PUBL 6313 (1-16609) Fundamentals of Policy Analysis

Thursdays, 5:30–8:30 PM, M 113
University of Houston
Department of Political Science
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Course Description
The objective of this seminar is to introduce you to policy analysis as a systematic method of thinking about the design, development and assessment of public policies. Public policy analysis may be viewed as an element of the larger process of policy making, beginning with the identification and definition of a problem in the public realm, the generation of policy options or choices for addressing the problem, the selection of a particular policy option by political actors (e.g., a legislature or governor), the development of a plan for implementation, and the implementation and evaluation of that policy by the government (or others that the government directs).

An important goal of public policy analysis is to help policy makers 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 policy-making 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 critically analyze policy issues and problems, articulate relevant decision-making criteria for policy analysis, 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. We will use R for problem sets and data analysis examples. Replication code, datasets, and detailed lab instructions will be distributed on Blackboard Learn each week before 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 public policy.
3. To learn the statistical skills of policy analysis, including descriptive analysis, cost-benefit analysis, impact analysis, and data visualization.

Required Books and Additional Readings
3. There are additional weekly readings and methodology handouts to be distributed on Blackboard Learn.
4. Recommended Books for R:

Course Requirements
1. Class attendance and 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 open-book problem sets in total (starting from Week 4). Each problem set contains 2-3 policy analysis questions, which are designed to help you learn and practice a specific policy analysis skill. The problem sets are also designed to prepare students for comprehensive exam questions pertaining to policy analysis. Each problem set will be distributed on Thursday in class and due on Wednesday noon the following week, on Blackboard. We will use a subsequent class to discuss each problem set.
4. A term paper. You are required to write a term paper through 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 contain an analytical component comparing policy alternatives used to address the policy problem (see Gupta Appendix A and B as examples).

• 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 explicitly address one research question, review the recent and most relevant literature, and contain an analytical component 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 develop their papers step by step through the semester, and to obtain feedback on each section.

• February 5 (optional), noon: Part 1 (2-page introduction) due by email.
• March 5 (optional), noon: Part 2 (5-page literature review and/or research design) due by email.
• April 2 (optional), noon: Part 3 (6-page data analysis research design and data analysis) due by email.
• April 30 (required), noon: first paper draft due on Blackboard learn.
• May 10 (required), noon: final paper due on Blackboard Learn.

5. Mini-Conference. We will hold two mini-conference sessions on April 30 and May 7, respectively. Each student will have 10 minutes to present his/her term paper to the class and to draw feedback from the audience.

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 without grade-penalty if you have university-accepted excuses.

Grading

1. Participation, 10%
2. Problem sets, 40%.
3. Term paper, 40%
4. Mini-Conference Presentation, 10%
5. 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: www.uh.edu/provost/policies/uhhonestypolicy.html. 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.

Course Calendar

PART I. Understanding the Basics of Policy Analysis

Week 1 (January 22): Course Overview

Week 2 (January 29): Introduction to Public Policy Analysis

- Weimer & Vining, Chapter 1-2.
- Gupta, Chapter 1-2.

**Lab 1: Getting Start on R**
- Installing R and RStudio
- Data manipulation in R

**Week 3 (February 5): The Policy Analysts: Their Roles and Their Tools**
• Weimer and Vining, Chapter 3
• Gupta, Chapter 2, 4-5

**Lab 2: Graphical Tools in R**
- Package lattice and ggplot2

**PART II. Conceptual Foundations for Problem Analysis**

**Week 4 (February 12): Market Failure and Inefficiency**
• Weimer and Vining, Chapter 4-5
• Gupta, Chapter 3 (pp.49-61)

• Gupta, Chapter 6

• Lab 3: Descriptive Analysis (1)
  – Sampling from a population
  – Analyzing central tendency
  – Analyzing dispersion
  – Describing the distribution
  – Distribute Problem Set 1

Week 5 (February 19): Other Limitations of the Competitive Framework

• Discuss Problem Set 1

• Weimer and Vining, Chapter 6

• Gupta, Chapter 3


• Gupta, Chapter 9

• Lab 4: Descriptive Analysis (2): Measurement
  – Measuring social inequality
  – Standardization
  – Ranking
  – Indexing: factor analytical models
  – Item-response theory (IRT) models
  – Distribute Problem Set 2

Week 6 (February 26): Government Interventions and Unintended Consequences

• Weimer and Vining, Chapter 7-8

• Guest Speaker: Francisco Pedraza (Texas A&M University)

Week 7 (March 5): Limits to Government Interventions: Government Failures


• Discuss Problem Set 1-2.

**PART III. Analyzing Policy Solutions**

**Week 8 (March 12): Correcting Market and Government Failure**

• Weimer and Vining: Chapter 10


• Lab 5: Probability and Measures of Uncertainty
  – Probability distribution
  – Correlations
  – Hypothesis testing
  – Distribute Problem Set 3

**Week 9 (March 19): Spring Break.**

**Week 10 (March 26): Policy Adoption and Implementation**

• Weimer and Vining, Chapter 11-12

• Gupta, Chapter 10-11


• Guest Speaker: Francisco Pedraza (Texas A&M University)

**PART V. Design and Develop Policy Analysis**

**Week 11 (April 2): Cost-Benefit Analysis**

• Weimer and Vining, Chapter 13, 16.

• Gupta, Chapter 14.


• Discuss Problem Set 3.

**Week 12 (April 9): Evaluate Policy Impact (1)**

• Gupta, Chapter 12.


• Lab 6: Analyzing Policy Effects with Static and Dynamic Data
  – Cost-benefit ratio
Discounting
Cost-benefit effective analysis
Calculating expected utilities
Regression models with dynamic data
Impact analysis
Single-factor projection
Calculating short- and long-run effects using time-series data
Distribute Problem Set 4.

Week 13 (April 16): Work on term paper, no in-class meeting.

Week 14 (April 23): Evaluate Policy Impact (2)

- Gupta, Chapter 13
- Lab 7: Heterogeneity and the Analysis of Success and Failures
  - Regression discontinuity design
  - Population subgroups and heterogeneous effects
  - Substantively weighted analytical techniques (SWAT)
  - Discuss Problem Set 4.


Week 16 (May 7): Mini-Conference, Session 2.

**Caveat**

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