at her/his discretion, change content and requirements during the semester. Excused absences will be given for absences due to religious holidays as per the university schedule, but please advise the instructor ahead of time



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## University policies

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### **University policy on observance of religious holidays**

In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see “Religious Holidays” at [provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines](http://provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines)

### **Academic Integrity Code**

Academic Integrity is an integral part of the educational process, and GW takes these matters very seriously. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and in other ways outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity. Students accused of academic integrity violations should contact the Office of Academic Integrity to learn more about their rights and options in the process. Outcomes can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the University, including a transcript notation. The Office of Academic Integrity maintains a permanent record of the violation.

More information is available from the Office of Academic Integrity at [studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity](http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity). The University’s “Guide of Academic Integrity in Online Learning Environments” is available at [studentconduct.gwu.edu/guide-academic-integrity-online-learning-environments](http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/guide-academic-integrity-online-learning-environments). Contact information: [rights@gwu.edu](mailto:rights@gwu.edu) or 202-994-6757.

### **Support for students outside the classroom**

#### **Virtual academic support**

A full range of academic support is offered virtually in fall 2020. See [coronavirus.gwu.edu/top-faqs](https://coronavirus.gwu.edu/top-faqs) for updates.

Tutoring and course review sessions are offered through Academic Commons in an online format. See [academiccommons.gwu.edu/tutoring](https://academiccommons.gwu.edu/tutoring)

Writing and research consultations are available online. See [academiccommons.gwu.edu/writing-research-help](https://academiccommons.gwu.edu/writing-research-help)

Coaching, offered through the Office of Student Success, is available in a virtual format. See [studentsuccess.gwu.edu/academic-program-support](https://studentsuccess.gwu.edu/academic-program-support)

Academic Commons offers several short videos addressing different virtual learning strategies for the unique circumstances of the fall 2020 semester. See [academiccommons.gwu.edu/study-skills](https://academiccommons.gwu.edu/study-skills). They also offer a variety of live virtual workshops to equip students with the tools they need to succeed in a virtual environment. See [tinyurl.com/gw-virtual-learning](https://tinyurl.com/gw-virtual-learning)

### **Writing Center**

GW's Writing Center cultivates confident writers in the University community by facilitating collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations at all stages of the writing process. Working alongside peer mentors, writers develop strategies to write independently in academic and public settings. Appointments can be booked online. See [gwu.mywconline](https://gwu.mywconline).

### **Academic Commons**

Academic Commons provides tutoring and other academic support resources to students in many courses. Students can schedule virtual one-on-one appointments or attend virtual drop-in sessions. Students may schedule an appointment, review the tutoring schedule, access other academic support resources, or obtain assistance at [academiccommons.gwu.edu](https://academiccommons.gwu.edu).

### **Disability Support Services (DSS) 202-994-8250**

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. [disabilitysupport.gwu.edu](https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu)

## **Counseling and Psychological Services 202-994-5300**

GW's Colonial Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. [healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services](http://healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services)

## **Safety and Security**

In an emergency: call GWPD 202-994-6111 or 911

- For situation-specific actions: review the Emergency Response Handbook at [safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook](http://safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook)
- Stay informed: [safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed](http://safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed)

## **Out of Class Learning**

Average minimum amount of independent, out-of- class, learning expected per week: In a 15 week semester, including exam week, students are expected to spend a minimum of 5.5 hours of out-of- class work in addition to each class meeting, for a total of 112.5 hours total (counting the 2 hour class meetings).

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