

**GOV 384M: Policy Analysis & Evaluation, Spring 2018**  
Department of Government, University of Texas at Austin

## 1 Instructor Information

Professor Michael Findley  
Phone: 512.232.7208  
Email: [mikefindley@utexas.edu](mailto:mikefindley@utexas.edu)

Office Location: BAT 3.108  
Office Hours: Tues 9–12  
Class Location: BAT 5.102

## 2 Course Overview, Format, and Objectives

Public policy analysis and evaluation is increasingly becoming central to social science research. In recent years, many of the most innovative and compelling dissertations, articles, and books across the empirical subfields of political science are based on research conducted as part of public policy evaluations. Moreover, the attention to “policy relevance” in the social sciences is unprecedented. Developing public policy evaluation skills is key to engaging on policy topics in rigorous social scientific ways. This course covers public policy analysis and evaluation from a political science perspective. While we cover all aspects of the policy analysis process, most of the emphasis will be given to policy evaluation, which is where most social scientists engage in the process. Course topics include an overview of the field, coverage of standard evaluation techniques, discussion of ethics in policy evaluation, treatment of the role of policy organizations, and discussion of the practicalities of working with them. The course pays special attention to understanding how rigorous evidence can be used to evaluate the causal claims about the impact of public policy programs.

## 3 Requirements

### 3.1 Required Readings

The following books will be required. We will also read some journal articles. I will add some readings throughout the course, and will give sufficient notice.

- Dunn, William. 2011. *Public Policy Analysis*. 5th edition. London: Routledge. (Note that this edition is a bit pricey. It is fine to get the 4th ed.)
- Glennerster, Rachel, and Kudzai Takavarasha. *Running Randomized Evaluations: A Practical Guide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Karlan, Dean, and Jacob Appel. 2016. *Failing in the Field: What We Can Learn When Field Research Goes Wrong*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cartwright, Nancy, and Jeremy Hardie. 2012. *Evidence-Based Policy: A Practical Guide to Doing it Better*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

A quick and fun (non-required) read about evidence-based policymaking.

- Ayotte, Kelly, et al. 2014. *Moneyball for Government*. Results for America / Disruption Books.

For some useful background on basic and applied science, and how our research fits into broader public policy, see the following (non-required) book:

- Stokes, Donald E. 1997. *Pasteur's Quadrant: Basic Science and Technological Innovation*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

A useful (non-required) graduate-level textbook for brushing up on the conceptual foundations for policy analysis is:

- Weimer, David L., and Aidian R. Vining. 2011. *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Also, for anyone who thinks they may teach policy analysis at an undergraduate level, it may be worthwhile to acquaint yourself with the following (also non-required) book:

- Bardach, Eugene, and Eric M. Patashnik. 2016. *A Practical Guide to Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*. Los Angeles: Sage.

### 3.2 Participation / Presentations

Attendance and participation are worth 20% of your grade. Each of you needs to participate actively in weekly discussions. We should have lively, engaging discussion that explore the state of knowledge on each topic as well as creative frontiers. To accomplish this, you need to attend class very well-prepared. I expect each of you to participate *at bare minimum* once every session, but on average you should be speaking substantially more than that. If you are not comfortable speaking in class, then you should talk to me before the second week of class so we can help you become comfortable or work out other arrangements.

Also, each of you needs to prepare at least two agendas for guiding class discussions. You will begin leading the discussions in the third week. The agenda-setter should take the lead in guiding a stimulating discussion and everyone else in class should engage fully.

### 3.3 Presentation

I typically have students give presentations in class. You will present early in the semester on a specific policy that could be analyzed. This will get you learning about specific public policy decisions that will create a common frame for discussion. We will do the presentations in weeks 2–5. In addition to a 10-minute presentation, you should prepare a one-page fact sheet that you can hand out to others in class. Please choose a specific public policy and clear it with me by week 2. There are, of course, many possibilities. Some example topics appear below, but you should feel free to identify something different. The presentation is worth 10% of your grade.

- Marriage equality
- The war on terror

- Immigration
- Gun control
- Abortion
- Welfare reform
- Defense spending
- Budget and taxation
- Campaign finance reform
- Government gender quotas in India
- The strategic defense initiative (star wars)
- Anti-money laundering
- Extractives in conflict-prone countries
- National solidarity in Afghanistan
- Territorial consolidation in Colombia

### 3.4 Assignments

20% of your grade will be based on 4 short assignments. Each assignment will be due the week after we discuss it in class. Tentative due dates are posted in the schedule below.

- Cost-benefit Analysis
- Forecasting
- Randomization
- Power analysis

### 3.5 Seminar Paper

The seminar paper is worth 50% of your grade and comprises the primary requirement for the course. First, a comment on the nature of the paper. We obviously cannot arrange an actual policy evaluation during the course of the semester. We could instead put together an evaluation design or some sort of extended forecasting/cost-benefit assignment, but I think that they may prove less useful to you in the long run, especially since they would have to be based on hypothetical programs.

Given all of this, I've opted to have you study an existing policy that was recently implemented and evaluated (an impact evaluation), and then use the evaluation data to write a research paper suitable for publication in an academic journal (which could then be extended to a policy outlet).

We will discuss the paper at length in class, but to give you a sense of what this will entail:

- Identify a specific public policy that has recently been completed and fully evaluated (for impact, not performance).
- You must find a policy with the following **publicly available** information:
  - A guiding program document (such as a World Bank program appraisal document). Of course, there could be more than one document.
  - A pre-analysis plan specifying the full research approach. I will show you examples in class.
  - A baseline evaluation report, typically conducted by an independent evaluator and submitted to the agency sponsoring the program.
  - A midline evaluation report, typically conducted by an independent evaluator and submitted to the agency sponsoring the program.
  - An endline evaluation report, typically conducted by an independent evaluator and submitted to the agency sponsoring the program.
  - Full replication data for the results in the evaluation reports.
- While it is not required, you may want to choose a program for which researchers have already produced an academic publication. More on this in class.
- Then using all of this information, you should construct an academic paper that re-assesses some aspect of the program. Most likely this will proceed as follows:
  - Identify the theory(-ies) of change guiding the program, and which the impact evaluation assessed.
  - Tie that to a relevant academic literature that advances a theoretical story about how some factor (independent variable=program intervention) causally affects some other factor (dependent variable=program outcome).
  - Importantly, here you should develop some novel theoretical ideas that you can use the program evaluation data to test. In other words, you will not regurgitate results from the evaluation reports, but rather you will theorize about some related aspect of the program for which there is data.
  - Test your novel theoretical expectations using the replication data as posted or by supplementing the replication data with new data that you put together.
  - Write the paper
- To make this a bit more concrete, we will discuss in class a specific example: The National Solidarity Program in Afghanistan. All of the above documents are available for this program and researchers have published some academic work using this. The idea would be to study a program like this and then theorize about some new idea related to the program for which they have data and then carry out the relevant tests. And then write up a paper based on this.

For purposes of a semester-long course, I quite like this idea for a paper. It actually fits well with the advice Gary King gave in his “Publication, Publication” article in PS. We will discuss the approach and timeline more concretely as we move forward, and we will also devote a portion of most class periods to discussions and decision-making about each of the projects.

## 4 University and Course Policies

### 4.1 Academic Integrity

UT students should seek to be completely honest in their dealings with others. They should complete their own work and be evaluated based upon that work. They should avoid academic dishonesty and misconduct in all its forms, including plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, cheating, and other academic misconduct. Students are expected not only to be honest but also to assist other students in fulfilling their commitment to be honest.

While students should make a general commitment to proper academic conduct, there are still specific skills most students need to master over time in order to correctly cite sources, especially in the age of the internet, as well as deal with the stress and strain of college life without resorting to cheating. Please know that as your professor I will notice instances of cheating on exams or plagiarizing on papers.

Writing submitted for credit at UT must consist of the student's own ideas presented in sentences and paragraphs of his or her own construction. The work of other writers or speakers may be included when appropriate (as in a research paper or book review), but such material must support the student's own work (not substitute for it) and must be clearly identified by appropriate introduction and punctuation and by footnoting or other standard referencing.

The substitution of another person's work for the student's own or the inclusion of another person's work without adequate acknowledgment (whether done intentionally or not) is known as plagiarism. It is a violation of academic, ethical, and legal standards and can result in a failing grade not only for the paper but also for the course in which the paper is written. In extreme cases, it can justify expulsion from the University. Because of the seriousness of the possible consequences, students who wonder if their papers are within these guidelines should visit a writing lab or consult a faculty member who specializes in the teaching of writing or who specializes in the subject discussed in the paper. Useful books to consult on the topic include the current *Harbrace College Handbook*, the *MLA Handbook*, and James D. Lester's *Writing Research Papers*.

Please also see the University Honor Code site for more information at:  
<http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html>.

### 4.2 Access

The University of Texas at Austin is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere that reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

### 4.3 Religious Holidays

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

#### 4.4 Emergencies

Please also see the following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/>. 1. Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside. 2. Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building. 3. Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class. 4. In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. 5. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office. 6. Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL): 512-232-5050. 7. Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: [www.utexas.edu/emergency](http://www.utexas.edu/emergency).

### 5 Tentative Course and Reading Schedule

#### 5.1 January 22: Evidence-Based Policymaking

- Brookings Principles: <http://www.evidencecollaborative.org/principles-evidence-based-policymaking>
- PEW / MacArthur Report:  
<http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/assets/2014/11/evidencebasedpolicymakingaguideforeffectivegovernm>

#### 5.2 January 29: Policy Analysis Basics

- Dunn, William. 2011. *Public Policy Analysis*. London: Routledge. Chps 1–2. “The Process of Policy Analysis” & “Policy Analysis in the Policy-Making Process”
- Weimer, David L., and Aidian R. Vining. 2011. *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*. London: Routledge. Chp 2 “What is Policy Analysis”

#### 5.3 February 5: Structuring Policy Problems for Analysis

*Presentation 1 & 2*

- Dunn, William. 2011. *Public Policy Analysis*. London: Routledge. Chp 3 “Structuring Policy Problems”
- Weimer, David L., and Aidian R. Vining. 2011. *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*. London: Routledge. Chps 14 & 15 “Gathering Information for Policy Analysis” & “Landing On Your Feet: Organizing Your Policy Analysis”

## 5.4 February 12: Forecasting Outcomes

*Presentation 3 & 4*

- Dunn, William. 2011. *Public Policy Analysis*. London: Routledge. Chp 4 “Forecasting Expected Policy Outcomes”
- Application: Afghanistan National Solidarity Program Description

## 5.5 February 19: Prescription / Cost-Benefit Analysis

*Presentation 5 & 6*

*Forecasting assignment due today*

- Dunn, William. 2011. *Public Policy Analysis*. London: Routledge. Chp 5 “Prescribing Preferred Policies”
- Weimer, David L., and Aidian R. Vining. 2011. *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*. London: Routledge. Chp 16 “Cost-Benefit Analysis: Assessing Efficiency”
- Newcomer, Kathryn E., Harry P. Hatry, and Joseph S. Wholey. 2015. *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*. 4th Edition. Chp 24 “Cost-Effectiveness and Cost-Benefit Analysis”
- Application: Afghanistan National Solidarity Program Pre-Analysis Plan

## 5.6 February 26: Monitoring and Evaluation Overview

*Presentation 7 & 8*

*Cost-benefit assignment due today*

- Dunn, William. 2011. *Public Policy Analysis*. London: Routledge. Chp 6 & 7 “Monitoring Observed Policy Outcomes” & “Evaluating Policy Performance”
- Glennerster, Rachel, and Kudzai Takavarasha. *Running Randomized Evaluations: A Practical Guide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chps 1-3 “Introduction” “Why Randomize?” and “What Questions”
- Application: Afghanistan National Solidarity Program Baseline Evaluation Report

## 5.7 March 5: Randomization

- Glennerster, Rachel, and Kudzai Takavarasha. *Running Randomized Evaluations: A Practical Guide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chps 4 “Randomizing”
- Application: Afghanistan National Solidarity Program Baseline Evaluation Report

**5.8 March 12: NO CLASS / SPRING BREAK****5.9 March 19: Outcomes and Interventions**

*Randomization assignment due today*

- Glennerster, Rachel, and Kudzai Takavarasha. *Running Randomized Evaluations: A Practical Guide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chps 5 “Outcomes”
- Application: Afghanistan National Solidarity Program Endline Evaluation Report

**5.10 March 26: Statistical Power**

- Glennerster, Rachel, and Kudzai Takavarasha. *Running Randomized Evaluations: A Practical Guide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chps 6 “Statistical Power”
- Application: Afghanistan National Solidarity Program Replication Data

**5.11 April 2: Threats to Valid Causal Inference and Analysis**

*Statistical power assignment due today*

- Glennerster, Rachel, and Kudzai Takavarasha. *Running Randomized Evaluations: A Practical Guide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chps 7 & 8 “Threats” “Analysis”
- Deaton, Angua, and Nancy Cartwright. 2017. “Understanding and Misunderstanding Randomized Controlled Trials.” *Social Science and Medicine*
- Application: Afghanistan National Solidarity Program Academic Report

**5.12 April 9: Failing in the Field**

- Karlan, Dean, and Jacob Appel. 2016. *Failing in the Field: What We Can Learn When Field Research Goes Wrong*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. All.

**5.13 April 16: Policy Analysis I**

- Glennerster, Rachel, and Kudzai Takavarasha. *Running Randomized Evaluations: A Practical Guide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chps 8 “Analysis”
- Cartwright, Nancy, and Jeremy Hardie. 2012. *Evidence-Based Policy: A Practical Guide to Doing it Better*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Parts 1–3. “Getting Started: From ‘It Worked There’ to ‘It Will Work Here’” “Paving the Road from ‘There’ to ‘Here’” and “Strategies for Finding What You Need to Know”



**5.14 April 23: Policy Analysis II**

- Cartwright, Nancy, and Jeremy Hardie. 2012. *Evidence-Based Policy: A Practical Guide to Doing it Better*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Parts 4–6. “RCTs, Evidence-Ranking Schemes, and Fidelity” “Deliberation is not Second Best” and “Conclusion”
- EGAP Metaketa I reports

**5.15 April 30: Engaging the Policy Process**

- Dunn, William. 2011. *Public Policy Analysis*. London: Routledge. Chps 8 & 9 “Developing Policy Arguments” & “Communicating Policy Analysis”

**5.16 Final Paper Due by 5 pm CDT on May 11, 2018**