**PADM 7362 --- Public Policy Analysis I**

**Spring 2019**

**Professor Michael Craw**

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*You are entitled to your own opinion, but you are not entitled to your own facts.*

--- Daniel Patrick Moynihan

**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 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 am frequently 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 generally 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 two books for this course:

1) Klass, Gary M. 2012. *Just Plain Data Analysis.* Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield.

2) Schroeder, Larry, David Sjoquist and Paula Stephan. 2018. *Understanding Regression Analysis: An Introductory Guide*. 2nd edition. Newbury Park: Sage.

In addition, we will use two additional open-source textbooks that you can download from our course Blackboard site:

Diez, David, Christopher Barr and Mine Cetinkaya-Rundel. 2015. *OpenIntro Statistics*. 3rd edition. Also available online at <https://www.openintro.org/stat/textbook.php>

United States General Accounting Office. 1992. *Quantitative Data Analysis: An Introduction.* Report to Program Evaluation and Methodology Division. Also available online at <http://www.gao.gov/special.pubs/pe10111.pdf>

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 2016, a spreadsheet program, for much of our in-class work. This program is available in campus computer labs. Finally, we will make use of PSPP, a free open-source statistical software package. Downloadable software for Windows and for Apple Mac computers is available at <http://www.gnu.org/software/pspp/get.html>

**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 the above 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).

*---Homework assignments and annotated bibliography:* Ideas from reading are learned much better if they are applied right away. Hence, you will receive weekly assignments that ask you to respond to a discussion question or solve a set of problems.  These assignments will also often serve as a starting point for class discussion.

Since these assignments are preparatory for class sessions, they will be evaluated based on your effort using a check system (a check for a response showing satisfactory thought and effort, 0 otherwise). You must submit your homework response before class in order to receive credit.

In addition, you will prepare an annotated bibliography as part of the problem definition assignment (see below). Though this assignment will not be graded, satisfactory completion of it will be weighted in the homework grade as two homework assignments.

The homework portion of your grade counts as half the participation grade and is computed as the number of checks you receive out of the total number of assignments. I will also offer two bonus homework assignments over the semester that you may complete to make up for a missed homework assignment or to earn extra credit.

**Analytic essays:** Over the course of the semester, you will complete three assignments that require you to apply the analytical tools that you learned over the course to explain or evaluate a public policy problem. You will have one week to prepare your response to each question. You will receive the first question by Saturday, February 10 and your response will be due on **Saturday, February 23.** You will receive your second essay question by Saturday, March 24 and it will be due on **Saturday, April 6.** You will receive your third question by Wednesday, April 25, and your response will be due on **Wednesday, May 8**.

**Problem definition paper:** A problem definition argues that a social or economic condition is has undesirable consequences and thus deserves attention from policymakers. Thus, a problem definition usually addresses such questions as: How severe is the problem? How long has it been a problem? Who is most affected by the problem? What places have been most affected by the problem?

The final product in this assignment will be paper of at least 2000 words (7 pages double-spaced) plus graphs and tables that makes an argument about the scope and severity of a social or economic problem supported by your own data analysis. To do this, you will need to find data, select measures, make comparisons to determine how the problem varies over time and across groups and places, and write about your results. You will complete an annotated bibliography of at least five scholarly sources you plan to use for this paper. This annotated bibliography is due on **Saturday, March 16** and will count towards your course homework grade. This problem definition paper will be due at our in-class mini-conference on **Wednesday, April 24.**

**Submitting assignments**

The course Blackboard page includes a folder in which homework, essay and problem definition paper assignments are stored. You may upload your completed assignments to Blackboard and/or by emailing them 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 analytic essay and problem definition 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 UALR academic integrity standards will automatically receive a grade of zero in the course and the matter will be referred to the MPA program coordinator. An overview of academic integrity standards and UALR’s academic integrity policy are at <http://ualr.edu/deanofstudents/index.php/home/academic-integrity/>.

**Accessibility**

Your success in this class is important to me, and it is the policy and practice of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock to create inclusive learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have a documented disability (or need to have a disability documented), and need an accommodation, please contact me privately as soon as possible, so that we can discuss with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) how to meet your specific needs and the requirements of the course. The DRC offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process among you, your instructor(s) and the DRC. Thus, if you have a disability, please contact me and/or the DRC, at 501-569-3143 (V/TTY) or 501-683-7629 (VP). For more information, please visit the DRC website at [ualr.edu/disability](http://www.ualr.edu/disability).

**Course schedule**

These topics and reading assignments may change throughout the course of the semester, depending on our speed and interests. Changes will be announced in class.

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| **Date** | **Topic and Reading Assigned** |
| **Wednesday, January 23** | **Introduction to policy analysis/Introduction to Excel**Kraft and Furlong, "Introduction to policy analysis" (Blackboard)Sue and Griffin, "Excel Basics" (Blackboard) |
| **Wednesday, January 30** | **Defining and measuring public problems**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide" (Blackboard)Best, "Stat Wars" (Blackboard)**Guest Speaker: Dr. Carolyn Turturro, Principal Investigator, Little Rock Point-in-Time Homelessness Count** |
| **Wednesday, February 6** | **Interpreting statistical indicators**Shively, "Importance of Dimensional Thinking" (Blackboard)Klass, chapters 1, 9Miller, "Types of Quantitative Comparisons" (Blackboard) |
| **Wednesday, February 13** | **Visual presentation of statistical indicator data**Klass, chapter 6Sue and Griffin, "Bar and Column Charts" and "Line and Area Charts"(Blackboard)Miller, "Implementing 'Generalization, Example, Exceptions (GEE)'" (Blackboard) |
| **Wednesday, February 20** | **Best practices in survey research**Research Methods Knowledge Base, "Sampling" (Blackboard)UALR Institute of Government and Institute on Race and Ethnicity. "Racial Attitudes in Pulaski County: 2017 Annual Survey Report" (Blackboard)**Guest Speaker: Cindy Bennett, Director, UALR Survey Research Center** |
| **Saturday, February 23** | **Essay 1 due at 11:00 p.m.** |
| **Wednesday, February 27** | **Analyzing and reporting survey data**Diez et al, pp. 9-18 (Blackboard)GAO, "Quantitative Data Analysis: An Introduction", pp. 8-55 (Blackboard) |
| **Wednesday, March 6** | **Statistical inference from survey data**Diez et al., pp. 118-132 ("The Normal Distribution") and pp. 168-194 ("Foundations for Inference")Wheelan, "The Central Limit Theorem: The Lebron James of Statistics" (Blackboard) |
| **Wednesday, March 13** | **Differences in means and the chi-square test**Diez et al, pp. 212-235 ("Inference for Numerical Data")(Blackboard)Caldwell, "The Chi-Square Test" (Blackboard) |
| **Saturday, March 16** | **Annotated bibliography due at 11:00 p.m.** |
| **Wednesday, March 20** | **Spring Break (No Class)** |
| **Wednesday, March 27** | **Correlation and bivariate regression**Wheelan, "Correlation" (Blackboard)Schroeder et al., chapter 1 ("Linear Regression") |
| **Wednesday, April 3** | **Developing theories and hypotheses**Pollock, "Proposing Explanations, Framing Hypotheses and Making Comparisons" (pp. 48-58)(Blackboard)Lave and March, "An Introduction to Speculation" (Blackboard) |
| **Saturday, April 6** | **Essay 2 due at 11:00 p.m.** |
| **Wednesday, April 10** | **Causality and policy experiments**Government Accountability Office, "Determining Causation" (Blackboard)Garfinkel, "The New Jersey Income Maintenance Experiment" (Blackboard) |
| **Wednesday, April 17** | **Quasi-experiments in policy evaluation**Shively, "Causal Thinking and the Design of Research" (Blackboard)Klass, chapters 3-4Campbell and Ross, "The Connecticut Crackdown on Speeding: Time Series Data in Quasi-Experimental Analysis" (Blackboard) |
| **Wednesday, April 24** | **Course mini-conferenceProblem definition paper due at 6:00 p.m.** |
| **Wednesday, May 1** | **Multiple regression analysis**Schroeder et al., chapters 2-4Mayer and Sigelman, “Zog for Albania, Edward for Estonia, and Monarchs for All the Rest? The Royal Road to Prosperity, Democracy and World Peace.” (Blackboard) |
| **Wednesday, May 8** | **Essay 3 due at 11:00 p.m.** |