

University of Montana
PUAD 531: Introduction to Public Policy
Department of Public Administration & Policy
Fall 2019: Online

Instructor Information

Three (3) credit hours

Classroom: Online

Instructor: Dr. Sara Rinfret, Department Chair/MPA Director

Professor's Office: LAW 146

Email: sara.rinfret@umontana.edu (email is the most reliable way to contact me); allow for 24 hours for a response

Office Phone: 406-243-4702

Office Hours: In-person or give me a call: Tuesdays (11:00a.m.-noon.); Wednesdays (9-10a.m.); or by appointment

Communication with the Professor

My approach is to be responsive to student inquiries. I can be reached via email from 8a.m.-6p.m. (M-F) for course inquiries. Please allow for up to 24 hours for a response. Unless an emergency, student email inquiries sent over the weekend, will be addressed on Mondays.

Course Description

This is an elective course for the University of Montana's Master of Public Administration Program and required course for our department's graduate certificate in public policy. This course will provide insight into the study of policymaking in the United States. We are typically taught policy is made in a rational or linear fashion, and if it is not, then it should be. Our course is intended for students who are interested in public policy, how it is created, implemented, and evaluated (e.g. the public policy cycle). We will evaluate a variety of substantive policy areas, and enhance your public policy skills along the way.

Expectations for Student Learning for this Course and the University of Montana's MPA Program

The course objective is to critically think about and understand the premises of public policymaking in the United States. By the end of the semester students in this course should be able to engage and understand the following learning objectives:

- Understand the basic nature of the policy process (often called the stages heuristic approach)
- Explore and recognize how policy interacts with the broader social, political, and ethical environment
- Develop policy research skills and improve writing, speaking, and analytical capabilities
- Apply policy theory to real-life policy debates
- Understand and develop plausible solutions for a myriad of policy issues in the United States
- Investigate the role that public administration plays in policy implementation
- Increase our understanding of the diversity of opinions and perspectives
- Evaluate the role of value neutral and value laden policymaking decisions

MPA Portfolio

If you are using any of the class assignments for your final MPA portfolio, it is your responsibility to keep track of individual grades and professor feedback. Use your computer's "snipping tool" to capture graded feedback and save with your files. MPA Portfolio requirements can be found using this [link](#).

Required Course Readings & Materials

1. Moodle Required Readings – noted with an asterisk (*) in the course schedule.
2. Rinfret, Sara, Pautz, Michelle and Denise Scheberle's. 2018. *Public Policy: A Concise Introduction* (Sage).
3. Watch and listen to weekly professor updates, pod lectures, and podcasts
4. **If a citation is missing in a Moodle reading, please just cite the title of the reading and the week in Moodle.**

Note: apologies if quality of scans are poor, let me know, and I will do my best to address.

For students interested in free books for this course, I suggest using the university's [inter-library loan](#) – great way to decrease costs. You request the book via inter-library loan for the semester. Let me know if you need help with this.

Course Expectations

The following items provide explanations for course expectations.

Using Moodle:

This is an online course, each student is required to check our course site once per day. Here is the link for [Moodle access](#).

Weekly Updates & Lectures:

Each week, students are provided a weekly update and a voice automated pod lecture from the professor. Updates are intended to be short, provide feedback, and overview of any assignments due for the week. Lectures are longer and dive into the materials for each week. ***If not already posted, weekly updates and lectures will be published no later than Monday evening of each week – this is to provide timely information for the class.***

Course Grading & Drafts:

Please allow for up to 7 full business days after the due date to receive a grade. All grades will be recorded via Moodle gradebook. Each assignment will use a rubric. *If the rubric feedback is not enough, please let the professor know.* Students can submit drafts of assignments via email to the professor before turning in any assignment this semester. However, please work with the [UM Public Speaking and Writing Center](#) before doing so. The professor will only read one draft per assignment. These must be emailed to the professor at least 72 hours in advance. Students can locate the gradebook by clicking on the tools icon at the top of the screen to find your list of grades.

Help with Technology:

Please make sure that your Internet browser settings meet the requirements to be Moodle compatible. Call UM Online by phone, (406) 243-4999 or email umonline-help@umontana.edu if technological problems arise. There is no on-call assistance during nights and weekends. For a total Moodle system failure, students will be sent an email by the University of Montana. Y

Firing Option:

Working in groups can be difficult. Each group reserves the right to use the firing option. For underperforming team members, a group can fire a team member after first providing a written warning and consultation with the professor. If the performance does not improve after the warning, the group can fire their teammate. Fired students will then have to conduct an additional research project on their own in addition to any remaining deliverables.

Guidelines for Written Work:

All written assignments should meet and use following criteria:

1. All work must be typed, double-spaced, utilize 12 point font, and have one inch margins.
2. Citations should follow a proper style guidelines such as, MLA, Chicago, or APA – pick what works for you (in-text citations and a reference page are necessary)
3. Assignments are due on the date/time listed in the course schedule; late assignments will not be accepted.

4. All assignments must be turned in electronically via Microsoft Word. If the instructor cannot open the document, the student will not receive a grade. Submission of assignments via e-mail will not be accepted unless specific arrangements have been made.
5. Student collusion is not allowed for individual assignments and will be treated as an act of plagiarism.

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Students are evaluated according to their performance in the following areas: 1. policy skills assessments; 2. discussion forums; and 3. final semester project.

Policy Assessments (10 points apiece x 3 = 30 points possible):

Students select, from the list below, three policy assessments they want to tackle. If a student completes all four, the top three highest grades will be recorded.

Skills Assessment Option 1: Understanding the Policy Process Model (links to week 2 readings)	Objective: Select a federal policy (e.g. Clean Air Act) (your choice) and trace it through the stages of the policy process model? What are the limitations of this approach? What role does the bureaucracy play?
Skills Assessment Option 2: Submitting a Public Comment and Reading a Federal Rule (links to week 4 readings)	Objective: You have been asked by your agency's director to examine the comments for this federal rule and explain to your organization why it is valuable to submit a public comment. What approach do you take to explain and why?
Skills Assessment Option 3: Cost Benefit Analysis (links to week 6 readings)	Objective: EPA Administrator Wheeler has asked his agency to revamp how they conduct cost benefit analyses to become more transparent. You have been hired as an outside consultant due to your expertise in conducting CBAs. What recommendations to you suggest for Administrator Wheeler?
Skills Assessment Option 4: Implicit Bias (links to readings in week 8)	Objective: Take 2-3 of the implicit bias tests (social). What are the connections between your implicit bias results and your own assessment of the role of race and the reality of crime in the US?

These assignments are always due at 11p.m. on Sundays (see course schedule) and should be **one**-page (single-spaced) full-sentence [outlines](#). Each outline should be organized using the following criteria:

1. Answer the objective (5 points possible)
 - a. Explain/answer the objective for the week, using bullet points, and citing evidence from readings (your starting point). Students are encouraged to conduct their own outside research to provide additional support in their analysis to address the question/objective at hand.
2. Limitations & Recommendations (3 points possible)
 - a. In addressing the question for the week, what challenges and questions did you encounter? Explain in 1-2 bullet points.
 - b. Follow writing guidelines (2 points)

Note: You do not need to re-state the question for the week. Students that do not use an outline format will receive zero points for this assignment. This assignment pushes students to write in a clear and concise fashion – an expectation for public policy professionals.

Applied Learning Discussions (10 points apiece x 5 graded weeks = 50 points possible):

This course has six total discussion weeks that link to course readings and an applied discussion topic. Week 1 and Week 15 discussion will be an assigned date (your choice) and conducted via **zoom**. The remaining four discussion

weeks will be completed via the discussion tab in Moodle. Due to the amount of students in our class, students have been divided into two groups.

Discussion Topic 1: Student Introductions (Week 1) (not graded, but required)	<i>Students will sign up and convene Zoom group sessions with the professor and fellow classmates. Review Zoom's getting started page</i>
Discussion Topic 2: Immigration and Federalism	<i>Student Role Options: Agency managers or policy staff</i>
Discussion Topic 3: Federal Tax Policy	<i>Student Role Options: Agency manager or policy staff</i>
Discussion Topic 4: School Choice and Education Policy	<i>Student Role Options: Agency managers or policy staff</i>
Discussion Topic 5: Environmental Policy and the Climate	<i>Student Role Options: Agency managers or policy staff</i>
Discussion Topic 6: Final Presentation Policy Forum (Week 15) (links to final WPP paper)	<i>Student Role Options: select your designation time slot</i>

Voluntary Off Week Discussions: For students that would like to pose questions during the weeks we do not have mandatory discussions, there is a space to do so. These are open for the *entire* class and not graded to discuss course content. Questions about assignments should be directed to your professor.

Please read applied learning discussions instructions carefully:

- For discussion topics 2-5, the class is organized by two distinct roles - **agency manager** and **policy staff**.
- *Details for Agency Manager:*
 - o Each student will serve as an agency manager once. As the agency managers, you “add a new topic” and pose your very short video directive/question (30 seconds) to your policy staff based upon the readings by 11p.m. on Monday. This video question should be labeled with a number and title (e.g., Question 1: Cost Benefit Analysis). It is the student’s responsibility to post on time and failure to post your video question by 11p.m. on Mondays will result in zero points and forfeit your obligation to serve as an agency manager for the semester.
 - o Keep in mind each week we have 3-4 agency managers. You need to correspond via email (firstname.lastname@umontana.edu) before posting your video question with the other managers so there is no overlap. As one of the agency managers, you **only** manage and engage in your own topic/thread for the week. You keep the conversation going by asking additional questions.
- *Details for Discussion Policy Staff:*
 - o If you are not the assigned agency manager, you are a policy staff member and must respond to at least two of the question threads posted by your manager between Tuesday-Friday. The discussions should be ongoing and not occur all on one day. The goal is for you, as the policy staff member, is to post at least 4-5 total times across week. **Our goal is quality, not quantity.**

Note: You cannot see each other’s posts until you post yourself (sometimes there is a delay in Moodle)

Evaluative Criteria:

A Range: Agency manager(s) posts **one** of their own discussion video question (30 seconds or less) that directly relates to the reading for the week by Monday, 11p.m. and actively engages with classmates in discussions about their question (make sure your questions are not the same as the other agency managers for the week). *The question presented is clearly one question, not multiple questions.* The agency manager(s) have also demonstrated preparedness by reaching out to other leaders before posting questions to avoid overlap. The discussion leader(s) does not have to respond or engage in the other questions for the week, but should oversee their own question and respond promptly in a professional manner to policy staff posts. The agency leader manager not have to respond to every discussion post. Instead, the agency manager thoughtfully engages across the week.

Policy staff respond to **at least two** of the questions posted by the discussion leaders and actively engages with classmates in the discussion forum. These responses are clearly articulated with correct grammar and spelling. Such responses do not state, "I completely agree." The idea is that you pose additional questions and provide thoughtful questions for your classmates. This means that the student clearly uses readings to answer and conveys this in 100-200 words or less [instructor will monitor]. *These responses are made early (by Wednesday of each week)/ Moreover, evidence (i.e. quotes) are used from course readings for support. The student avoids long diatribes and sticks to course materials for support.*

B-C Range: Agency manager(s) posts **one** of their own video discussion question that directly relate to the reading for the week by Monday, 11p.m. and periodically engages with classmates in discussions about their question. The agency manager attempts to oversee their own question and respond promptly in a professional manner.

Policy staff respond to **at least two** of the questions posed by the agency manager(s) and are somewhat engaged with the class about questions for the week. These responses have a few grammatical and spelling errors. Additionally, the student touches upon and understands the author's arguments in the readings. The student attempts to articulate the main points of the author in 100 words or less, but the explanation is not clear enough. Rather, the student response does not simply state, "great work, I agree with your analysis." The student submits later in the week – by Friday and is not that active in discussions overall.

D – Below: Discussion manager(s) posts **one** of their own discussion questions (not a video) that directly relate to the reading for the week by Monday, 11p.m. and does not engage with classmates in discussions about their question. The agency manager does not have to respond or engage in the other questions for the week, but should oversee their own question and respond promptly in a professional manner.

Policy staff (respondents) **periodically** respond to discussion questions. These responses are not clear and do not contain correct grammar. The student does not understand or comprehend the readings and the response is made around 10p.m. on Friday, which does not provide enough time to discuss with classmates.

White Paper Project (3 assignments = 90 points possible)

The semester project is designed to give students an opportunity to delve into the messy and often unpredictable world of policymaking by researching and writing a white paper (e.g. government report). Students will work with a partner or small group (no more than 2-3). The project encompasses a series of assignments outlined below that are turned in at various points during the semester (**see course schedule**) to convene an end of the policy project forum. During this forum, your final assignment will be presented to your professor and classmates. Please use the [google doc sign](#) up to indicate your partner/group/topic/time preferences. *Under extenuating circumstances only, students can work on their own. Contact the professor directly to arrange.*

WPP Assignment 1: Research Outline (20 points possible)

This assignment requires students to select a specific policy issue for their white paper and provide a full-sentence [outline](#) that addresses:

- This should be written from the perspective of an agency policy expert (you decide, but links to your topic area)
- Select a policy topic (e.g. global climate change is too broad for this project; fertilizer run-off into the Chesapeake Bay would be a narrower and more appropriate topic) to research
- Research the topic extensively and provide sufficient background on the origins of the problem, efforts (if any) to deal with the problem
- Outline a variety of different options for dealing with the problem (use the policy choices in our PP book to consider approaches)

- This outline should be 4-5 pages in length (single spaced) and include at least 8-10 peer reviewed sources (classroom materials are fine to include).
- Submit one assignment per group by the due date

WPP Assignment 2: Draft White Paper (30 points possible)

This assignment takes feedback from your outline and is your draft white paper. Your draft should be 6-8 pages (double spaced) and include 8-10 peer reviewed sources. Key components of a white paper should include:

- A clear statement of the problem and a brief review of its history, particularly any efforts made in the past to ameliorate it
- An assessment of the stakeholders involved in the problem, those who are for or against a solution to the issue since policymakers are extremely cognizant of the impact of policy on stakeholders that they esteem; a presentation of several different policy options that could address the issue along with the arguments for and against each option; and
- A definite argument in support of one of the aforementioned policy options.

WPP Assignment 3: Final White Paper and Presentation (40 points possible)

Assignment 3 is twofold. Your team must address feedback from your draft to turn in a refined final white paper that includes a title page, table of contents, introduction (problem statement), policy options, and policy solution (conclusion) by the due date. In addition, your team compiles professional talking points (not a PPT) for your final presentation via zoom during Week 15.

Students will be evaluated on:

- Student presenters will be provided up to 5 minutes to effectively coordinate with their team to layout the problem and preferred approaches from your white paper. Students listening to presentations are expected to act as if they are policymakers, asking pointed questions for the different groups.

Note: At the end of each policy forum, we will collectively discuss who was the most persuasive and why. Please set aside December 2, 2019. There are three time slots available.

Totals Points for the Course:

Skills Assessments	30 points
Applied Discussions	50 points
WP Project	90 points
Total	170 points possible (If no alterations to the syllabus)

Grading Scale: The University of Montana uses the Plus/minus grading system and a Credit/No Credit system (the CR/NCR replaces the Pass/Fail system used in the past). *General education courses must be taken using the traditional letter grade to count toward one's general education requirements.* To accommodate the Plus/Minus system the grading scale shown below will be used.

Grade	Point Scale
A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86

B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 or lower

Course Schedule

Although this is the general outline of readings and assignments, the schedule may change as the semester proceeds. If this is the case, students will be notified of any changes. The readings marked with an asterisk (*) are available on Moodle, required, and organized by week. Readings labeled PP are abbreviated for our Public Policy: A Concise Introduction textbook. The day/week is which something is listed is when it is due. Watch & Listen items are posted on our course Moodle page by week and required.

WEEK	TOPIC	WATCH/LISTEN/READ	WHAT YOU WILL LEARN:	FOR SUBMISSION:
1 (Aug 26-Sep 1)	Introductions & Why Study Public Policy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Monday Update ✓ Pod Lecture ✓ Review how to use Zoom ✓ *Fact vs Fiction (JPAE article) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why public policy is important aspect of the study and practice of public administration ("the doing side of PA) • How to create 30 second agency manager discussion video • How to emulate policy staff perspectives for semester discussions • Purpose of policy assessment assignments and importance of civil discourse (range of perspectives) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your scheduled zoom session meeting (See Sign Up) - Practice applied discussions (agency manager and policy experts); not graded
2 (Sept 2-8)	The Foundation: Studying Public Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Monday Update ✓ Pod Lecture ✓ PP Chapters 1 & 2 ✓ *Conlan, Chapter 1 ✓ *Smith, Chapter 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How personal stories shape our understanding of policymaking • Begin to define the stages heuristic cycle and the role of public administration • The importance of fact versus fiction • Purpose or writing a white paper and value for public policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy assessment option 1, (Sunday, 11p.m.) - Sign up for WPP; importance of December 2nd
3 (Sept 9-15)	Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations (Institutional Actors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Monday Update ✓ Pod Lecture ✓ PP Chapters 3 & 8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the virtues of the federal system for US public policymaking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Applied Role Discussions (close, Friday at 11p.m.)

	<i>Discussion Application: Immigration Policy</i>	✓ Podcast (Open Borders?)	• Role of institutional actors and influence on the process	
4 (Sept 16-22)	Rulemaking and Regulations (Unofficial Actors)	✓ Monday Update ✓ Pod Lecture ✓ PP Chapter 4 ✓ *Bots and the Federal Register ✓ Smith, Chapter 10	• Understand the difference between rulemaking and compliance processes • Explore how agencies evaluate and make public policy	- Policy Assessment 2, (Sunday, 11p.m.); Submitting a Public Comment - <i>Start to think about WPP Assignment 1</i>
5 (Sept 23-29)	Economic Policy and Budgeting <i>Discussion Application: Federal Tax Policy</i>	✓ Monday Update ✓ Pod Lecture ✓ PP Chapter 5 ✓ Government Shutdown Podcast	• Understand basic concepts of economic policy and budget processes • Explore why budgeting is a political process	- Applied Role Discussions (close, Friday at 11p.m.)
6 (Sep 30-Oct 6)	Public Policy: The Professionals (Analysts and Evaluators)	✓ Monday Update ✓ Pod Lecture ✓ *Rinfret and Pautz Chapter 8 ✓ *Bardach, Intro ✓ EPA Memo	• Differentiate between public policy process and policy analysis • Revisit differences between public policy theories and models • Understand policy analysis tools	- Policy Assessment 3, (Sunday, 11p.m.) – Cost Benefit Analysis - Mid Semester Evaluations
7 (Oct 7-13)	Practical Application Project Research Work Week	✓ Monday Update ✓ *What is a White Paper	• How to effectively work with teammate(s) to complete first project assignment • Using writing center and library as resources to complete first assignment	- WPP Assignment 1 per group (Sunday, 11p.m.)
8 (Oct 14-20)	Substantive Policy Area: Crime & Public Policy	✓ Monday Update ✓ Pod Lecture ✓ PP Chapter 6 ✓ *Diangelo Chapter 1	• Understanding the crime rate • Role of the courts in crime and public policy • Issues of mass incarceration	- Policy Assessment, #4 (Sunday, 11p.m.) – Implicit Bias
9 (Oct 21-27)	Substantive Policy Area: Education Policy <i>Discussion Application: School Choice</i>	✓ Monday Update ✓ Pod Lecture ✓ PP Chapter 7 ✓ *NPR/School Choice	• Explain the US education system and structure • Explore the multi-faceted stakeholder involvement in education policy	- Applied Discussion Roles (close Friday, 11 p.m.)
10 (Oct 28-Nov 3)	Substantive Policy Area: Social Welfare and Health Care Policy	✓ Monday Update ✓ Pod Lecture ✓ PP Chapter 9 ✓ *Struggling Families Podcast	• Understanding social welfare and poverty • The intersection between social welfare and health care policies	- Work on WPP #2

11 (Nov 4-10)	Substantive Policy Area: Environmental and Energy Policy <i>Discussion Application: Climate Policy</i>	✓ Monday Update ✓ Pod Lecture ✓ PP Chapter 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Origins and evolution of US environmental policy • Differentiate and compare environmental and energy policy • Evolving role of federal and state agencies 	- Applied Discussion Roles (close Friday, 11 p.m.)
12 (Nov 11-17)	Practical Application Project Research Work Week	✓ Monday Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance your white paper 	- WPP, #2 (Sunday, 11p.m.), 1 per group
13 (Nov 18-24)	Public Policy: Why it Matters	✓ Monday Update ✓ Pod Lecture ✓ PP Conclusion Chapter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate and reflect rowing, steering, and serving • The intricacies of e-government and guerilla government • Revisit the driving elements of PA 	- Sign up for WPP forum time slot
14 (Nov 25-Dec 1)	Happy Thanksgiving (No class session)	-----	-----	Enjoy your holiday!
15 (Dec 2)	Final Presentations	-----	-----	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WPP # 3, 5p.m. Moodle (1 per group) - See sign up for your designated presentation time on December 2 (12-1:30p.m.; 5-6:30p.m.; or 6:30-8p.m.)

Classroom Policies

- **Extra Credit:** Not available for this course.
- **Online Classroom Etiquette:** A driving component of our MPA program is professionalism and your ability to work well with others. Thus, the expectation is that students will maintain a high level of professionalism in their online conduct with me, and with their fellow students. This means being respectful during class discussions, and in all communications with the professor and others. Failure to do so will result in removal from class discussions.
- **E-mail Etiquette:** E-mail is a wonderful tool for you to contact me with questions, but it does not replace office hours. If you have involved questions about course material, you should set up a time to come see me or set up a Moodle Zoom conversation.
- **Incompletes or Withdrawals “W” for the Course:** If for some reason the course is not working out for you please adhere to the University’s policies for the last day to drop a class.
- **University Attendance Policy:** (please make sure to follow the participation course policies listed above too) Students who are registered for a course but do not attend the first week of class may be dropped from the

class. **Students not allowed to remain must complete a drop form or drop the course on the Internet (<http://cyberbear.umont.edu>) to avoid receiving a failing grade.** Students who know they will be absent should contact the instructor in advance.

- **Wikipedia:** This online source is not reliable and should not be cited in any course assignment. The goal is to become accustomed to using scholarly sources for all work in any of your courses at the University of Montana.
- **Academic Dishonesty (Plagiarism):** Students must follow the University's policies for academic dishonesty. For detailed information, [please view](#). As such, all work submitted must be your own; no duplicate work (work completed for another class) will not be accepted. Acts of cheating or plagiarism will result in a grade of zero (0) for the assignment. Moreover, acts of plagiarism will also be reported to the Academic Court. To avoid acts of plagiarism, cite each reference or source you use and give proper credit for the ideas, opinions, and findings of others. When you are using the exact words of others, you must use quotation marks and include the page number where you found the quote in your citation.
- **Sensitive Course Materials:** College education aims to expand student understanding and awareness. Thus, it involves engagement with a wide range of information, ideas, and creative representations. In college courses, students can expect to encounter—and critically appraise—materials that may differ from and perhaps challenge familiar understandings, ideas, and beliefs. Students are encouraged to discuss these matters with the professor.
- **Disability Assistance:** The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors. The link for this is information: [Disability Services for Students](#). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with Disability Services, please contact Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 or call 406.243.2243. I will work with you and Disability Services to provide an appropriate modification.
- **Cultural Leave Policy:** UM has a Cultural and Ceremonial Leave Policy: "Cultural or ceremonial leave allows excused absences for cultural, religious, and ceremonial purposes to meet the student's customs and traditions or to participate in related activities. To receive an authorized absence for a cultural, religious or ceremonial event the student or their advisor (proxy) must submit a formal written request to the instructor. This must include a brief description (with inclusive dates) of the cultural event or ceremony and the importance of the student's attendance or participation. Authorization for the absence is subject to approval by the instructor. Appeals may be made to the Chair, Dean or Provost. The excused absence or leave may not exceed five academic calendar days (not including weekends or holidays). Students remain responsible for completion or make-up of assignments as defined in the syllabus, at the discretion of the instructor."