

PADM 7362 --- Public Policy Analysis I
Spring 2017
Professor Michael Crow

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You are entitled to your own opinion, but you are not entitled to your own facts.
--- Daniel Patrick Moynihan

Course description

This course is the first of a two course sequence in the use of data and evidence to support analysis of public problems, programs and policies. Course topics include problem definition and measurement; problem analysis; data visualization and presentation; stakeholder interviewing; sampling, survey and evaluation research; experimental and quasi-experimental research design; multivariate statistical analysis; and public values and ethics in policy analysis.

Course objectives

Policymaking is a thriving arena in which policy advocates and experts make competing arguments for what problems deserve attention, what causes the problems we see, and what policy solutions are appropriate. But as Senator Moynihan suggests, not all arguments are treated with the same seriousness: arguments that are supported by evidence carry much greater weight in the policy process.

In this course, you will learn how to think like a public policy professional, providing you with the ability to make evidence-based arguments about public problems and programs. By the end of this course, you will have demonstrated your ability to:

- Use statistical data to describe the scope of public problems
- Formulate theories and testable hypotheses about the causes of public problems
- Conduct and interpret statistical tests for correlation and causation
- Write convincing arguments based on your analysis

These skills are central to conducting the independent policy research that will be expected of you in your second year PA courses and in your capstone project. More importantly, this skill set is highly valued in the job market and will allow you to make more effective contributions to on-going policy debates throughout your career.

Plan for the course

Policy debate, and thus our course, begins by identifying and describing a public problem. Describing a problem means answering questions like, how big is the problem? Who is affected by it? What places are most affected? How long has it been going on? To do this, researchers need to be able to concretely define what circumstances should count as part of the problem and to actually do the counting. Even experts disagree about the most appropriate ways to define and measure a problem, and so policy debates on crime, homelessness and other issues often focus on measurement. After exploring issues on how to measure social problems, we will turn to how we can use statistical data collected by government, nonprofit and international organizations to describe a problem. In this part of the course, you will learn how to evaluate tables and charts, and how to create and use your own tables and charts in a research paper to show the scope and nature of a public problem.

In addition to statistical indicator data, policy professionals often work with survey data: responses to questionnaires designed to provide measures for public problems and to help describe relationships between problems and the characteristics of those affected. In the second part of this course, we will consider how policy professionals design and use surveys to find out more about factors associated with public problems and to evaluate outcomes from public policies. We will also develop a toolkit of methods for analyzing data from surveys, including sample statistics, crosstab analysis, the difference of means test, correlation and bivariate regression.

But identifying and describing a research problem and its associations with various social factors does not provide enough information on how to address the problem. For that, we also need to understand what causes the problem. Public policy professionals develop theories to explain how and why a problem happens, and several theories may exist to explain any given problem. Hence, in the third part of this course, you will learn how to develop theories and hypotheses about the causes of a problem; how to find and discuss relevant scholarly literature; and how to design strategies for obtaining and analyzing data to choose between alternative explanations for a problem. These strategies include experiments, quasi-experiments, and statistical methods, particularly multiple regression analysis. Using these methods, you will be able to develop an effective and evidence-centered argument about the causes of a public problem.

Communications

I encourage and expect contact from you over the semester. The easiest way to reach me is by e-mail (mccraw@ualr.edu). You may also reach me at my cell number above during reasonable hours (between 9 a.m. and 11 p.m.). Or you may see me during my office hours or by making an appointment to see me. I frequently am at my office beyond my posted office hours, so please feel free to come in at other times when my office door is open.

I frequently use UALR e-mail and the course Blackboard system to conduct course business. If you do not use Blackboard and UALR's e-mail, please be sure to forward messages from those accounts to the e-mail account that you use. I will also place course assignments, handouts and PowerPoint slides on the course Blackboard site whenever possible (usually within 24 hours after class).

Course materials

Books: You are required to have three books for this course:

1) Klass, Gary M. 2012. *Just Plain Data Analysis*. Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield. This book provides an introduction to the methods most commonly used to analyze statistical indicator data, i.e. the data produced by governments and nonprofit organizations to measure the extent of social and economic problems. We will use this book primarily in the first half of the course.

2) Miller, Jane. 2004. *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Numbers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Miller explains not just how to present and write about quantitative information persuasively, but how to think like a social scientist throughout the research process. This book will be a useful guide to you not only in this course, but throughout your career.

3) Salkind, Neil. 2013. *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*. 3rd ed. (Excel 2010 Edition). Los Angeles: Sage. This book will serve as our guide to the statistical tools we will develop over the course of the semester. This particular edition is written to include instructions for analyzing data in Microsoft Excel 2010, which will be the program we use most frequently to analyze data in this class. Another edition of the book has been ordered and is available for those students who prefer to use the SPSS statistical package.

All other readings are available on our course Blackboard site.

Hardware and software: You will need a USB Flash Drive or other portable memory storage device to save your work in class. In addition, we will use Microsoft Excel 2010, a spreadsheet program, for most of our in-class work. This program is available in campus computer labs.

Course requirements and grading

To pass the course, students must satisfactorily complete all the following requirements:

Class participation:	20%
Analytic essays (3 @ 20% each):	60%
Problem definition paper	20%

Provided that all work for the course is completed, your grade is determined by the weighted average of your scores on each of these three requirements as follows:

- A: 90% and above
- B: 80-89%
- C: 70-79%
- D: 60-69%
- F: 60% or below

Attendance: I expect and strongly urge that you attend EVERY class session. Attendance is especially important in this course since you must apply concepts and skills from prior class sessions to develop new skills in later class sessions. Missing a class, then, will significantly jeopardize your performance. Beyond this, I tolerate 2 absences without a grade penalty; every absence after the second lowers your **course grade** by 10 percentage points (one letter grade).

Class participation: One of the primary objectives of this class is to develop your ability to critically analyze policy issues. During class sessions, we will engage in activities such as lab assignments, discussion and group work that will call on you to apply new ideas from the reading to solve problems. Thus, it is important for you to come to class prepared to participate by having studied the assigned reading and completed the homework. Your class participation grade will reflect all the following factors:

--- *Collegiality:* Showing respect for your peers by being in class on time, staying through the entire class, cell phones off, and respecting the views of others in class discussion.

--- *Preparation:* Completing reading before class, coming to class prepared with assignments and reading materials, active participation in discussion and small group work.

--- *Engagement out of class:* Class sessions are not the only opportunity to discuss course ideas with me. I want to know if you are having trouble with the material and what you like and don't like about the course. You may reach me by e-mail, see me during office hours, make a lunch appointment with me, or drop by anytime my office door is open (I frequently work at my office beyond my posted office hours).

--- *Annotated bibliography:* As part of the problem definition assignment, you will complete an annotated bibliography of at least 5 scholarly sources and 3 data sources. This assignment will not be graded, but satisfactory completion is required as part of course participation.

--- *Homework:* Ideas from reading are learned much better if they are applied right away. Hence, you will receive twelve assignments over the semester that apply or extend ideas from the reading that you will prepare before class.

I will determine your homework grade using a check system (check for a response showing thoughtful response to the question posed, 0 otherwise). I must receive your assignment before class time to receive credit. Your homework grade counts as half your participation grade and is

to me. I recommend both uploading your assignment to Blackboard AND emailing it to me (mccraw@ualr.edu) to ensure I receive it. It is your responsibility to assure that I have received your work on time. You are also welcome to submit assignments to me in hard copy. These should be delivered to me at my office or to my mailbox on the 6th floor of Ross Hall.

In the interest of fairness, late take-home essay and policy analysis papers will receive a penalty of 10 percentage points (one letter grade) for each day late. Homework assignments must be submitted before class time to receive credit.

Academic integrity

Cheating, plagiarism, duplication of work from other courses, and other violations of academic integrity standards will not be tolerated. Any student turning in work that is in violation of