

AS 360.331 Methods for Policy Research
Social Policy Program
Johns Hopkins University Spring 2015
Th 3-5:30 Abel Wolman House
Syllabus

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Office hours: Monday 3-4 p.m. Mergenthaler 286 or by appointment

Course Description

This course will introduce students to quantitative methods for studying social policy problems. Topics to be covered include descriptive statistics and sampling, correlation and causation, simple and multiple regression and experimental methods. The emphasis will be on the selection, interpretation and practical application of these methodologies in specific policy settings, rather than with formal proofs. Skills will be reinforced by hands-on exercises using statistical software. Over the course of the semester, students will critically analyze policy reports and empirical research in a range of policy areas and learn how to present this research to a non-specialist audience. Finally, we will discuss the pros and cons of quantitative vs. qualitative methodologies. The course will conclude with group presentations that draw on all these skills.

Course Materials:

Handouts and assignments will be made available on the Blackboard website at blackboard.jhu.edu. Required supplementary readings are also on electronic reserve through the Milton S. Eisenhower library.

Software:

A short introduction to STATA is on the course website. STATA is available on campus at the student computing labs: <http://classrooms.johnshopkins.edu/computerlabs/> You may also access Stata from your own computer via myjlab.jhu.edu (instructions to follow).

Evaluation:

There will be 4 homeworks, and a paper with associated presentation. You will also be expected to complete the required reading prior to class, bring the selected article to class and be prepared to discuss it in some depth.

Homeworks	20%
Paper/presentation	40%
Class Participation	40% (attendance and contribution to class discussions)

Computer Homeworks:

Use STATA to complete the following (with due dates):

1. Examine data-sets on individuals and states (**February 12**)
2. Calculate correlations for CEOs and Presidential elections (**February 19**)
3. Examine the link between substance abuse and infant health (**March 5**)
4. Evaluate the importance of education in determining wage outcomes (**March 12**)

Class Discussion:

For discussion classes, all students should come to class prepared to discuss the assigned reading. Bring a copy of the article to class because we may need to focus on details within it.

Paper:

You must complete a short paper using data! The paper should be approximately 6-8 pages in length and should demonstrate that you understand and can apply quantitative techniques to an issue of public policy. We can talk about whether or not you want to work in teams of 2-3.

A schedule of assignment dates follows.

Paper Proposal – February 26. A one-page abstract submitted by email briefly outlining the question you are asking, and the types of model and data you will be using. Provide at least three related references you have consulted.

Progress Report – March 26, April 2. Submit a table of descriptive statistics for the data you are using and a description of the empirical model to be used. Describe what type of estimation you will do, what variables will be included and any possible problems or shortcomings of your approach. You will have some class time to present your proposal and receive feedback.

Paper Presentation – April 23, April 30. You will have an opportunity to present your paper to the class. The following issues should be addressed in that presentation:

- ◆ What question is being addressed in my paper? Why is it important? What is the context?
- ◆ What does my data look like? Are there any problems with it? (Please present a handout/overhead of descriptive statistics and discuss).
- ◆ What kind of model is being used? Briefly describe it, and mention any shortcomings.
- ◆ What does the empirical analysis show? (Please present a handout/overhead of results and discuss).
- ◆ Conclusion. What does this research contribute? What are the policy implications? Indicate any areas for further research.

The use of overheads, Powerpoint or similar technical aids are optional. However, aim to make your presentation as professional as possible.

Final Paper – May 4. The final paper should have a clear writing style, correct spelling, grammar and punctuation, be well-organized and include references. You should explain the question asked, put it into context, describe the data you are using, specify the model used, interpret the results and draw conclusions.

**Quantitative Approaches to Public Policy
Course Outline and Reading List**

Date:

1/29 **Introduction to the Course**

2/5 **Descriptive Statistics**

Jacob, Robin Tepper et al. 2014. "Reading Partners" MDRC Policy Brief, June.

2/12 **Correlation and Bivariate Regression**

Fair, Ray C. 2002. *Predicting Presidential Elections* Stanford University Press, Chapter 1.

HOMEWORK 1 DUE

2/19 **Multiple Regression (I)**

Sander, William. 1992. "The Effect of Women's Schooling on Fertility," *Economic Letters* 40, 229-233.

HOMEWORK 2 DUE

2/26 **Multiple Regression (II)**

Bendick, Marc, Jr., et al. 2010. "Employment Discrimination in Upscale Restaurants: Evidence from Matched Pair Testing," *Social Science Journal* 47, 802-818.

PAPER PROPOSAL DUE

3/5 **Dummy Variables, Data issues**

Ross, Catherine and Chia-ling Wu. 1995. "The Links between Education and Health," *American Sociological Review* 60 (5) 719-745.

HOMEWORK 3 DUE

3/12 **Panel Data**

Card, David and Alan Krueger. 1994. "Minimum Wages and Employment: A Case Study of the Fast-Food Industry in New Jersey and Pennsylvania" *American Economic Review* 84 (4) 772-793.

HOMEWORK 4 DUE

3/26 **Papers – Progress Reports**

4/2 **Papers – Progress Reports**

4/9 **Limited Dependent Variables**

Johnson, David R. and Laurie K. Scheuble. 1995. "Women's Marital Naming in Two Generations: A National Study," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57 (2) 724-732

4/16 **Further Issues**

Eissa, Nada and Jeffrey B. Liebman. 1996. "Labor Supply Response to the Earned Income Tax Credit," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 111 (2) 605-637.

4/23 **Presentation of Papers**

4/30 **Presentation of Papers**

FINAL PAPER DUE MONDAY MAY 4