

POL SCI 4043: PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS

Washington University in St Louis
Washington University in St. Louis
Spring 2022
Tuesday & Thursday 8:30-9:50AM
Classroom: Seigle 210

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Office Hours: Fri 1-3 ([appointment link](#))
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course teaches students how to provide good advice to decision-makers about matters of public importance. To that end, our focus will be on identifying policy problems, identifying potential solutions, navigating trade-offs between different policy goals, and evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies. The course has three main components:

1. Conventional policy analysis. This section will include market and government failures as a rationale for policy interventions, ideas for enumerating policy solutions, analysis of implementation, and an introduction to cost-benefit analysis.
2. Criticisms and alternatives. This section will discuss philosophical and practical objections to some ideas in conventional policy analysis and some alternative approaches.
3. Program evaluation. The final section will discuss how to retrospectively analyze whether existing policies achieved their aim. The main topic is causal inference.

Overall, the course will provide students with some important tools necessary to do serious policy analysis for governments, non-profits, or think tanks and provide some broader context for the methods used in these settings. The course will also combine theoretical learning with experiential learning by asking students to engage in real policy consulting for real clients.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

PREREQUISITES

Quantitative Political Methods (L32-363) is a prerequisite for this course, though other introductory statistics courses may be used to substitute for this course. I may provide some demonstrations in R but students will not do any statistical programming in the course. The main substantive prerequisite is a working knowledge of the linear regression model.

TEXTBOOK AND READINGS

There are two required textbooks for this course. They are:

- Policy Analysis. David Weimer and Aidan Vining. Ed 5. 2011. ¹
- Mastering Metrics: The Path from Cause to Effect. Joshua Angrist and J orn-Steffen Pischke. Princeton University Press. 2015.

¹There is a newer edition than this but I am still working from the fifth edition.

I will also provide supplemental readings for various weeks which will be made available on Canvas.

It is always absolutely essential for students to do the reading before coming to class. There are very few lectures in the course so students should arrive prepared to participate in class activities based on the readings.

ASSIGNMENTS

The graded components of the course are listed below, with percent contributions to your final course grade in parentheses:

- Reading responses (20%). To ensure sufficient class preparation and participation, I ask students to write short (one paragraph) responses to questions about the reading before each class period unless otherwise noted. These are due at the start of class and should be submitted on Canvas.
- Client-based policy analysis. You will conduct a policy analysis of a real problem submitted by a client. This will be a group project but is broken up into several individual and group components.
 - Introductory meeting and debrief (5%). You will have an introductory meeting with the client in which you elicit information on the problem the client would like to solve, what information might be available to you to devise solutions, and what goals the client hopes to achieve. The assistant instructor will observe your meeting. The grade is a combination of a short (single paragraph) debrief submitted over Canvas and the assistant instructor's certification that you attended the meeting and behaved professionally.
 - Problem identification individual assignment (5%). Describe the policy problem you will analyze. Discuss the magnitude of the problem. Diagnose the problem: that is, identify what market failures, government failures, or other problems your analysis will propose to remedy.
 - Solution identification individual assignment (5%). Lay out some potential solutions to the policy problem identified in the previous part and discuss why they are potentially promising or deserve consideration.
 - Problem and solution identification group assignment (5%). As a group, reach a consensus on the problem description and the set of solutions you will analyze. Write up a *brief* (1-2 page) professionally written memo summarizing your approach in plain language. This will serve as a basis for your check-in meeting with the client, after which you might change various aspects of your original idea to incorporate feedback from the client.
 - Check-in meeting and debrief (5%). You will have a check-in meeting with the client to seek feedback and establish a plan for completing the analysis. The grade is a combination of a short (single paragraph) debrief submitted over Canvas and the assistant instructor's certification that you attended the meeting and behaved professionally.
 - Evidence and impact assessment individual assignment (5%). Individually write a plan for how you will assess the impacts of the proposed solutions and weight them against one another. What will be your solution concept? What evidence will you seek out to project impacts? Be as specific as possible.
 - Evidence and impact assessment group assignment (10%). Come to a consensus on how you will go about assessing impacts and write up a brief professionally written memo laying out your plan. You may send the memo to the client and seek feedback on the plan. Internally (but not in the memo) you should also come to an understanding on how you will divide the labor. Summarize this understanding for the instructor (but not for the client).

- Group policy memo (30%). Produce a policy report summarizing your findings and recommendations. The report should be moderate length (8-10 pages), visually appealing, easily skimmable, and written in plain language.
- Group presentation (10%). Give a brief group presentation summarizing the contents of the policy report.

GRADING SCALE

The course will follow a standard grading scale:

97-100	A+	77-79	C+
93-96	A	73-76	C
90-92	A-	70-72	C-
87-89	B+	67-69	D+
83-86	B	63-66	D
80-82	B-	60-62	D-

EXPECTATIONS/PROCEDURES

Respect. Students are expected to treat one another with respect. This is essential to creating a good classroom environment. Incidentally, it is also essential to being a good policy analyst – a good policy analyst is charitable to the arguments of those who disagree with his or her conclusions.

Inclusive Learning Environment Statement. The best learning environment—whether in the classroom, studio, laboratory, or fieldwork site—is one in which all members feel respected while being productively challenged. At Washington University in St. Louis, we are dedicated to fostering an inclusive atmosphere, in which all participants can contribute, explore, and challenge their own ideas as well as those of others. Every participant has an active responsibility to foster a climate of intellectual stimulation, openness, and respect for diverse perspectives, questions, personal backgrounds, abilities, and experiences, although instructors bear primary responsibility for its maintenance.

A range of resources is available to those who perceive a learning environment as lacking inclusivity, as defined in the preceding paragraph. If possible, we encourage students to speak directly with their instructor or TA about any suggestions or concerns they have regarding a particular instructional space or situation. Alternatively, students may bring concerns to another trusted advisor or administrator (such as an academic advisor, mentor, department chair, or dean). All classroom participants—including faculty, staff, and students—who observe a bias incident affecting a student may also file a report (whether personally or anonymously) utilizing the online Bias Report and Support System.

Office Hours. Come! You will get a lot more out of this course if you come to office hours with questions related to the course material. Because of the virtual format of the course I will conduct Zoom office hours by appointment usingly Calendly. A link to the appointment page will be made available on Canvas.

Late Assignments. Assignments not completed by class time they day they are listed on the syllabus are late. Late assignments are accepted subject to a 5% per day (including weekends) late penalty. Other assignments are given as preparation for that day's in-class activities and therefore will not be accepted late.

Ethics/Violations of Academic Integrity Ethical behavior is an essential component of learning and scholarship. Students are expected to understand, and adhere to, the University's academic integrity policy:

wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html. Students who violate this policy will be referred to the Academic Integrity Policy Committee. Penalties for violating the policy will be determined by the Academic Integrity Policy committee, and can include failure of the assignment, failure of the course, suspension or expulsion from the University. If you have any doubts about what constitutes a violation of the Academic Integrity policy, or any other issue related to academic integrity, please ask your instructor.

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Disability Resources. If you have a disability that requires an accommodation, please speak with instructor and consult the Disability Resource Center at Cornerstone (cornerstone.wustl.edu/). Cornerstone staff will determine appropriate accommodations and will work with your instructor to make sure these are available to you.

Writing Assistance. For additional help on your writing, consult the expert staff of The Writing Center (writingcenter.wustl.edu) in Olin Library (first floor). It can be enormously helpful to ask someone outside a course to read your essays and to provide feedback on strength of argument, clarity, organization, etc.

Sexual Assault The University is committed to offering reasonable academic accommodations to students who are victims of sexual assault. Students are eligible for accommodation regardless of whether they seek criminal or disciplinary action. Depending on the specific nature of the allegation, such measures may include but are not limited to: implementation of a no-contact order, course/classroom assignment changes, and other academic support services and accommodations. If you need to request such accommodations, please direct your request to Kim Webb (kim_webb@wustl.edu), Director of the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center. Ms. Webb is a confidential resource; however, requests for accommodations will be shared with the appropriate University administration and faculty. The University will maintain as confidential any accommodations or protective measures provided to an individual student so long as it does not impair the ability to provide such measures.

If a student comes to me to discuss or disclose an instance of sexual assault, sex discrimination, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence or stalking, or if I otherwise observe or become aware of such an allegation, I will keep the information as private as I can, but as a faculty member of Washington University, I am required to immediately report it to my Department Chair or Dean or directly to Ms. Jessica Kennedy, the University's Title IX Coordinator. If you would like to speak with the Title IX Coordinator directly, Ms. Kennedy can be reached at (314) 935-3118, jwkennedy@wustl.edu, or by visiting her office in the Women's Building. Additionally, you can report incidents or complaints to Tamara King, Associate Dean for Students and Director of Student Conduct, or by contacting WUPD at (314) 935-5555 or your local law enforcement agency. You can also speak confidentially and learn more about available resources at the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center by calling (314) 935-8761 or visiting the 4th floor of Seigle Hall.

Bias Reporting. The University has a process through which students, faculty, staff and community members who have experienced or witnessed incidents of bias, prejudice or discrimination against a student can report their experiences to the University's Bias Report and Support System (BRSS) team. See: brss.wustl.edu.

Mental Health Mental Health Services' professional staff members work with students to resolve personal and interpersonal difficulties, many of which can affect the academic experience. These include conflicts with or worry about friends or family, concerns about eating or drinking patterns, and feelings of anxiety and depression. See: shs.wustl.edu/MentalHealth.

DISCLAIMER

The instructor reserves the right to make modifications to this information throughout the semester.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

- **Tuesday, January 17** Introduction.
Reading: Chapters 1-2 of Weimer and Vining. (no reading response prompt for first class)
- **Thursday, January 19** Ethics and the Client Orientation
Reading: Chapter 3 of Weimer and Vining
Assignment: Submit preferences for client-based project
- **Tuesday, January 24** Normative foundations.
Reading: Chapter 1 of Bueno de Mequita (on Canvas).
- **Thursday, January 26** Market failures as a rationale for public policy.
Reading: Chapters 4-5 of Weimer and Vining.
Assignment: Introductory meeting debrief
- **Tuesday, January 31** Other rationales for public policy.
Reading: Chapters 6-7 of Weimer and Vining.
- **Thursday, February 2** Government failures
Reading: Chapters 8-9 of Weimer and Vining.
Assignment: Problem identification individual assignment
- **Tuesday, February 7** Generic policy solutions
Reading: Chapter 10 of Weimer and Vining
- **Thursday, February 9** Adoption, implementation, and feasibility
Reading: Chapters 11 and 12 of Weimer and Vining.
Assignment: Solution identification individual assignment
- **Tuesday, February 14** Doing policy analysis
Reading: Skim Chapter 14 of Weimer and Vining. Read Chapter 15 of Weimer and Vining.
- **Thursday, February 16** Cost-benefit analysis
Reading: Chapter 16 of Weimer and Vining.
- **Tuesday, February 21** Workshop
- **Thursday, February 23** Decision theory and criteria for good policy decisions
Reading: Manski Chapter 4 (on Canvas)
Assignment: Problem and solution group assignment
- **Tuesday, February 28** Efficiency and Kaldor-Hicks
Reading:
Reinhardt, 1992, *Reflections on the Meaning of Efficiency*, Yale Law and Policy Review.
Persky, 2001, *Cost-Benefit Analysis and the Classical Creed*, Journal of Economic Perspectives

- **Thursday, March 2** Decision theoretic frameworks
 Reading:
 Gilboa, Rouziou, and Sibony. 2018. **Decision theory made relevant: Between the software and the shrink**, Research in Economics.
 Nyborg 2014. **Project evaluation with democratic decision-making: What does cost-benefit analysis really measure?**. Ecological Economics.
Assignment: Goals and solution identification individual assignment
- **Tuesday, March 7** Workshop
- Thursday, March 9 Valuation and measurement issues
 Reading:
 Amartya Sen. **“The Discipline of Cost-Benefit Analysis”**
Assignment: Goals and solution identification group assignment
- **Tuesday, March 14** SPRING BREAK
- **Thursday, March 16** SPRING BREAK
- **Tuesday, March 21** Randomized experiments and potential outcomes.
 Readings: Chapter 1 of Angrist and Pischke.
- **Thursday, March 23** Regression review.
 Readings: Chapter 2 of Angrist and Pischke (no reading response prompt)
Assignment: Check-in meeting debrief
- **Tuesday, March 28** Instrumental variables.
 Reading: Chapter 3 of Angrist and Pischke.
- **Thursday, March 30** Instrumental variables reprise.
 Reading:
 Aizer, Anna, and Joseph J. Doyle Jr. “Juvenile incarceration, human capital and future crime: Evidence from randomly-assigned judges.” The Quarterly Journal of Economics, Volume 130, Issue 2, 1 May 2015, Pages 759-803
 Gerber, Alan and Donald Green. “The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A field experiment.” American Political Science Review, Vol. 94, No. 3. Paged 653-663
Assignment: Evidence and impact assessment individual assignment
- **Tuesday, April 4** Workshop
- **Thursday, April 6** Regression discontinuity.
 Reading: Chapter 4 of Angrist and Pischke (no reading response prompt)
Assignment: Evidence and impact assessment group assignment.
- **Tuesday, April 11** Regression discontinuity reprise.
 Reading:
 Jacob, Brian A., and Lars Lefgren. “Remedial education and student achievement: A regression-discontinuity analysis.” Review of Economics and Statistics 86.1 (2004): 226-244.
 Dobkin, Carlos and Ferreira Fernando. “Do school entry laws affect educational attainment and labor market outcomes?” Economics of Education Review. 29. 40-54. (2010)

- **Thursday, April 13** Difference in differences.
Reading: Chapter 5 of Angrist and Pischke (no reading response prompt)
- **Tuesday, April 18** Difference in differences reprise.
Reading:
Krueger, David Card Alan B. "Minimum Wages and Employment: A Case Study of the Fast-Food Industry in New Jersey and Pennsylvania." *The American Economic Review* 84.4 (1994).
Card, David. "The Impact of the Mariel Boatlift on the Miami Labor Market." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* (1990): 245-257.
- **Thursday, April 20** Workshop
- **Tuesday, April 25** Policy evaluation synthesis.
Reading: Chapter 6 of Angrist and Pischke.
Assignment: First draft of group policy report
- **Thursday, April 27** Workshop
- **May 5, 1-3 (scheduled final)** Final presentations and policy reports due.