

PUBL 6313 Fundamentals of Policy Analysis

Spring 2022

Tuesdays 5:30–8:30 PM

University of Houston

Master of Public Administration Program &

Department of Political Science

Online Sessions: Zoom ID: 7919619091, Passcode: 021987

In-Person Sessions: Room C126

Instructor

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Course Description

The objective of this course is to introduce students to policy analysis as a systematic method of thinking about the design, implementation, 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 alternatives for addressing the problem, the selection of a particular policy by political actors (e.g., a legislature or a governor), the development of a plan for implementation, and the implementation and evaluation of a policy program 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 students 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.

Hybrid Course

This course is being offered in the hybrid format. Synchronous online class meetings will take place on Zoom and in-person sessions will take place in C126, according to the class schedule. There will also be asynchronous activities to complete (e.g., assignments, one-on-one Zoom office-hour meetings).

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites. However, some familiarity with public finance at the level of PUBL6312 is helpful. Equivalently, students with the political science background may find it helpful to take POLS6312 American Institutions and Public Policy before taking this class. 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 before each weekly 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.
 - Wickham, Hadley & Garrett Golemund. 2017. *R for Data Science*, O'Reilly Media, Inc.

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, students will be given 4 problem sets (starting from Week 4). Each problem set contains 2-3 policy (data) analysis questions, which are designed to help students learn and practice a specific policy analysis technique. Each problem set will be distributed on Tuesday in class and due on Friday 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 submit 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 American Political Science Association (APSA) Style Manual.

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 15 (optional), Part 1, two-page introduction.
 - March 15 (optional), Part 2, four-page data collection/analysis prospectus.
 - April 16 (optional), six-page data analysis due.
 - **April 23 (required), final paper presentation due.**
 - **May 10 (required), final paper full draft due.**
5. Mini-Conference. We will hold a mini-conference during our last class meeting on **April 26**. Each student will have 10 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.

Grading

1. Participation, 10%
2. Weekly problem sets, 40%.
3. Policy analysis paper, 35%
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)

- 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.

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 constitutes 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.

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.

Reasonable Academic Adjustments/Auxiliary Aids

The University of Houston complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, pertaining to the provision of reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids for disabled students. In accordance with Section 504 and ADA guidelines, UH strives to provide reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids to students who request and require them. If you believe that you have a disability requiring an academic adjustments/auxiliary aid, please contact the Justin Dart Jr. Student Accessibility Center (formerly the Justin Dart, Jr. Center for Students with DisABILITIES).

Face Covering Policy

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, the University strongly encourages everyone (vaccinated or not) to wear face coverings indoors on campus including classrooms for both faculty and students.

Presence in Class

Your presence in each class session means that you:

- Are NOT exhibiting any Coronavirus Symptoms that makes you think that you may have COVID-19;
- Have NOT tested positive or been diagnosed for COVID-19;
- Have NOT knowingly been exposed to someone with COVID-19 or suspected/presumed COVID-19.

If you are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms that are not clearly related to a pre-existing medical condition, do not come to class. Please see Student Protocols for what to do if you experience symptoms and Potential Exposure to Coronavirus for what to do if you have potentially been exposed to COVID-19. Consult the (Graduate Excused Absence Policy) for information regarding excused absences due to medical reasons.

COVID-19 Information

Students are encouraged to visit the University's COVID-19 website for important information including on-campus testing, vaccines, diagnosis and symptom protocols, campus cleaning and safety practices, report forms, and positive cases on campus. Please check the website throughout the semester for updates.

Vaccinations

Data suggests that vaccination remains the best intervention for reliable protection against COVID-19. Students are asked to familiarize themselves with pertinent vaccine information, consult with their health care provider. The University strongly encourages all students, faculty and staff to be vaccinated.

Excused Absence Policy

Regular class attendance, participation, and engagement in coursework are important contributors to student success. Absences may be excused as provided in the University of Houston Undergraduate Excused Absence Policy and Graduate Excused Absence Policy for reasons including: medical illness of student or close relative, death of a close family member, legal or government proceeding that a student is obligated to attend, recognized professional and educational activities where the student is presenting, and University-sponsored activity or athletic competition. Under these policies, students with excused absences will be provided with an opportunity to make up any quiz, exam or other work that contributes to the course grade or a satisfactory alternative. Please read the full policy for details regarding reasons for excused absences, the approval process, and extended absences. Additional policies address absences related to military service, religious holy days, pregnancy and related conditions, and disability.

Recording of Class

Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the Center for Students with DisABILITIES. If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor's recordings for their own studying and note-taking. Instructor's recordings are not authorized to be shared with anyone without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.

Resources for Online Learning

The University of Houston is committed to student success, and provides information to optimize the online learning experience through our Power-On website. Please visit this website for a comprehensive set of resources, tools, and tips including: obtaining access to the internet, AccessUH, and Blackboard; requesting a laptop through the Laptop Loaner Program; using your smartphone as a webcam; and downloading Microsoft Office 365 at no cost. For questions or assistance contact UHOnline@uh.edu.

UH Email

Email communications related to this course will be sent to your Exchange email account which each University of Houston student receives. The Exchange mail server can be accessed via Outlook, which provides a single location for organizing and managing day-to-day information, from email and calendars to contacts and task lists. Exchange email accounts can be accessed by logging into Office 365 with your CougarNet credentials or through Access UH. Additional assistance can be found at the UH Get Help page.

Webcams

Access to a webcam is required for students participating remotely in this course. Webcams must be turned on during class to provide the instructor with students to look at and to ensure some level of student awareness and participation.

Syllabus Changes

Due to the changing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, please note that the instructor may need to make modifications to the course syllabus and may do so at any time. Notice of such changes will be announced as quickly as possible through email.

Course Calendar

PART I. Understanding the Basics of Policy Analysis

Week 1 (January 18) Zoom Session: Course Overview, no required readings.

Week 2 (January 25) Zoom Session: Conceptual Foundations for Policy Analysis

- Weimer & Vining, Chapters 1 and 2.
- Gupta, Chapters 1 and 4, and Appendix A.
- 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 with R (Hui Zhou)
 - Lab 1 Handouts
 - Installing RStudio and R
 - Basic data manipulation in R
 - Introducing R Markdown as a tool for homework.

Week 3 (February 1) Zoom Session: Policy Analysts: Their Role and Their Tools

- Weimer and Vining, Chapter 3
- Gupta, Chapters 2 and 5
- 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.
- Howlett, Michael, M. Ramesh and Giliberto Capano. 2020. "Policy-Makers, Policy-Takers, and Policy Tools: Dealing with Behaviourial Issues in Policy Design." *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*, 22(6):487-497.
- Lab 2: Data Visualization in R
 - Gupta, Chapter 9

- Lab 2 Handouts
- Packages: `lattice` and `ggplot2`

PART II. Conceptual Foundations for Problem Analysis

Week 4 (February 8) In-Person Session: Market Failure and Inefficiency as Policy Problems

- 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 5 (February 15) Zoom Session: 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 (Hui Zhou)
 - Gupta, Chapter 8
 - Lab 4 handouts
 - Reporting survey data

Week 6 (February 22) In-Person Meeting: Government Interventions and Consequences

- Weimer and Vining, Chapter 7
- Kaufman, Brystana G., Kristin L. Reiter, George H. Pink, and George M. Holmes. 2016. “Medicaid Expansion Affect Rural and Urban Hospitals Differently.” *Health Affairs*, 35(9): 1665-1672.
- Zhang, Pengju and Ling Zhu. 2021. “Does The Affordable Care Act Reduce Hospitals’ Fiscal Performance? ” *Public Finance Review*, Forthcoming.
- Gruber, Jonathan and Benjamin Sommers. 2020. “ Paying for Medicaid- State Budgets and the Case for Expansion in the Time of Coronavirus.” *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Perspective Article.

- Brauner, Jan M. et al. 2021. “Inferring the Effectiveness of Government Interventions Against Covid-19.” *Science*, Vol. 371, No. 6531.
- Discuss Problem Set 1

Week 7 (March 1) Zoom Session: Ethics, Corruption, and 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, Cheol Liu Tima T. Moldogaziev John L. Mikesell. 2017. “Corruption and State and Local Government Debt Expansion.” *Public Administration Review* 77(5): 681-690.
- Lab 5: Measurement, Standardization, Ranking and Indexing
 - Lab 5 handouts
 - Ranking and standardization
 - Indexing and measurement models
 - Distribute Problem Set 2.

PART III. Designing and Conducting Policy Analysis

Week 8 (March 8) In-Person Session: Analyzing Policy Feedback Effects Using Survey Data

- Weimer and Vining: Chapter 10
- Fleming, David. 2014. “Learning from Schools: School Choice, Political Learning, and Policy Feedback.” *Policy Studies Journal* 42(1):55-78.
- Jacobs, Lawrence R., Suzanne Mettler, and Ling Zhu. 2021. “The Pathways of Policy Feedback: How Health Reform Influences Political Efficacy and Participation.” *Policy Studies Journal*, forthcoming.
- Lab 6: Regression Analysis Using R (Hui Zhou)
 - Gupta, Chapter 7
 - Lab 6 handouts
 - Correlations
 - Bivariate regression
 - Hypothesis testing
 - Discuss Problem Set 2
 - Distribute Problem Set 3

Week 9 (March 15): Spring Break.

Week 10 (March 22) In-Person Session: Policy Adoption, Implementation, and Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA)

- Weimer and Vining, Chapters 11, 12, 13, and 16
- 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.”
- 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.
- Lab 7: Conducting Cost-Benefit Analysis and Dynamic Regression Models
 - Gupta, Chapter 14.
 - Conducting CBA (discounting and cost-benefit ratio).

Week 11 (March 29) Zoom Session: Evaluate Policy Impact (1): What Works?

- Gupta, Chapters 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.
- Card, David. 2001. “Estimating the Return to Schooling: Progress on Some Persistent Econometric Problems.” *Econometrica*, 69(5):1127-1160.
- Card, David. 1999. “The Causal Effect of Education on Earnings.” *Handbook of Labor Economics*, 3(A): 1801-1863.
- Lab 8: Analyzing Dynamic Data
 - Lab 8 handouts
 - Regression models with dynamic data
 - Trend and impact analysis
 - Discuss Problem Set 3
 - Distribute Problem Set 4

Week 12 (April 5) In-Person Session: Evaluate Policy Impact (2): Heterogenous Policy Effects

- Gupta, Chapter 13
- Zhu, Ling and Ping Xu. 2015. “The Politics of Welfare Exclusion: Immigration and Disparity in Medicaid Coverage.” *Policy Studies Journal* 43(4): 456-483.
- 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.
- Myers et al. 2020. “Unequal Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Scientists.” *Nature Human Behavior* 4: 880-883.

- Bell, Michelle L. and Kelvin C. Fong. 2021. “Gender Differences in First and Corresponding Authorship in Public Health Research Submissions During the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *American Journal of Public Health*, 111(1): 159-163.
- Lab 9: Heterogeneity and the Analysis of Distributional Effects
 - Lab 9 handouts
 - Population subgroups and distributional effects
 - Replication analysis of Zhu and Xu 2015, with panel data

Week 13 (April 12) Zoom Session: Evaluate Policy Impact (3): Policy Networks

- 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.
- 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.
- Yi, Hongtao and John Scholz. 2016. “Policy Networks in Complex Governance Subsystems: Observing and Comparing Hyperlink, Media, and Partnership Networks.” *Policy Studies Journal* 44(3): 248-297.
- Discuss Problem Set 4.
- Lab 10: Measuring and Evaluating Networking Activities.
 - Lab 10 handouts.

Week 14 (April 19) In-Person Session: Workshop on term paper projects, no readings.

Week 15 (April 26) Zoom Session: Last Day of Class: Mini-Conference for Students’ Term Papers.

Week 16 (May 2) Finals’ week, no class. Online Zoom meetings for discussing term papers. Term paper due on May 10 on Blackboard.