PUBPL 6000: Economics and Public Policy Statistics

Summer 2024

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Office Hours: Friday 3 pm – 5 pm

Office Location: Will be available via Zoom

COURSE DESCRIPTION

"One of the beautiful things about science is that it allows us to bumble along, getting it wrong time after time, and feel perfectly fine as long as we learn something each time."

- Martin A. Schwartz (2008), "The Importance of Stupidity in Scientific Research"

Data serves as the lifeblood of public policy research. With the escalation in public spending, legislators increasingly rely on accurate, timely, and easily-accessible data to make well-informed decisions. To meet this obligation, researchers have devised an array of tools and data analysis methods. Each researcher draws upon a spectrum of these tools and methods to translate their studies into policy recommendations. This course is tailored to prepare incoming graduate students to scrutinize policy issues and tackle policy research questions critical to their academic and professional journeys. To achieve this, we will concentrate on the fundamentals of economics and statistics, which form the bedrock of public policy.

This course is conducted online, structured to facilitate a phased learning approach and furnish you with the knowledge and tools necessary for the Master of Public Policy program and the MPP Certificate. It is intended for students who have either not previously taken economics or statistics classes in their academic pursuits or have done so many years ago and seek a refresher. Throughout the course, you will acquire the **basic principles of economics and statistics to lay the groundwork for the more in-depth courses required for the program**.

Delivered online, the course will guide you through a series of video lectures, readings, group discussion threads, and exams to evaluate your understanding and prepare you for subsequent courses. The course is divided into two components: Economics and Statistics, each comprising

six modules. Within each module, you will progress through a structured learning process, completing one task before advancing to the next. An exam will conclude each module to assess your comprehension. Importantly, each module is "gated," necessitating completion of the preceding module before proceeding. **Be mindful of due dates, although you will have ample time to work on them.** Announcements will be made with the publication of each module.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Component 1 – Economics:

The primary goal of the economics segment in this course is to enhance students' comprehension of the fundamental principles of microeconomic theory essential for public policy analysis. Additionally, it aims to acquaint students with diverse applications of economic theory in the context of policy formulation and implementation.

Component 2 - Statistics:

The main objective of the statistics segment of this course is to provide students with foundational calculation and interpretation skills necessary for conducting statistical analyses and engaging in quantitative social science research.

OFFICE HOURS

I will be holding office hours every Friday between 3 pm to 5 pm. The Zoom link will be available on Canvas under the Zoom tab. You can drop by during this time if you have questions and doubts regarding the course material, concepts, and assignments. If you need to meet me at a different time, please send me an email in advance so that we can figure out a convenient schedule for a Zoom meeting. Additionally, I'll establish a "Class Forum" discussion board. This forum can be utilized for general inquiries about course materials, logistics, and assignments. If your questions could benefit the entire class, I encourage you to post them in the Class Forum before sending me an email. This would also create a way of interacting with your fellow classmates.

REQUIRED READINGS

To save you money, the program has decided to make this course *textbook-free*. This offers a significant advantage as it allows me to provide you with all the necessary readings at no cost. However, there may be occasional drawbacks, as some scanned materials provided by the library may not be of the highest quality. Try to be patient, but if you run across a reading that is unusable, be prepared to use your Google sleuthing skills to figure out an equation or two (for

example). All required readings and videos will be linked in the modules. Graduate education is at least in part about learning how to learn on your own, and in some cases you will need to go find information**. I cannot stress this enough - you will need to go find some information on your own**. It is not difficult to find, I promise, but will require some minimal effort on your part.

CANVAS

As this is an online course, the course Canvas site is a virtual classroom and super syllabus all-in-one. There are several aids for addressing any technical difficulties experienced in Canvas, listed below. These are also linked to from the course Canvas site's Help page. Please consult these aids before contacting instructors about technical difficulties.

- University of Utah Canvas Orientation resources
- Online Canvas Guides
- University of Utah IT Help Desk: 801-581-4000

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

This course is arranged into 'modules' for each week. Please see the Canvas course for details on each week.

Economics Modules

Week 1, May 13 : Thinking like an economist

Week 2, May 20 : The market system and demand, supply and equilibrium

Week 3, May 27 : Competition and monopolies

Week 4, June 3: Market failures - public goods and externalities

Week 5, June 10 : Income inequality, poverty and discrimination

Week 6, June 17 : Introduction to macroeconomics and measuring domestic output and national income

Statistics Modules

Week 7, June 24 : The what and why of statistics and frequency distribution

Week 8, July 1 : Measures of central tendency and measures of variability

Week 9, July 8 : Probability and normal probability distribution

Week 10, July 15 : Introduction to inference and hypothesis testing

Week 11, July 22 : Estimating population proportion and testing the difference

Week 12, July 29 : Introduction to regression

Rejoice! There is no final!

COURSE POLICIES

I will detail the policy for this course below. Academic honesty is expected, and dishonesty will not be tolerated. The University policy on academic dishonesty can be found on the university website. An act of academic dishonesty will result in a course grade of E and a recommendation of additional disciplinary action. The faculty has adopted the following guidelines concerning what constitutes a violation of ethical standards for work completed in this course. Any of these violations will be considered academic dishonesty and treated as such. These guidelines are in addition to any University-wide guidelines concerning academic dishonesty, which may be in effect. All course assignments will be scanned through Turnitin, and any misconduct will result in a failing grade for the course.

1. **Cheating**: the giving or receiving of any unauthorized assistance on any academic work;

2. **Plagiarism:** presenting the language, structures or ideas of another person or persons as one's own academic work;

3. **Falsification:** Any untrue statement, either oral or written, concerning one's own academic work or the academic work of another student, or the unauthorized alteration of any academic record; and

4. **Original work:** Unless specifically allowed by the instructor, all academic work undertaken in a course must be original (i.e., it must not have been submitted in a prior course or be submitted in a course being taken concurrently).

COURSE WORK

Assignments vary by week/module. All assignments are located in the **Modules** section of the course. You must complete all the modules. There are due dates for every module! Every week you will have a lesson and an exam. Some weeks will also have mandatory discussion posts/replies, and there are three short research briefs (written assignments) scattered throughout the course (Modules 3, 4, and 10). Each module also has an ungraded practice exam. Though not worth points, it is required to complete before the next module will unlock! Our class

weeks begin on Monday and end on the following Sunday. Due dates for the assignments are set for the Sunday at 11:59 p.m. **Pay particular attention to the end of the course** - because of the shortened summer semester, the last module (Module 12) only has a few days in it, so you either have to work ahead, or work very fast in the final week!

GRADING POLICY

I use a standard grading scale to assign letter grades as computed by your percentage of points earned divided by the total points available. This class has approximately 750 points available through exams and assignments:

- *Economics Modules:* Six exams, two written assignments = 355 points

Module 1 Exam	45 points
Module 2 Exam	60 points
Module 3 Exam	60 points
Module 3 written assignment	25 points
Module 4 Exam	50 points
Module 4 written assignment	15 points
Module 5 Exam	50 points
Module 6 Exam	50 points
TOTAL	= 355

- *Statistics Modules:* Six exams, one written assignment = 305 points

Module 7 Exam	50 points
Module 8 Exam	60 points
Module 9 Exam	50 points
Module 10 Exam	50 points
Module 10 written assignment	25 points
Module 11 Exam	35 points
Module 12 Exam	35 points
TOTAL	= 305

- *Discussion threads:* 9 discussion threads (10 points each) = 90 points.
  For the modules that include an online discussion component, you will be graded based on how you post your response to the question and interact with your fellow students. As outlined in the "Netiquette" section of the syllabus, your online interaction should be

courteous and respectful. The objective of the discussion sections is to create a platform for engaging discussions where we can learn from each other. You can almost always expect to receive a full score based on active and mindful participation.

Please keep in mind that these are approximations, and throughout the course I may modify the course and assignments points as needed. I will communicate any such changes through the Canvas course announcements.

Grade Scale

GRADE	TOTAL POINTS EARNED
A	92 and above
A-	90 to < 92
B+	88 to < 90
B	82 to < 88
B-	80 to < 82
C+	75 to < 80
C	70 to < 75
C-	65 to < 70
D+	63 to < 65
D	57 to < 63
D-	55 to < 57
E	< 55

ATTENDANCE POLICY

As this is an asynchronous, online class, there is no attendance policy *per se*. However, you must complete all of the course as assigned (see late policy below). You should plan on logging in at least a few times per week in order to successfully complete the course.

LATE POLICY

Because this is a shortened semester, I have tried to develop a course that will allow you to work *ahead* of the modules as needed to accommodate your personal and professional lives. However, there must still be a great deal of discipline on your part in order to be successful. Please keep up with the class schedule, especially with assignment due dates. **Late assignments and projects will be subject to a 10% decrease in points for every day they are late. This means that if you submit an assignment five days late, it will be worth just 50% of the earned points; ten days late means zero points.** It is in your best interest to contact me beforehand if you are experiencing difficulties that will impact your ability to turn in work. However, you do not need to let me know if you will

be turning in assignments late, just be aware of the 10% penalty/day impact to your score which will automatically be applied.

INSTRUCTOR EXPECTATIONS

I commit to being your mentor and facilitator of the classroom experience, and to the following expectations for this course:

- I will design the course to include lectures, readings materials, and assignments that will challenge students and will provide them with opportunities to learn and practice course content.
- Though this online course includes pre-recorded lectures, it is not a class that is run "automatically" by technology. I interact with the class via announcements, virtual office hours, emails/the Canvas Inbox, feedback on assignments, and comments on lecture bulletin boards, among other methods.
- I will respond to emails in a timely fashion. *"Timely"* in this instance means within 48 hours, not including weekends and holidays. *Normally,* I am quite a bit faster, but like everyone else, life sometimes intervenes.
- I will be available for individual consultation via virtual office hours, email, or phone. Students will not be required to come to campus in order to meet with me, nor does it have to be during 'bankers hours.'
- I will provide feedback on the assignments in a timely manner.
- I will follow all official University of Utah policies regarding conduct in the classroom, incompletes, and accommodations. Accommodations will be considered on an individual basis and only with required documentation. See the **University Policies** section at the end of this syllabus for more information and resources.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Though the online format allows students greater flexibility to complete their work, this course does have a structure and timeline, including due dates for course assignments. As such, the following is expected of all students in this class:

- Students will log in to the course a minimum of 3 times per week.
- Students may be expected to work with classmates; however, students are not expected to interact with their classmates in person. A good alternative to meeting in person would be online video conferencing, which allows students to find a time to meet that works best for their schedule. Depending on the assignment, students can also choose to

interact with their classmates with whatever technology they are most comfortable with (Groupme, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, etc).

- To do well in online courses, students must be self-motivated, organized, and willing to stay on top of their schedule. Students should take control of their learning while in this course.
- Students will regularly check **course announcements**. The Announcements area is the instructor's official means of communication when distributing information to the entire class.
- Students will update their Canvas settings to ensure they receive timely notifications from the course.
- If students have any questions, are struggling with course materials, or need further assistance from their instructor, they will take the initiative to contact their instructor via the Inbox feature in Canvas or via email. Email is not perfect; sometimes, messages sent to instructors are lost before they are read. If you do not hear back from your instructor 3 days after sending a message, please contact your instructor again. I am available for office hours every Friday from 3 pm – 5 pm and students should consider this to be a primary option for reaching out to me.
- Students will engage with the course, students, and the instructor in a respectful and professional manner at all times.

NETIQUETTE

Students are expected to follow the core rules of netiquette at all times while participating in the class, interacting with other students, and communicating with the course instructor and teaching assistants. **Be kind.**

TECHNOLOGY ISSUES AND TECH HELP

I have invested a great deal of time before the start of the semester to ensure that the technologies used in this online class will operate smoothly. Nevertheless, technology doesn't always do what we want it to do! As such, this course has the following expectations regarding tech problems:

- Students are required to contact the instructor immediately when they notice broken links or inaccessible files in the course. Links and files are assumed to work, unless students indicate otherwise. Points lost on assignments, due to inaccessible links and files, cannot be made up if students did not notify the instructor of the problem prior to the assignment due date.

- The instructor is committed to fixing broken links and inaccessible files as soon as possible after being notified by the students. In the case that there will be a significant
- delay before these items can be fixed, the instructor will post an announcement to let the class know about the problem and to describe any alternate files/links or alternate due dates for assignments, if applicable, that students should be aware of.
- Students are responsible for submitting all assignments and activities by their due dates. In the very rare case that technical problems prevent a student from submitting an assignment, students are required to— Immediately contact their instructor via email or the Canvas Inbox, to let them know about the problem and to submit a copy of their assignment as an attachment (where possible). Then, immediately contact the Canvas help desk to troubleshoot and resolve the problem.
- Submit an email updating the instructor on whether the problem was resolved and of any additional steps the student or instructor needs to take to get the assignment properly submitted to Canvas.
- It is not appropriate to send an email to your instructor informing them about tech problems after an assignment due date.
- Students are expected to read all assignment instructions and to submit work in the required file formats. Work submitted as improper file formats will not be considered to have been handed in on time. The instructor will only grade work submitted using the proper file format.
- It is the student's responsibility to reach out to the appropriate help desk to troubleshoot and resolve tech problems in the course.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you. The following resources and statements are drawn directly from the University of Utah guidelines. If you have questions or concerns not answered below, please contact me directly so we can work together to answer and address them.

(1) *Accommodation of Sincerely Held Beliefs*: I will work with students who require schedule changes due to religious or other significant obligations. I will not consider any requests based on course content. No other area of study touches on more sensitive topics than the broad category of "public policy" (and at times disturbing forms of human misbehavior such as criminal law). Policy researchers must read about, talk about, and listen to information relating to very difficult subjects. Sometimes case descriptions can be quite graphic. Students are required to attend all classes and to read all the assignments. All assignments and lectures are related to our subject matter.

(2) *The Americans with Disabilities Act*: The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, (801) 581-5020. CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.

(3) *University Safety Statement*: The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious activity, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit safeu.utah.edu.

(4) *Addressing Sexual Misconduct:* Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which Includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581- 7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801- 585-2677(COPS).

(5) *Undocumented Student Support Statement*: Immigration is a complex phenomenon with broad impact—those who are directly affected by it, as well as those who are indirectly affected by their relationships with family members, friends, and loved ones. If your immigration status presents obstacles to engaging in specific activities or fulfilling specific course criteria, confidential arrangements may be requested from the Dream Center. Arrangements with the

Dream Center will not jeopardize your student status, your financial aid, or any other part of your residence. The Dream Center offers a wide range of resources to support undocumented students (with and without DACA) as well as students from mixed-status families. To learn more, please contact the Dream Center at 801.213.3697 or visit the Dream Center website.

(6) *Veterans' Center:* If you are a student veteran, the U of Utah has a Veterans Support Center located in Room 161 in the Olpin Union Building. Hours: M-F 8-5 pm. Please visit their website for more information about what support they offer, a list of ongoing events, and links to outside resources: Veteran's Center. Please also let me know if you need any additional support in this class for any reason.

(7) *Wellness Statement:* Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student's ability to succeed and thrive at the University of Utah. For helpful resources, contact the Center for Student Wellness or call at 801-581-7776.

(8) *English Language Learners*: If you are an English language learner, please be aware of several resources on campus that will support you with your language and writing development.These resources include the Writing Center, the Writing Program, and the English Language Institute. Please let me know if there is any additional support you would like to discuss for this class.

(9) *LGBT Resources*: I am committed to inclusivity and respect for all students in the classroom, including and not limited to LGBT individuals. Additionally, the University of Utah has an LGBT Resource Center located in the Olpin Union Building, Room 409. Their website contains more information about the support they offer, a list of events, and links to additional resources: LGBT Resources.

(10) *Names/Pronouns:* Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name as well as "Preferred first name" (if previously entered by you in the Student Profile section of your CIS account). While CIS refers to this as merely a preference, I will honor you by referring to you with the name and pronoun that feels best for you in class or on assignments. Please advise me of any name or pronoun changes so I can help create a learning environment in which you, your name, and your pronoun are respected. If you need any assistance or support, please reach out to the LGBT Resource Center: LGBT Resources.

(11) *Drop/Withdrawal:* Please check the academic calendar for more information pertaining to dropping and withdrawing from a course. Withdrawing from a course, and other matters of registration, are the student's responsibility.

(12) *Student Code*: https://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.php

(13) *Accommodation Policy (see Section Q):* https://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-100.php