

AS 360.331 Methods for Policy Research
Social Policy Program
Johns Hopkins University Spring 2018
Th 4-6 Abel Wolman House
Syllabus

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Office hours: Monday 3-4 p.m. Wyman 522 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, assignments and readings will be made available on the Blackboard website at blackboard.jhu.edu.

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:

Class Participation	40% (attendance and contribution to class discussions)
Computer Homeworks	30%
Paper/presentation	30%

Class Discussions:

In addition to lecture material, we will be critically evaluating articles most weeks. For each article, we will be discussing the relevance of the questions asked, the data and model used, results and interpretation. All students should come to class prepared to discuss the assigned reading. If you do not contribute to the discussion, I will call upon you. Since we will cover each assigned article in a fair amount of depth, and may need to look at tables and graphs, please bring a copy of the article to class.

Computer Homeworks:

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

1. Examine data-sets on individuals and states (**February 15**)
2. Calculate correlations for CEOs and Presidential elections (**February 22**)
3. Examine the link between substance abuse and infant health (**March 15**)

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. You will work on the project in teams of 1, 2 or possibly 3, but the final paper will be your own work.

I will recommend a couple of easily-accessed datasets, but if you wish you may use other datasets, or even analyze data from your internship. Keep in touch with me if you would like to go this route. A schedule of assignment dates follows.

Paper Proposal – March 1, by email. 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 29 in class. 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 26, May 3. 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 presentation should be similar to one you may give at a conference, or to professional colleagues.

Final Paper – May 7, 5 p.m. by email. 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:

- 2/1 **Introduction to the Course**
- 2/8 **Descriptive Statistics**
Jacob, Robin Tepper et al. 2014. "Reading Partners" MDRC Policy Brief, June.
- 2/15 **Correlation and Bivariate Regression**
Fair, Ray C. 2002. *Predicting Presidential Elections* Stanford University Press,
Chapter 1.
- HOMEWORK 1 DUE**
- 2/22 **Multiple Regression (I)**
Rosenblatt, Peter and Stefanie DeLuca, "What Happened in Sandtown-Winchester?"
Urban Affairs Review, December 16, 2015.
- HOMEWORK 2 DUE**
- 3/1 **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**
- 3/8 **Dummy Variables, Data Issues**
Sander, William. 1992. "The Effect of Women's Schooling on Fertility," *Economic
Letters* 40, 229-233.
- 3/15 **Papers – Individual Consultations**
HOMEWORK 3 DUE
- 3/29 **Zeke Cohen 3:30 – 4:30**
- 4/5 **Papers – Progress Reports, in class**
- 4/12 **Panel Data and Fixed Effects**
Bhattacharya, Jayanta, Janet Currie and Steven J. Haider. 2006. "Breakfast of
Champions? The School Breakfast Program and the Nutrition of Children and
Families," *Journal of Human Resources*, 1 (3) Summer, 445-466
- 4/19 **Limited Dependent Variable Models, Further Issues**
Mmari, Kristin et al. 2014. "A Global Study on the Influence of Neighborhood
Contextual Factors on Adolescent Health." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 55(6) S13-S20.
- 4/26 **Presentation of Papers**
- 5/3 **Presentation of Papers**

FINAL PAPER DUE MONDAY MAY 7, 5 P.M.