

PUBL 6313: Fundamentals of Policy Analysis

Mondays 5:30–8:30 PM, PGH 310

University of Houston

Master of Public Administration Program

Spring 2019

Instructor

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Course Description

The objective of this course is to introduce you to policy analysis as a systematic method of thinking about the design, development and assessment of public policies. Policy analysis may be viewed as an element of the larger process of policymaking, beginning with the identification and definition of a problem in the public realm, the generation of policy options for addressing the problem, the selection of a particular policy by political actors (e.g., a legislature or governor), the development of a plan for implementation, the implementation and evaluation of that policy by the government (or others that the government directs).

An important goal of policy analysis is to help policymakers arrive at viable, informed policy choices with a credible expectation of what the expected outcome(s) of those policy choices will be. In a world of complex political and socioeconomic processes, predicting the effectiveness of a particular policy relative to the intended goals while identifying potential unintended consequences is a difficult task. If policymaking is an art, policy analysis aims to add a bit of science to the art.

This course is designed to help you develop the skills required to define and systematically analyze policy problems, articulate relevant decision-making criteria, evaluate alternative policy solutions, assess the means and costs of implementation, and evaluate the effectiveness of existing policy programs. These skills and techniques will be applied to a wide range of substantive public policy issues, with the idea that a good policy analyst can approach problems as a generalist and bring more specific information from a given policy area to bear in the analysis.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites. However, some exposure to public finance at the level of PUBL6312 is helpful. We will primarily use Excel and R for problem sets and data analysis examples. Replication code, datasets, and detailed lab notes will be distributed on Blackboard Learn each week before each seminar session.

Learning Objectives

1. To become familiar with the core concepts related to the policymaking process.
2. To become familiar with the tools that scholars use to analyze various policies.
3. To learn the core statistical skills of policy analysis, including descriptive analysis, data visualization, cost-benefit analysis, contingency table, ordinary least square regression, and generalized linear regression models.

Required Books and Additional Readings

1. Weimer, David L. and Aidan R. Vining. 2017. *Policy Analysis*, 6th edition. Routledge.
2. Gupta, Dipak K. 2012. *Analyzing Public Policy: Concepts, Tools, and Techniques*, 2nd edition. CQ Press.
3. There are additional weekly readings and lab handouts to be distributed on Blackboard Learn.
4. Recommended Books for R:
 - Fox, John and Sanford Weisberg. 2011. *An R Companion to Applied Regression*, 2nd edition, Sage Publication.
 - Monogan, James E., III. 2015. *Political Analysis Using R*, Springer.

Course Requirements

1. Class attendance and active participation in class discussion.
2. Read the assigned readings prior to each class meeting.
3. Problem Sets. Through the semester, you will be given 5 problem sets (starting from Week 5). Each problem set contains 2-3 policy (data) analysis questions, which are designed to help you learn and practice a specific policy analysis technique. Each problem set will be distributed on Monday in class and due on Tuesday noon on Blackboard the following week. In the subsequent week, we will discuss and review the previous problem set in class.
4. A term paper. You are required to develop a term paper by the end of the semester. There are two options for writing the term paper.

- Option 1: A policy analysis report. The policy analysis report should explicitly address one policy problem, describe that problem with empirical data, and include an analytical component comparing policy alternatives used to address the policy problem (see Gupta Appendix A as an example).
- Option 2: A research paper. You can also choose to write a research paper that is related to a public policy topic of interest. The research paper should focus on one research question, review the recent and most relevant literature, and include an analytical section using empirical data to address the research question. The research paper should follow the APSA style.

The term paper should not be shorter than 4,000 words (including references, figures and statistical tables). You CANNOT use any of your term papers from other seminars for this class. A duplicate submission will be deemed as self-plagiarism and will automatically receive a grade of F. The term paper assignment is divided into several segments to allow students to develop their papers step by step through the semester and to obtain feedback on each section. All the following writing assignments are due by noon on Blackboard Learn.

- February 12 (optional), Part 1, three-page introduction.
 - March 19 (optional), Part 2, five-page data collection/analysis prospectus.
 - **April 23 (required), first full draft due.**
 - **May 6 (required), final paper due.**
5. Mini-Conference. We will hold a mini-conference during our class meeting on **April 29** (the last day of class). Each student will have 20 minutes to present his/her policy analysis paper to the class and to draw feedback from the audience. Prior to the mini-conference, each student will be assigned as a discussant for one term paper. The discussant will prepare written comments for the assigned paper and share the constructive feedback during our mini-conference. Written comments will be given to both the author and the instructor after the mini-conference. These comments will be evaluated by the instructor for depth, clarity, and the constructiveness of the comments.

Attendance and Late Policy

1. Attendance. Absence from the class will only be accepted in extenuating circumstances with a university-accepted excuse. If you know in prior that you cannot attend the class, please inform me before the scheduled class-meeting.
2. Late Policy. Late work will be penalized by one letter grade. E.g. an A-paper turned in one day late will become a B-paper. Late work would only be accepted with university-accepted excuses without penalty.

Grading

1. Participation, 5%
2. Weekly problem sets, 40%.
3. Policy analysis paper, 40%
4. Mini-conference presentation, 10%

5. Mini-conference discussant, 5%

6. Final Grades

A	=	100-95 (Excellent)
A-	=	94-90
B+	=	89-87 (Good)
B	=	86-84
B-	=	83-80 (Poor)
C+	=	79-77
C	=	76-74
C-	=	73-70
D+	=	69-67
D	=	66-64
D-	=	63-60
F	=	59-0 (Failing)

Academic Integrity

As commonly defined, presenting the words or works of others' as your own is plagiarism. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues, without which research cannot be safely communicated. Plagiarism is also a violation of the UH Academic Honesty Policy. If you are uncertain of what constitute academic dishonesty, you should contact me prior to submitting the assignment and/or check the UH Academic Honesty Policy from the university website: http://www.uh.edu/provost/policies/honesty/_documents-honesty/academic-honesty-policy.pdf. Students are expected to adhere to the UH Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating or plagiarism in course assignments, exams, and the final paper will lead to a grade of F.

Americans with Disability Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you need special accommodations and assistance due to a disability, please contact the Center for Students with DisABILITIES (CSD Building 568, Room 110) and the Learning Support Services (LSS, 321 Social Work Building), or call 713-743-5411 to make appropriate arrangements.

University of Houston CAPS Statement

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the "Let's Talk" program (www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html), a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus.

Course Calendar

PART I. Understanding the Basics of Policy Analysis

Week 1 (January 14): Course Overview

Week 2 (January 21): Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday.

Week 3 (January 28): Conceptual Foundations for Policy Analysis

- Weimer & Vining, Chapters 1 and 2.
- Gupta, Chapters 1 and 4
- Lasswell, Harold D. 1970. “The Emerging Conception of Policy Sciences.” *Policy Sciences* 1(1): 3-30.
- Adams, William C., Donna Lind Infeld, Laura F. Minnichelli, and Michael W. Ruddell. 2014. “Policy Journal Trends and Tensions: JPAM and PSJ.” *Policy Studies Journal* 42(s1): s118-s137.
- Lab 1: Getting Started on R
 - Lab 1 Handouts
 - Installing RStudio and R
 - Data manipulation in R

Week 4 (February 4): The Policy Analysts: Their Role and Their Tools

- Weimer and Vining, Chapter 3
- Gupta, Chapters 2 and 5
- Harmon, Michael M. 1989. “The Simon/Waldo Debate: A Review and Update.” *Public Administration Quarterly* 12(4): 437-451.
- Jenkins-Smith, Hank. 1982. “Professional Roles for Policy Analysts: A Critical Assessment.” *Journal of Policy Analysis & Management* 2(1): 88-100.
- Barke, Richard, Hank Jenkins-Smit, and Paul Slovic. 1997. “Risk Perceptions of Men and Women Scientists.” *Social Science Quarterly* 78(1): 167-176.
- Waldo, Dwight. 1952. “Development of Theory of Democratic Administration.” *American Political Science Review* 46(1): 81-103. [Recommended]
- Simon, Herbert, Peter F. Drucker, and Dwight Waldo. 1952. “Development of Theory of Democratic Administration: Replies and Comments.” *American Political Science Review* 46(2): 494-503.
- Lab 2: Graphical Tools in R
 - Gupta, Chapter 9
 - Lab 2 Handouts
 - Package `lattice` and `ggplot2`

PART II. Conceptual Foundations for Problem Analysis

Week 5 (February 11): Market Failure and Inefficiency and The Policy Problem

- Weimer and Vining, Chapter 4-5
- Gupta, Chapter 3
- Vining, Aidan R. and David L. Weimer. 1988. "Information Asymmetry Favoring Sellers: A Policy Framework." *Policy Sciences* 21(4): 281-303.
- Ford, Michael R. and Fredrick O. Andersson. 2016. "Determinants of Organizational Failure in the Milwaukee School Voucher Program." *Policy Studies Journal*, Online first.
- Lab 3: Describing a Policy Problem: Basic Statistics (1)
 - Gupta, Chapter 6
 - Lab 3 handouts
 - Analyzing central tendency and dispersion
 - Describing a distribution
 - Distribute Problem Set 1

Week 6 (February 18): Other Limitations of the Competitive Framework

- Weimer and Vining, Chapter 6
- Meier, Kenneth J. 1999. "Drugs, Sex, Rock and Roll: A Theory of Morality Politics." *Policy Studies Journal* 27(4): 681-695.
- Weimer, David, Aidan R. Vining and Randall K. Thomas. 2009. "Cost-Benefit Analysis Involving Addictive Goods: Contingent Valuation to Estimate the Willingness-to-Pay for Smoking Cessation." *Health Economics* 18(2):181-202.
- Lab 4: Descriptive Analysis (2): Reporting Survey Data
 - Gupta, Chapter 8
 - Lab 4 handouts
 - Reporting survey data
 - Distribute Problem Set 2

Week 7 (February 25): Government Interventions and Unintended Consequences

- Weimer and Vining, Chapter 7
- Zhu, Ling and Breanca Thomas. 2013. "School-Based Obesity Policy, Social Capital, and Gender Differences in Weight Control Behaviors." *American Journal of Public Health*, 103 (6): 1067-1073.
- Niu, Sunny Xinchun and Marta Tienda. 2010. "The Impact of the Texas Top Ten Percent Law on College Enrollment: A Regression Discontinuity Approach." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 29(1): 84-110.
- Miller, Susan M., Jill Nicholson-Crotty and Sean Nicholson-Crotty. 2011. "Reexamining the Institutional Effects of Term Limits in U.S. State Legislatures." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 36(1): 71-97.
- Discuss Problem Set 1

Week 8 (March 4): Government Failures

- Weimer and Vining, Chapter 8
- Bohte, John and Kenneth J. Meier. 2000. “Goal Displacement: Assessing the Motivation for Organizational Cheating.” *Public Administration Review* 60(2): 183-182.
- Avellaneda, Claudia N. 2012. “Mayoral Decision-Making: Issue Salience, Decision Context, and Choice Constraint? An Experimental Study with 120 Latin American Mayors.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 23(3): 631-661.
- Liu, Cheol and John Mikesell. 2014. “The Impact of Public Officials’ Corruption on the Size and Allocation of U.S. State Spending.” *Public Administration Review* 74(3): 346-359.
- Lab 5: Measurement, Standardization, Ranking and Indexing
 - Lab 5 handouts
 - Ranking and standardization
 - Indexing and measurement models
 - Discuss Problem Set 2

PART III. Analyzing Policy Solutions

Week 9 (March 11): Spring break.

Week 10 (March 18): Correcting Market and Government Failure

- Weimer and Vining: Chapter 10
- Kiser, Edger and Kathryn Baker. 1994. “Could Privatization Increase the Efficiency of Tax Administration in Less Developed Countries?” *Policy Studies Journal* 22(3): 489-500.
- Fleming, David. 2014. “Learning from Schools: School Choice, Political Learning, and Policy Feedback.” *Policy Studies Journal* 42(1):55-78.
- Lab 6: Regression Analysis Using R
 - Gupta, Chapter 7
 - Lab 6 handouts
 - Correlations
 - Bivariate regression
 - Hypothesis testing
 - Distribute Problem Set 3

Week 11 (March 25): Policy Adoption and Implementation

- Weimer and Vining, Chapters 11 and 12
- Meyers, Marcia K., Bonnie Glaser, and Karin McDonald. 1998. “On the Front Lines of Welfare Delivery: Are Workers Implementing Policy Reforms?” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 17(1): 1-22.

- Gallo, Nick and David Lewis. 2011. “The Consequences of Presidential Patronage for Federal Agency Performance.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 22(2): 219-243.
- Kashin, Konstantin, Gary King, and Samir Soneji. 2015. “Explaining Systematic Bias and Non-transparency in US Social Security Administration Forecasts.” *Political Analysis* 23(3): 336-362.
- Lab 7: Analyzing Policy Adoption
 - Gupta, Chapters 10 and 11
 - Lab 7 Handout
 - Forecasting and single-factor projection
 - Analyzing policy using cross-section data
 - Distribute Problem Set 4

PART IV. Conducting Policy Analysis

Week 12 (April 1): Cost-Benefit Analysis

- Weimer and Vining, Chapters 13 and 16
- Lewis, David. 2002. “The Politics of Agency Termination: Confronting the Myth of Agency Immortality.” *Journal of Politics* 64(1): 89-107.
- Daley, Dorothy M. and David F. Layton. 2004. “Policy Implementation and the Environmental Protection Agency: What Factors Influence Remediation at Superfund Sites?” *Policy Studies Journal* 32(3): 375-392.
- Boardman, Anthony, Aidan Vining and W. G. Waters II. 1993. “Costs and Benefits through Bureaucratic Lenses: Example of a Highway Project.” *Journal of Policy Analysis & Management* 12(3): 532-555.
- Krutilla, Kerry and John D. Graham. 2012. “Are Green Vehicles Worth the Extra Cost? The Case of Diesel-Electric Hybrid Technology for Urban Delivery Vehicles.” *Journal of Policy Analysis & Management* 31(3): 501-532.
- Lab 8: Conducting Cost-Benefit Analysis
 - Gupta, Chapter 14.
 - Cost-benefit ratio
 - Discounting
 - Cost-benefit effectiveness analysis-Calculating expected utilities
 - Discuss Problem Set 3
 - Distribute Problem Set 5

Week 13 (April 8): Evaluate Policy Impact (1)

- Gupta, Chapter 10-13.
- Gilmour, John B. and David E. Lewis. 2006. “Does Performance Budgeting Work? An Examination of the Office of Management and Budget’s PART Scores.” *Public Administration Review* 66(5): 742-752.

- Srithongrung, Arwiphawee and Kenneth A. Kriz. 2014. “The Impact of Subnational Fiscal Policies on Economic Growth: A Dynamic Analysis Approach.” *Journal of Policy Analysis & Management* 33(4): 912-928.
- Prillaman, Soledad Artiz and Kenneth J. Meier. 2014. “Taxes, Incentives, and Economic Growth: Assessing the Impact of Pro-business Taxes on U.S. State Economies.” *Journal of Politics* 76(2): 364-379.
- Lab 9: Analyzing Dynamic Data
 - Lab 9 handouts
 - Regression models with dynamic data
 - Trend and impact analysis
 - Discuss Problem Set 4

Week 14 (April 15): Evaluate Policy Impact (2)

- Gupta, Chapter 13
- Zhu, Ling and Meredith B.L. Walker. 2013. “ ‘Too Much Too Young’: Race, Descriptive Representation, and Heterogeneous Policy Responses in the Case of Teenage Childbearing.” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 1(4): 528-546.
- Zhu, Ling and Ping Xu. 2015. “The Politics of Welfare Exclusion: Immigration and Disparity in Medicaid Coverage.” *Policy Studies Journal* 43(4): 456-483.
- Pierce, Jonathan J., Saba Siddiki, Michael D. Jones, Kristin Schumacher, Andrew Pattison and Holly Peterson. 2014. “Social Construction and Policy Design: A Review of Past Applications.” *Policy Studies Journal* 42(1): 1-29.
- Lab 10: Heterogeneity and the Analysis of Distributional Effects (Jonathan Mower)
 - Lab 10 handouts
 - Population subgroups and distributional effects
 - Replication analysis of Zhu and Xu 2015.
 - Discuss Problem Set 5.

Week 15 (April 22): Evaluate Policy Impact (3)

- Gupta, Chapter 13
- Percival, Garrick L. 2009. “Exploring the Influence of Local Policy Networks on the Implementation of Drug Policy Reform: The Case of California’s Substance Abuse and Crime Prevention Act.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 19(4): 795-815.
- Liang, Jiaqi. 2016. “The Shadow of the Politics of Deservedness? The Implications of Group-Centric Policy Context for Environmental Policy Implementation Inequalities in the United States.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 26(3): 552-570.
- Zhu, Ling. 2017. “Voices from the Frontline: Network Participation and Local Support for National Policy Reforms.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 27(2): 284-300.

Week 16 (April 29): Mini-Conference, in class.

- Wrap up on data analysis labs.
- Workshop students' term paper projects.

Week 17 (May 6): Term paper final draft due on Blackboard by noon.

Caveat

The aforementioned weekly schedule and assignments in this course may be subject to change.