Spring 2018 Syllabus
PLCY 1200 – Program Evaluation

Instructor: Andrew Bacher-Hicks
andrew_bacher-hicks@brown.edu

Class meetings: T, TH 9:00 – 10:20 AM 54 College St-Gerard House 119
Office hours: T 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM 59 Charlesfield 307

Course website: https://canvas.brown.edu/courses/1074706

Course Description

Public resources are limited, and decisions regarding how to use these scarce public resources must be
informed by an understanding of how well public programs and policies produce their desired outcomes.
However, measuring causal effects can be a challenge. This course is designed to provide a broad – yet
rigorous – overview of the tools available to evaluate the causal effects of public programs and policies.
These tools and methods include randomized control experiments and quasi-experiments, such as
difference-in-difference, regression discontinuity, and instrumental variables.

Students in this course will become familiar with the concepts, methods, and applications of evaluation.
We will build intuition around the experimental and quasi-experimental method commonly used in
practice so that students learn how to interpret evaluation results, read evaluation research critically, and
understand the pros/cons of each method. We will draw on illustrations and case studies from a variety
of substantive policy areas.

Prerequisites

As this course builds on several introductory courses, students must have completed PLCY 0100. In
addition, they must have completed one of the following: POLS 1600, EDUC 1110, SOC 1100, or
ECON 1620. In particular, students are expected to have a basic knowledge of statistics and regression
analysis. If you have not completed these prerequisites, you must see me to receive written permission to
enroll in the course.

Readings

The required textbook for this course is:


In addition to this required textbook, we will read case studies and journal articles that apply the
methodology discussed in the textbook. All such articles will be posted on Canvas. You are expected to
do assigned readings before class; this is especially important on days when we will discuss journal
articles and case studies.

Learning Outcomes and Course Structure

The course has three main goals:

1. Help students recognize the importance of high-quality program evaluation research.
2. Develop intuition for the methodology used in program evaluation to make students critical consumers of program evaluation research.
3. Expose students to high-quality quantitative research on important policy questions.

In order to facilitate these learning objectives, most classes will follow one of two structures. The first structure is a lecture. During lecture-style classes, I will introduce a new topic or method. The second type of structure will be a discussion of a research article that applies a specific method I have previously introduced. In these discussion-based classes, it is particularly important that you complete the assigned reading before class. There may be parts of these articles that you do not fully understand (that’s okay!) and the authors may extend their approaches in ways that we have not discussed. I will often tell you to skim over sections that will not be central to our discussion; the key is that you read the paper as an informed consumer and walk away with an understanding of the key insights.

Assignments/Grading

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation and Engagement</td>
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<td>Quizzes</td>
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<td>Group Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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Class Participation and Engagement

Student participation can substantially enrich the learning experience for both the students and the instructor. As a result, you are expected to attend all classes. Please notify me in advance if you will need to miss a class.

I will encourage class participation and discussion throughout the course. Effective class participation requires you read the assigned readings before coming to class. You will be expected to participate in small- and large-group discussions throughout the course. In addition, you are encouraged to ask questions, to share relevant insights you have from previous experiences, and to treat your classmates’ participation with courtesy. I do not expect discussions to be perfect, but I expect you to try. This class will be a safe space to practice your understanding.

You are welcome to use laptops in class for taking notes. I will also provide .ppt versions of slides on Canvas before lecture. You should feel free to download these slides to follow along and take notes. However, please refrain from any other uses (e.g. checking email, web surfing, etc.) – these activities are distracting to me and (more importantly) to others trying to pay attention. Respect your classmates.

Group Presentation

Students will form groups of approximately five students based on different policy interests (e.g., education, health, immigration, etc.). As a group, students will identify a program/policy of interest that has been evaluated experimentally. The group will deliver a short presentation (i.e., 10-15 minutes) to the class on 2/22, which should summarize the program, evaluation, main results, and limitations. The presentation should also include the group’s policy recommendations. I will provide more detail on this assignment later in the course.
Quizzes

On the days when we will be discussing a case study, there will be a very brief (i.e., one question) quiz at the beginning of class, which will serve as an incentive to read cases/articles before class.1 These quizzes will be extremely straight-forward and are not meant to be difficult if you have done the reading. Late quizzes (or re-takes) will not be accepted, but I will drop your lowest quiz grade.

Exams

The midterm and final will be closed book and closed notes. All students are expected to be present. The midterm exam will be in class on March 6. The final exam will be held during exams period on May 12 at 9am.

Course Time Allotment

The total of in-class hours and out-of-class work for all full-credit courses at Brown is approximately 180 hours over the semester. In this course, students can expect to spend 3 hours per week in class (33 hours total). Required reading and preparation for the class meetings is expected to take up approximately 8 hours per week (88 hours). In addition, student assignments include a presentation (approximately 15 hours of preparation), a midterm exam (approximately 15 hours of preparation), and a final exam (approximately 25 hours of preparation). Actual times will vary for each student; final grades are not determined by the amount of time a student spends on the course.

Academic Integrity

All students should read, understand and abide by the Academic Conduct Code at Brown.

Accommodations

Please inform me if you have a disability or other condition that might require some modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information, contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu.

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1 The one exception to this is 2/22 when there will not be a quiz because there is no assigned reading and student groups will be presenting case studies to the class.
# Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/25</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Introduction and course overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1/30</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>What is program evaluation? Why is it important?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2/1</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Program theory; appropriate questions and measures</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2/6</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Process evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2/8</td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Introduction to impact evaluation and causal inference</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Impact</td>
<td>Experimental impact analysis</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Evaluation: Experiments</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>2/22</td>
<td>Evaluation: Experiments</td>
<td>Case study of experiments (student-led)</td>
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<td>2/27</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Case study of experiments</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>Midterm exam (in class)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>3/6</td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Introduction to quasi-experiments</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>3/8</td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Multiple controls, matching, and fixed effects</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>3/13</td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Case study of multiple controls</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>3/15</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>3/20</td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Case study of matching</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>3/22</td>
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<td>Case study of fixed effects</td>
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<td>Regression discontinuity</td>
<td>Regression discontinuity</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>Regression discontinuity</td>
<td>Case study of regression discontinuity</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>4/10</td>
<td>Difference-in-difference</td>
<td>Difference-in-difference</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>4/12</td>
<td>Difference-in-difference</td>
<td>Case study of difference-in-difference</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>4/17</td>
<td>Instrumental variables</td>
<td>Instrumental variables</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>4/19</td>
<td>Instrumental variables</td>
<td>Case study of instrumental variables</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>4/24</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Meta-analysis and cost-benefit</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>4/26</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Review and wrap-up</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>5/12</td>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>Final exam</td>
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Detailed Course Schedule (with Readings)

Class 1 (1/25): Introduction and course overview

Class 2 (1/30): What is program evaluation? Why is it important?
    o Read Chapter 1

Class 3 (2/1): Program theory; appropriate questions and measures
    o Read Chapter 2

Class 4 (2/6): Process evaluation

Class 5 (2/8): Introduction to impact evaluation and causal inference
    o Read Chapter 3

Class 6 (2/13): Overview of experiments
  • A&P Introduction; A&P Ch. 1

Class 7 (2/15): Case study of experiments
  • Crepon, et al. (2013). Do labor market policies have displacement effects? Evidence from clustered randomized experiment.
    o This paper is complex. Please focus on the abstract, introduction, and results (it’s okay if you don’t understand all of the results -- we will work through them in class).

Class 8 (2/22): Case study of experiments (student-led)
  • No assigned readings; class presentations

Class 9 (2/27): Qualitative analysis

Class 10 (3/1): In-class midterm

Class 11 (3/6): Introduction to quasi-experiments
  • No reading, but feel free to get started on A&P Ch. 2 for next class

Class 12 (3/8): Multiple controls, matching and fixed effects
  • A&P Ch. 2
Class 13 (3/13): Case study of multiple controls
  • Kane & Staiger (2008) *Estimating Teacher Impacts on Student Achievement: An Experimental Evaluation*.

Class 14 (3/15): NO CLASS

Class 15 (3/20): Case study of matching

Class 16 (3/22): Case study of fixed effects

Class 17 (4/3): Regression discontinuity
  • A&P Ch. 4

Class 18 (4/5): Case study of regression discontinuity

Class 19 (4/10): Difference-in-difference
  • A&P Ch. 5

Class 20 (4/12): Case study of Difference-in-Difference

Class 21 (4/17): Instrumental Variables
  • A&P Ch. 3

Class 22 (4/19): Case study of instrumental variables
  • Madestam et al. (2013). *Do political protests matter? Evidence from the Tea Party Movement*.

Class 23 (4/24): Meta-analysis and cost-benefit

Class 24 (4/26): Review and wrap-up
  • No reading