PUBPOL 479: EVALUATING PUBLIC POLICIES - FALL 2023

Monday and Wednesday 10:00am – 11:20am; Weill Hall 1110 – the Betty Discussion Friday 1:00pm-1:50pm; Weill Hall 1110 or 1230

Instructor: Prof. Natasha Pilkauskas  
Office: 5219 Weill Hall  
Email: npilkaus@umich.edu

Student Office hours: Tuesdays 2:15-4:15 in my office. Sign up for an appointment here 
GSIs: 
Alvin Christian, alvinchr@umich.edu  
Office hours: M/W 8:50-9:50 in 3207. Sign up for an appointment here 
Catalina Anampa Castro, canampa@umich.edu 
Office hours: Thurs 3-5pm in 3204. Sign up for an appointment here

Course Requirements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiz</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>September 27, 2023</td>
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<tr>
<td>Article Critique</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>October 25, 2023</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Article Critiques/Presentations</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>November 6, 8, 13 &amp; 15, 2023</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Evidence Memo</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>November 17, 2023</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>December 6, 2023</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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Course Objectives:

• To understand the basic research methods used in program and policy evaluation.
• To gain skills needed to understand and critique published evaluations of public policies and programs – essentially to become informed consumers of research used to make decisions in the policy making process.
• To develop expertise in framing evaluation questions, crafting research designs and data analysis to better critique and understand research and evaluations.
• To gain skills in using program and policy evaluation research studies to inform and communicate policy recommendations, including in politically-charged environments.

Class Participation and Attendance:

• Class and lab participation is 15% of the course grade – attending class + discussion. We will take attendance.
• Class participation will also include posting discussion posts, posting questions for lab, class, and guest lecturers as well as taking ungraded quizzes.
• All students are expected to make productive contributions to class discussions and to small-group exercises.
• Students are also expected to share their opinions/perspectives and to respectfully challenge the perspective of others if they disagree. Program/policy evaluation invokes a wide variety of opinions (many subjective) about what makes “good” public policy, what are desirable outcomes of a policy program, and what the role of evidence is in measuring those outcomes and allocating
resources towards the public good. Be an active and engaged listener, offer insights, critique class content, ask questions. Be respectful of others viewpoints to encourage a diversity of views.

- You can miss up to 2 classes (unexcused) without taking any points from your participation grade. If you know you will have to miss a class you should email Catalina and Alvin before class so that you are excused. If you miss class you will be expected to watch the lecture capture.
- Communicate with me and your GSIs. You are adults, things come up – but it is an important skill to learn to communicate with your colleagues.
- Lectures will be recorded for the benefit of all students. If you are sick, please do not come to class. You can catch up via the recording. If you wish to be excused (and get your participation point) you need to communicate with us. No communication = no participation point.
- There will be opportunities to earn extra participation points via attending outside talks (and posting a discussion post after to show you attended), watching Three Identical Strangers, and possibly other posts.
- Please do NOT use your laptop (or phone) in class unless you are working on a group exercise. Studies show you learn more by taking notes by hand. If you have a need for a laptop, please speak with me privately about it. I will provide lecture slides after class. This also helps to foster participation in class.

The course is organized in Canvas around modules. Checking each day’s module will be key!

**Readings:** Check the modules on Canvas. **Students are expected to do the assigned readings for each class period, BEFORE CLASS, even though we will not discuss all of the readings in class.** It is assumed that students will do the readings and will gain important information from them, and that class time can be used to go over additional material. The readings are important, because they provide helpful examples of different evaluation designs and measurement approaches, and give you the opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of actual evaluations. They will also be useful for exams and written assignments.

**Assignments:** All assignment information and due dates are posted on Canvas. Late work needs to be negotiated before the assignment is due (just like you would do on a job). Professor Pilkauskas is willing to negotiate a new deadline with you if you have a reasonable reason for needing an extension. Assignments that are turned in late without prior discussion or approval will be docked one grade step (A to A-) for every day they are late.

**Ford School Inclusivity Statement:** Members of the Ford School community represent a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives. We are committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. While working together to build this community we ask all members to:

- Share their unique experiences, values and beliefs
- Be open to the views of others
- Honor the uniqueness of their colleagues
- Appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other in this community
- Value one another’s opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- Keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature
- Use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in Ford classes and across the UM community

**Ford School Public Health Protection Policy:** In order to participate in any in-person aspects of this course--including meeting with other students to study or work on a team project--you must follow all the
public health safety measures and policies put in place by the State of Michigan, Washtenaw County, the University of Michigan, and the Ford School. Up to date information on U-M policies can be found here. It is expected that you will protect and enhance the health of everyone in the Ford School community by staying home and following self-isolation guidelines if you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19.

**Student Mental Health and Wellbeing:** The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. We acknowledge that a variety of issues, both those relating to the pandemic and other issues such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, can directly impact students’ academic performance and overall wellbeing. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available.

You may access the Ford School’s embedded counselor Paige Ziegler (contact information TBD) and/or counselors and urgent services at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) and/or University Health Service (UHS). Students may also use the Crisis Text Line (text ‘4UMICH’ to 741741) to be connected to a trained crisis volunteer. You can find additional resources both on and off campus through the University Health Service and through CAPS.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** The University of Michigan recognizes disability as an integral part of diversity and is committed to creating an inclusive and equitable educational environment for students with disabilities. Students who are experiencing a disability-related barrier should contact Services for Students with Disabilities https://ssd.umich.edu/; 734-763-3000 or ssdoffice@umich.edu). For students who are connected with SSD, accommodation requests can be made in Accommodate. If you have any questions or concerns please contact your SSD Coordinator or visit SSD’s Current Student webpage. SSD considers aspects of the course design, course learning objects and the individual academic and course barriers experienced by the student. Further conversation with SSD, instructors, and the student may be warranted to ensure an accessible course experience.

**Academic Integrity:** The Ford School academic community, like all communities, functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. We hold all members of our community to high standards of scholarship and integrity. To accomplish its mission of providing an optimal educational environment and developing leaders of society, the Ford School promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct. Academic dishonesty may be understood as any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community. Plagiarism involves representing the words, ideas, or work of others as one’s own in writing or presentations, and failing to give full and proper credit to the original source. Conduct, without regard to motive, that violates the academic integrity and ethical standards will result in serious consequences and disciplinary action. The Ford School's policy of academic integrity can be found in the MPP, BA, and PhD Program handbooks. Additional information regarding academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct and their consequences is available here.
Use of Technology: Students should follow instructions from their instructor as to acceptable use of technology in the classroom, including laptops, in each course. All course materials (including slides, assignments, handouts, pre-recorded lectures or recordings of class) are to be considered confidential material and are not to be shared in full or part with anyone outside of the course participants. Likewise, your own personal recording (audio or video) of your classes or office hour sessions is allowed only with the express written permission of your instructor. If you wish to post course materials or photographs/videos of classmates or your instructor to third-party sites (e.g. social media), you must first have informed consent. Without explicit permission from the instructor and in some cases your classmates, the public distribution or posting of any photos, audio/video recordings or pre-recordings from class, discussion section or office hours, even if you have permission to record, is not allowed and could be considered academic misconduct.

Please review additional information and policies regarding academic expectations and resources at the Ford School of Public Policy.

FYI: Maize & Blue Cupboard: “College students are experiencing food insecurity at alarming rates. The Maize and Blue Cupboard is here to provide an immediate and comprehensive response for the U-M community. We provide students with resources, educational opportunities, leadership development and compassionate support -- the tools they need to develop the skills to make informed decisions.” More information here: https://mbc.studentlife.umich.edu/
### TOPIC/READING ASSIGNMENT

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Introduction to Course and Program Evaluation</th>
<th>8/28/23</th>
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<tr>
<td>READ THE SYLLABUS. SERIOUSLY. READ IT. THAT STUFF AT THE FRONT ESPECIALLY. Also read the archaeology paper on poop.</td>
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<tr>
<th>2. Types of Evaluations/Basics</th>
<th>8/30/23</th>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;The random risks of randomized trials&quot; by Tim Hartford, from The Financial Times (2.5 pages)</td>
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### D.1 Discussion section - Meet and Greet

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### 9/4/23 – Labor Day – No Class

### 3. Asking the right questions; causal vs. descriptive; logic models | 9/6/23 |

Read 2nd and 3rd sections “define - red” and “frame – orangish” (pages 4-7; 3 pages) https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/BetterEvaluation%20Rainbow%20Framework%20clusters%202013.pdf

Read case summary it is only 1.5 pages but you will need to have it fresh in your mind for class! Case_Theory_WomenAsPolicymakers_India no prompts.pdf


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D. 2 DISCUSSION SECTION – Stats Review 9/8/23


Resource (SKIM): SAS – Basic Concepts in Research and Data Analysis (ignore random/fixed effects part)

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4. Measures, data and survey design 9/11/23

Data Module #1: What is research data? Macalester college (4 pages).
(https://libguides.macalester.edu/data1)


Read case summary it is only 1.5 pages but you will need to have it fresh in your mind for class! Case_Theory_WomenAsPolicymakers_India no prompts.pdf

5. What do we mean by causation? Counterfactual thinking & selection  


Ferraro PJ. Counterfactual thinking and impact evaluation in environmental policy. In M. Birnbaum & P. Mickwitz (Eds.), Environmental Program and Policy Evaluation. New Directions for Evaluation. 2009; 122, 75-84. *this reading is a bit technical – but really solid – try to get through it. (9 pages).

Read 5th section “understand causes – green” (pages 9-10) (2 pages)  

D. 3 DISCUSSION SECTION – Causal inference, selection, measures + data  


6. Overview of different methods to infer causation/fundamentals of research design  


7. More fundamentals of research design  


[https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-research-methods/chapter/chapter-5-research-design/](https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-research-methods/chapter/chapter-5-research-design/) (10 pages)


Read the case for class! Case_WhyRandomize_GOTV_US cropped.pdf

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D. 4 DISCUSSION SECTION Quiz Preparation 9/22/23

8. Guest lecture from Katherine Michelmore 9/25/23


9. IN CLASS QUIZ 9/27/23

D. 5 DISCUSSION SECTION – how to find articles etc 9/29/23

10. Randomized Controlled Trials 10/2/23

Glennerster, R. & Powers S. chapter from the *The Oxford Handbook on Professional Economic Ethics.* READ section 3 - pages 4-16. (12 pages) feel free to skim the rest.


11. Randomized Controlled Trials 10/4/23


**D. 6 DISCUSSION SECTION** 10/6/23


**12. Class Exercise: Designing a Randomized Trial** 10/9/23

Laura and John Arnold Foundation. (2016) *Key Items to Get Right When Conducting Randomized Trials of Social Programs*. (12 pages)

**13. Randomized Trial examples** 10/11/23


**D. 7 Discussion Section – NO SECTION.** 10/13/23

Use this time to work on your article critique or talk to your GSIs about this.

**14. FALL BREAK – NO CLASS** 10/16/23

**15. Quasi experimental designs: matching, regressions, individual fixed effects** 10/18/23


D. 8 Discussion Section – review matching/reg/fixed effects 10/20/23

16. Quasi experimental designs: regression discontinuity, instrumental variables and difference-in difference 10/23/23


17. More on DID and RD  
10/25/23

D. 9 Discussion Section – review RD, DID, IV  
10/27/23

18. Literature reviews and meta analyses  
10/30/23

*Systematic literature reviews.* Sanz, J. (2013) The contribution of literature reviews to public policy design: From anecdote to evidence (12 very easy pages).


Read 6th section “synthesize – blue” (pages 11-12) (2 pages)  


19. Guest lecturer – Prof Shobita Parthasarathy 11/1/23


D.10 Discussion Section – Cancelled meet with your groups 11/3/23

20. IN CLASS PRESENTATIONS OF ARTICLES 11/6/23

21. IN CLASS PRESENTATIONS OF ARTICLES 11/8/23

D. 11 Discussion Section – systematic reviews, other stuff as needed 11/10/23

22. IN CLASS PRESENTATIONS OF ARTICLES 11/13/23

23. IN CLASS PRESENTATIONS OF ARTICLES 11/15/23

D. 12 Discussion Section – Section cancelled, watch “three identical strangers” 11/17/23


No class today – watch video lecture


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25. No Class -- Happy Break!

D. 13 Discussion Section – No section due to break

26. In class exercise – designing a study

27. Review of key issues

D. 13 Discussion Section – FINAL EXAM REVIEW

28. Evaluation in the real world: challenges, politics and translation


Read 7th section “report and support use of findings – purple” (pages 13-15) (3 pages)

29. IN CLASS FINAL EXAM

12/6/23