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School of Public Affairs
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Public Affairs 380: Analytic Tools for Public Policy
Spring 2021

Instructor: Lindsay Jacobs
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 10:00am–11:00am, or by appointment (online)

Class Hours and Location:
Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00am–12:15pm (online)

Course Description

This course offers an introduction to the role of policy analysis and the analytical concepts and tools that are used in the practice. The first part of the course will introduce students to policy analysis, rationales for public policy, tools for framing policy problems, and the application of key concepts and methods from economics. In the second part of the course, we will apply these concepts and tools through guided hands-on data exercises, interpreting and generating relevant informational graphics, producing a policy memo, and presenting results to technical policy problems and solutions.

Learning Objectives

After completing this course, students will be able to:
- understand analytical and economic frameworks and their application to real policy issues,
- gather information to study a policy problem,
- interpret findings of basic cost-benefit and regression analyses,
- use software to analyze data,
- interpret and produce tables and graphs, and
- propose and communicate an analysis of a policy problem.

Credit Hours

This course counts for **3 credits**. The class meets for two, 75-minute periods each week over the semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities

(reading, writing, problem sets, studying, etc) for about 3 hours out of classroom for every class period. The syllabus includes more information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

Class Structure

The class will meet virtually through BBCollaborate (see below) on Mondays and Wednesdays, and will typically be divided into lecture and discussion periods, with questions and comments highly encouraged throughout. Recordings and annotated lecture slides will be posted to Canvas after class.

Course Canvas Site

I will post problem sets, lecture slides and recordings, and supplemental materials to the course Canvas website, among other things. You will also access the course lectures on BBCollaborate through the Canvas site. The address is https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/244064.

Recommended Text

- Textbook: *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice* (6th Edition), by David L. Weimer and Aidan R. Vining. Publisher: Routledge, 2017. We will cover the topics that align primarily with chapters 1–10 and 17. While the required content for the course will be covered during lectures and discussions, your understanding will be very much enhanced by reading this textbook.

Additional articles and excerpts will be posted to Canvas throughout the semester.

Computer Software

Stata and spreadsheet software (such as Excel, Numbers, Google Sheets) will be used in the last half of the course. Both Stata and Excel are licensed by the University and are available for use on personal computers or laptops checked out from the library. Students who also have familiarity with other programs will be permitted to use those if preferred.

Assessments and Grading

The typical UW–Madison grading scale will be used. There will be an opportunity for "extra credit" during the semester. The final grade will weight the assessments as follows, with late assignments counting for at most half credit:

- <u>10%</u> **Group Policy Analysis Proposal and Presentation.**
  Early in the course, **in groups of 3**, students will propose a public policy topic to analyze for their final project. This will involve gathering basic information about the problem and identifying potential data sources.

- <u>15%</u> **Economics and Policy Article Analysis.**
  The product for this assignment will be a two-page analysis connecting economics and policy to a current issue.

- **15% Take-home Exam.**
  The exam will cover the major concepts in public policy analysis and economics from the first part of the course.

- **20% Data and Graphic Exercise.**
  In Part 1, students will be given a data set and use statistical software to answer questions about and present the data. For Part 2, students will submit examples of both clear and poor presentations of data/information with a brief analysis.

- **30% Group Policy Analysis Final Project and Presentation.**
  The products of the **group** final project will be a dense 8-10 page policy analysis on the topic proposed earlier in the course, including graphics, a research brief (summary), and a presentation to the class. The project will be evaluated on the quality of the information gathered and how clearly the policy problem and alternative solutions are communicated to a broad audience, as well as ratings from other group members.

- **10% Course participation.**
  Full credit for this component comes from regular attendance at lectures and participation in class, and meeting with the instructor.

Course Policies

Communication with Instructor

In addition to office hours, I will typically be available before and after class lectures. This would be a good time especially to discuss material, ask questions about class logistics, etc. E-mail communication is usually best reserved for timely or highly person-specific matters. Please include "PA 380" in the subject line of your message. If you have not heard back from me within two business days, please follow up as I may have missed your message.

University Policies

Academic Integrity and Honesty

University statement: *By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review.*

For more information, refer to https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/.

Accommodations for Disabilities

McBurney Disability Resource Center statement: *The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities*

Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

Please find more information and resources at: <http://mcburney.wisc.edu>.

Schedule and Weekly Topics

Week 1, 01/25–01/29:   *What is Policy Analysis?*

- Reading: Chapters 2 and 3, including discussion of policy analysis as a profession and professional ethics.

Week 2, 02/01–02/05:   *Efficiency and the Idealized Competitive Model*

- Reading: Chapter 4, covering the competitive economy, the usefulness and limitation of models. Production possibilities frontier, tradeoffs, opportunity costs, marginal analysis.

Week 3, 02/08–02/12:   *Effects of Interventions in Competitive Markets*

- Reading: Chapter 4, effects of price controls; taxes and economic incidence.

Week 4, 02/15–02/19:   *Rationales for Public Policy, Part I*

- Reading: Chapter 5, on public goods, externalities, monopolies, information asymmetry.
- **Group Policy Analysis Proposal draft due Friday, 2/19.**

Week 5, 02/22–02/26:   *Rationales for Public Policy, Part II*

- Continuing Chapter 5 material
- Reading: (skim) Chapter 6, other limitations of the competitive framework.

Week 6, 03/01–03/05:   *Rationales for Public Policy, Part III*

- Continuing Chapter 6 material
- Reading: Chapter 7, distributional and other goals, social welfare and Pareto efficiency, distributional values, and culture.
- Possible guest lecture (TBD)

Week 7, 03/08–03/12: *More Rationales for and Limits to Public Intervention*

- Reading: Chapter 7, distributional and other goals, social welfare and Pareto efficiency, distributional values, and culture.
- Reading: Chapters 8 and 9, government failures, limited information, rent seeking; policy problems as market and government failure.
- **Economics and Policy Article Analysis due Friday, 3/12.**

Week 8, 03/15–03/19: *Limits to Public Intervention, Policy Challenges*

- Continuing Chapters 8 and 9
- Readings: Chapter 10, policies to correct market and government failures.
- **Take-home exam due Friday, 3/19.**

Week 9, 03/22–03/26: *Cost-Benefit Analysis*

- Chapter 17, introduction to cost-benefit analysis.
- Net present value and discounting
- Wednesday: **Brief presentations of Group Policy Analysis Project Proposals.**

Week 10, 03/29–04/02: *Using Software to Analyze Data*

- Guided, in-class introduction to data sets and Stata.
- Interpreting descriptive statistics and regressions.

Week 11, 04/05–04/09: *Principles of Interpreting Data and Information*

- No Class Monday, April 5th.
- How to interpret data and information.

Week 12, 04/12–04/16: *Principles of Presenting Data and Information*

- Presenting data and information.
- **Data and Graphic Exercise due Friday, 4/16.**

Week 13, 04/19–04/23: *Discussion and Review, Begin Presentations*

- Reading: "Ten commandments for policy economists".
- Wednesday: **Begin presentations of Group Policy Analysis Projects.**

Week 14, 04/26–04/30: *Final Presentations*

- Monday and Wednesday: **Continuing presentations of Group Policy Analysis Projects.**

Week 15, 05/03–05/07: *Submitting final project*

- **Submission of Group Final Analysis Projects, due Friday, 5/7 by midnight.** PDF version posted to Canvas.

Last Updated: February, 2021