To: Karen Stein
From: Jonathan Justice, Andrea Sarzynski, Anthony Middlebrooks
Date: December 31, 2011
Re: 2012 Instructional Improvement Grant Proposal—UAPP 325

Enclosed herein is our proposal for a 2012 Instructional Improvement Grant to Support Research and Scholarship Intensive Courses for Undergraduates. We appreciate your consideration.

Applicant Information

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Department chair's letter of support: attached separately.

Course Information

1. We propose to substantively redesign the following currently offered course:

UAPP 325 Public Policy Analysis (3 cr.)

Introduction to the basic principles and concepts of policy analysis. Practice application through problem solving and critical examination of analyses conducted by prominent research groups within the field as well as through case study problem-solving.

2. Expected enrollment limit per course offering: 30

3. We propose a substantial revision of the course during Summer 2012, for implementation in Fall 2012. The course as offered now (a copy of the syllabus for Fall 2011 is attached) serves to introduce students to the core research and analysis skills required for the conduct of professional policy analysis. It is constrained by the newness of the Public Policy major, for which it is a core requirement, and by the dearth of appropriate course materials. Reflecting the early start-up of

the Public Policy curriculum, the course has been taught in a fashion that reflects our inability to presume prior knowledge of public-finance and welfare economics concepts, statistics, or even the public policy process. We have therefore adapted a skills-focused course design and textbook used by the MaxwellSchool at SyracuseUniversity primarily for a freshman-level course (although Maxwell also uses the same text, with supplements, for a 300-level policy analysis course).

This has been a reasonable stopgap solution, but the rapid development of the Public Policy program and our experience to date with the course have by now created an opportunity to take it to the next level. The course and materials as currently designed are effective as a first pass over these topics but do not sufficiently engage students in the scholarly process. Students do not become fully fluent in basic research terminology or the logic of research design. Students are not as well prepared to translate findings from existing policy evaluation research into their own projects as we feel they can potentially be.

We propose therefore to redesign the course and develop suitable course materials to supportthe continuing development of the larger Public Policy curriculum and the needs of students majoring in Organizational and Community Leadership (OCL), and to better prepare our undergraduate students for excellence in both graduate study and policy work. As the program matures and as part of the redesign, we will enforce a prerequisite requirement for UAPP 110, our introductory course covering public policy and the public policy process. This will free up instructional space in UAPP 325 for more extensive treatment of economics and market-failure concepts as well as key statistical tools. Our review of available texts has led us to conclude that it makes more sense to develop our own materials. The Maxwell text is too basic for our needs going forward, in addition to being somewhat dated and going out of print. Available texts other than the Maxell book tend to be targeted to graduate students, presuming more background in economics and statistics than we can reasonably expect from undergraduates, and/or to emphasize economic or social theory at the expense of the fundamental research skills we need our students to acquire *and practice* in the course.

The redesigned course will broadly resemble the current version in its general approach. The course trains students to identify and solve public policy problem, and emphasizes training in hands-on skills of doing policy research. Over the course of the semester, students are exposed to various skills and analytical tools in a general sense, and then are asked to apply their knowledge to solve a public problem of their choosing. The final project for each student builds on the results of a series of modules covering related skills needed for policy research. During each module, students work collaboratively on practice exercises, and use what they learn from the collaborative exercises in developing their individual material for the modules.The skills include identifying and gathering data, performing basic data manipulation, collecting data through interview and survey techniques, evaluating data and information, applying systems thinking, evaluating political contexts, anticipating implementation problems, and communicating their analysis. By the end of the semester, the students have prepared an abbreviated policy analysis on their topic, written as a memo for a policy maker, as an opinion article for a newspaper, or orally presented as if to a stakeholder group.

In essence, this is a course in applied social-scientific research design and methods for public policy applications and issues The redesigned course and materials will retain the focus on public policy issues, however we will enhance treatment of the logic and skills of applied social (or socio-technical) research, with increased depth in the treatment of appropriate explanatory logics and theories.

We propose to develop new primary course materials that would elevate the readings and make them more accessible for undergraduates than the texts currently on the market. The course materials would retain a focus on primary knowledge and skills development, as described above, but add segments explicitly on the breadth and purposes of scholarship, the nature and validity of evidence, research design and the use of research in policy analysis and its broader applicability and value to society. We also recognize that the existing course materials do not sufficiently explain the theory behind policy problems and their analysis, such as market and governmental failures. We propose to add a segment on policy theory and how the application of policy theory directs the analytical methods used to solve public problems.

We propose to prepare the course materials and associated assignments during summer 2012 as a series of modules that function independently and build upon one another, allowing students to both engage with individual concepts and see the larger process. The course materials would be ready for implementation in fall 2012. We will test the materials again in spring 2013, after which we will suitably revise or extend the materials. We may at that time approach a publisher.

The redesigned course will further the following general education goals of the University:

1. *Attain effective skills in (a) oral and (b) written communication, (c) quantitative reasoning, and (d) the use of information technology.* Development of these core skills is at the heart of the course. Students will practice using IT to acquire data and secondary analyses. They will then use the data as material for basic statistical analyses, which in turn will be part of their written and oral analytic presentations.

2. *Learn to think critically to solve problems.* The central logic of the course design is for students to practice key skills of identifying and solving public policy problems.

3. *Be able to work and learn both independently and collaboratively.* Most of the graded work will be individual projects, but the course design will also include collaborative exercises. The final project for each student builds on the results of a series of modules covering related skills needed for policy research. During each module, students work collaboratively on practice exercises, and use what they learn from the collaborative exercises in developing their individual material for the modules.

4. *Engage questions of ethics and recognize responsibilities to self, community, and society at large.* While the course will not have a module or chapter titled "ethics," we emphasize the ethics of doing research – avoiding bias, acknowledging errors and limitations, respect for human subjects, etc. – throughout the course. Because public policies by definition tend to affect large numbers of people, often through coercive means, ethical competence is in fact a key policy skill. We therefore call students'

attention to the ethical dimensions of every part of the analysis process, as well as to the ethical balance of being a professional analyst even while working for decision makers who may have ideological or other biases.

5. *Understand the diverse ways of thinking that underlie the search for knowledge in the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences.* Policy analysis is by its nature an integrative form of research, often involving a variety of physical as well as social science research, both basic and applied. We emphasize this in the course, and students may choose to develop projects that draw on a variety of fields of interest to them.

6. *Develop the intellectual curiosity, confidence, and engagement that will lead to lifelong learning.* The course aims to help students understand that the techniques of science are in fact learnable skills, which they can continue to practice in their future lives, whether as professional analysts or as engaged citizens.

7. *Develop the ability to integrate academic knowledge with experiences that extend the boundaries of the classroom.* This will be accomplished through the basic course requirement that every student conduct an empirical investigation into a policy problem of his or her choosing.

9. *Understand the foundations of United States society including the significance of its cultural diversity.* The design of policy solutions – a core requirement of the course – requires an understanding not just of human behavior and the physical environment, but also of the institutional context within which policies are formulated and implemented. One of the course's modules in fact focuses on performing an empirically based analysis of the political and administrative feasibility of proposed policy solution.

4. Because the final project requirement within the course is the production of an original research product in the form of a policy analysis, we intend to emphasize primarily the third student learning goal: "Students will create an original scholarly or creative project." We should note that the project will be developed in stages over the course of the semester, as students work through the several staged modules of the course, and that the final product may be a one- or two-page memorandum and/or a five-minute presentation. This reflects the needs of the public policy field, namely to condense research to meet the needs of busy decision-makers. The student, however, will have done all of the research work that would normally go into a much longer academic paper. It is in fact an additional level of challenge, not an easy way out, for students to figure out how to condense a semester's work into such a short format.

In the course of the semester, students will also learn about the role of scholarship in society and work through the key elements of the scholarly process. (Although it is not a central object of the course, we work to help students understand that although the nature of the problems to be solved differs, the fundamental logics of argument and evidence, and cause and effect, are the same for applied and organizational research as they are for scholarly work.)

Alignment with UD / College Strategic Initiatives

Of the three strategic initiatives, the course will most immediately advance The Engaged University, promoting intellectual and civic engagement among students and faculty. Many students in the Public Policy and OCL programs come to us already motivated to civic engagement. The course equips these students with the analytic, research, and communications

skills that will enable them to be successful in their civic pursuits. Others may be interested but reluctant to engage, due to lack of skills or confidence in their skills. One element of the course design we hope to retain and strengthen is the confidence and therefore predisposition to engagement that comes from successfully practicing the basic skills of researching, formulating, and presenting a policy argument. In fact, the intent of our course redesign is to increase rigor in service of the current course text's concern for "good citizenship: public policy skills in action."

The course requires students to develop a project based on their own civic interests, in the context of contemporary public policy concerns and political environments, and to work in precisely the way they would work for an actual decision-making client. They have to identify a client, understand the client's needs and preferences, find information, contact and interview relevant individuals in the real world, and integrate library and empirical research into a solution, which they must then present. One outcome we intend is that once having done this in the course, students will have the confidence to do it again outside the classroom. Another is that they will know how to do a good job in those real-world applications, of course.