

PAUD 604: Public Program Evaluation

Dr. Jeffrey Bloem

Fall 2022*

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Office Hours: Mondays, 4:30 - 5:30 pm

Office Hours Location: **Kerwin ST06**

Web: www.JeffBloem.com

Class Hours: Mondays, 5:30 - 8:00 pm

Classroom: **Kerwin Hall 5**

Course Description

Imagine you are a policymaker, and your constituents are demanding a solution to a social problem. This may be rising crime, high school drop-out rate, teenage pregnancy, or pollution in the water and air. You are approached with several proposals purporting to address the problem at hand. How do you make a decision regarding how to spend your limited resources? What proposal, if any, will you select, and why?

Your first question is likely to be, how does the program work, and what evidence supports its effectiveness? Public program evaluation is a critical component in designing and operating effective programs and accomplishing policy goals. Evaluations supply information to policymakers and program managers that can assist them in making decisions about which programs to fund, modify, expand, or eliminate. An important element of program evaluation is learning through iteration. No program is perfect and evaluation can be used as a way to learn and adapt a current program to achieve better results. A significant amount of money is spent on evaluations, across many fields and for many different purposes, although not all are created equal in terms of methodology and results.

Required Materials

- **Dr. Scott Cunningham.** *Causal Inference: The Mixtape.* [Online version available here](#) and for sale on Amazon for slightly over \$30.
- Other material will come from an assorted set of academic papers. These readings are linked below (in the course schedule) and on Canvas.

*Last Updated: 08/28/2022

Prerequisites

This course requires and reinforces a basic understanding of regression analysis. The activities and assignments require you to apply concepts taught in Quantitative Methods for Policy Analysis II. You will be regularly asked to conduct and interpret Stata output. If you are unfamiliar with Stata, I recommend that you purchase or review the following text:

Kohler, U., Kreuter, F. (2012). *Data analysis using Stata*. 3rd Edition. College Station, TX: Stata Press. (ISBN-13: 978-1-59718-110-5)

Or check out the Christopher F. Baum's [Using Stata for Data Management and Reproducible Research](#) introductory presentation slides.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. **Consume** research in an informed, critical manner, **identifying** the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of specific studies and research designs.
2. **Distinguish** high- from low-quality evaluations.
3. **Recognize** how organizational, programmatic, and political factors influence evaluation.
4. **Create** and **employ** the research designs and methodological tools of approaches to evaluation designs and measures.
5. **Conduct** original empirical research, applying your statistical knowledge from previous courses.
6. **Interpret** research findings in logical and meaningful ways, and write and speak clearly and concisely in formats targeting both academic and policy audiences.

Course Structure

Class Structure

Each class will meet in-person. Class sessions will be a mixture of lecture, group activities, class presentations, and guest lectures.

Article Reviews

One of the goals of this class is to become a good consumer of evaluations, in addition to being a good evaluator. Students will review evaluation articles in the course readings listed below. Imagine you are staffing a policymaker or program administrator who needs to make a decision about whether or not to fund, expand, improve or terminate the program evaluated in the article. Write a memo providing your critique and recommendation for how your boss should act moving forward. Base your recommendations on the quality and substance of the research article. Each (3 page, double spaced) memo should cover the following topics briefly:

1. Objective/evaluation type
2. Intervention/program
3. Measures of outcomes and other variables
4. Research design
5. Empirical findings
6. Your assessment and/or critique: What are the strengths/weaknesses of the evaluation, its design, its measures, and its interpretation? Do you believe the results?

You may discuss papers with your classmates, but each student must hand in their own assignments via Canvas. Although we will have **many** opportunities to submit an article review, you are only required to submit **two** article reviews throughout the semester. That is, at the end of the course, I will keep your two highest grades on article reviews. You may complete more than two article reviews. *Do not wait until the last two opportunities.* Be kind to your future self!

These article reviews will be graded on a zero through ten scale. To earn ten points, you must carefully consider the article and its components with only a small number of minor errors. If you do not complete the review, you will earn zero points. You will earn partial credit (e.g., earning between zero and ten points) for either not carefully considering the article and its components or by making a large number of major mistakes.

Midterm Exam

The midterm exam focuses on knowledge and understanding of the material from required readings, classroom lectures, and discussions in class. You will complete the midterm at home and submit your typed answers via Canvas. You may use your notes and readings, but must complete the exam individually (do not discuss questions or answers with your colleagues). The midterm will be made available on **October 18** and will be due the following week, **October 24**.

Program Evaluation Proposal

The final paper will involve responding to a request for proposals to perform a quantitative evaluation of a program or a policy of your choice. For example, you could evaluate the effects of school-provided lunch or breakfast on students' academic or food security outcomes, whether a smoking ordinance reduced tobacco use, or how Europe's carbon cap and trade system affects carbon emissions, or economic activity. It will essentially involve writing a research grant proposal. The proposal will consist of the following sections:

1. Abstract
2. Introduction, with details about the policy or program you're proposing to evaluate and previous research literature on the subject
3. Methods section, including what dataset(s) and the sources you'll use, how you'll measure and define your right-hand-side and dependent variables, the research design you'll use, and how you'll analyze the data

4. Expected results, describing why this issue is important and relevant for policy and practice.
5. (Optional) Appendix to include any statistical analyses and/or proposed Stata (or other software) commands and measures.

Your final submission will be graded on (a) the inclusion of each of the sections outlined above, (b) the technical quality of the discussion within each section, and (c) the clarity of the writing throughout the proposal. This project represents a large share of the grade for this course, so the assignment will be broken-down into the discrete segments.

- Project idea. Due: **September 19**. You are required to commit to a project idea early in the semester, so that you get thinking about this project early while we are learning about evaluation methods.
- First draft submission. Due: **November 14**. Your first draft to be shared with your peer reviewer. The better you write, the better your feedback will be.
- Peer review. Due: **November 21**. You will be required to review a classmate's program evaluation proposal, as peer review is a central component of scientific analysis.
- Final presentation. Due: **December 5**. You will present a brief summary of your program evaluation proposal during the last class.
- Final draft submission. Due: **December 12**. After receiving peer review and feedback from class discussion after your presentation, the final submission of your program evaluation proposal will be due incorporating and addressing feedback from your peers.

Grading

The grading of this course is as follows:

- Article Reviews: 20%
 - Two reviews due throughout the semester, 10% each.
- Midterm Exam: 25%
 - At-home exam. See details above.
- Program Evaluation Proposal: 45%
 - Project idea, 5%
 - First draft submission, 5%
 - Peer review, 10%
 - Final presentation, 5%
 - Final draft submission, 20%
- Class participation: 10%

Grading Scale: 93-100% A, 90-93% A-, 88-90% B+, 83-88% B, 80-83% B-, 78-80% C+, 73-78% C, 70-73% C-, 60-70% D, Below 60% F.

Course Policies

COVID-19 Policy

We will follow the guidelines set by American University. I also want us all to be willing to go above and beyond these guidelines if necessary and when doing so will make others in our class more comfortable. I hope that you will all do what is necessary to keep each other, and yourselves, safe. Even if you consider yourself low risk, people around you may not be. If you feel at all sick, or have a temperature, please get tested. If you test positive, email me and we can discuss how to handle the situation.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory. We only meet once per week, for a total of 15 times during the semester. Missing just one class period, therefore, represents missing a substantial portion of our in-class time together. With that said, I understand that travel plans can sometimes be unavoidable. If you do expect the need to miss a class period, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can adjust. In addition, "attendance" does not simply mean showing up for class. I also expect that you will participate with our discussion and activities in each class period.

Communication Policy

E-mail is my preferred method of communication. E-mails sent between Monday and Friday will be responded to within twenty-four hours. Please do not wait until the last minute to send questions. Also, note that e-mails sent after 5pm will typically not be read until the next day.

Late Assignments Policy

Late assignments will not be accepted. If you anticipate that you will complete an assignment late due to unforeseen circumstances or events, please notify me *before* the assignment due date. If you experience challenges with technology, please notify me as soon as possible.

Physical and Mental Health

Your physical and mental health are important. I encourage you to take full advantage of the services provided by American University to facilitate your physical and mental health.

- Schedule time to exercise. Run, walk, do something to move around as you are able.
- Care for yourself mentally. Take breaks from your studies and work, spend time with friends and family, do something to rest from your most pressing task.
- Familiarize yourself with available mental health resources: <https://www.american.edu/ocl/counseling/>
- Other available resources:
 - Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance: <https://www.dbsalliance.org/>
 - Suicide Prevention Crisis line: 1-800-273-8255 or <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

Accommodations for Disabilities

American University is committed to assisting students with documented disabilities. A student with a disability who may need academic accommodations should follow this procedure (found at [this link](#)):

1. Complete and return the Student Accommodations Questionnaire.
2. Submit documentation of your disability.
3. You will be assigned a Disability Access Advisor who will review your documentation and contact you at your American University student email when it is time to schedule your intake appointment or additional materials are needed. (Documentation review typically takes 2-3 weeks; however, review may be longer during high volume times, such as the summer months.)

Lauren's Promise

I will listen and believe you if someone is threatening you.

Lauren McClusky, a 21-year-old honors student athlete, was murdered on October 22, 2018 by a man she briefly dated on the University of Utah campus. We must all take actions to ensure this never happens again.

If you are in immediate danger call 911. Do not hesitate.

If you are experiencing sexual assault, domestic violence, or stalking please seek help from the police whether or not you are in immediate danger.

- Campus police: 202-885-2527 (for things that happen on campus)
- Washington DC police: 202-671-7233 (for things that happen off campus)

Additional resources:

- The Red Flag Campaign: <http://www.theredflagcampaign.org/>
- HAWC (Healing Abuse, Working for Change): <https://hawcdv.org/>
- National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence: <http://www.ncdsv.org/>
- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: <https://ncadv.org/>

American University also has counseling services that can help you in the aftermath of an incident: 202-885-3500.

I can also help connect you to the appropriate resources, or put you in touch with a female colleague or faculty member who will do so. You can learn more about a variety of resources related to all aspects of sexual assault, domestic violence, or predatory behavior at American University here: <https://www.american.edu/ocl/counseling/special-topics-resource-page.cfm>.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

Academic dishonesty is regarded as a major Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the university's **Academic Integrity Code**. By registering for this course, students have acknowledged their awareness of the Academic Integrity Code and they are obliged to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly and disciplinary action will be taken should violations occur. This includes cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism.

Student Code of Conduct

The central commitment of American University is the development of thoughtful, responsible human beings in the context of a challenging yet supportive academic community. The **Student Code of Conduct** is designed to benefit the American University community and to assist in forming the highest standards of ethics and morals among its members. By registering for this course, students have acknowledged their awareness of the Student Code of Conduct and they are obliged to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code.

Religious Observances

Students will be provided the opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. Please send this notification through email to the professor. For additional information, see American University's [religious observances policy](#).

Schedule

The schedule is tentative and subject to change. Items marked with an asterisk* indicate article review *opportunities* of which you are only required to submit **two** throughout the semester. As noted above, you may complete more than two article reviews throughout the semester. I will keep your two highest graded reviews for your final grade.

Week 1: Introduction

August 29 — Syllabus review. Introductions. What is program evaluation? What is causal inference?

Week 2: Logic Model and Theory of Change

September 12 — Required Material:

- Gugerty, M.K. and Karlan, D. (2018) "**Ten Reasons Not to Measure Impact—and What to Do Instead**," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Summer 2018.
- Chapter 1 from Scott Cunningham (2021) "Causal Inference: The Mixtape," **Introduction**.

What is due?

- N/A

Week 3: Regression Review

September 19 — Required Material:

- Chapter 2 from Scott Cunningham (2021) "Causal Inference: The Mixtape," **Probability and Regression Review**.

What is due?

- Project idea

Week 4: Theory of Causal Inference

September 26 — Required Material:

- Chapter 3 from Scott Cunningham (2021) "Causal Inference: The Mixtape," **Directed Acyclic Graphs**.
- Chapter 4 from Scott Cunningham (2021) "Causal Inference: The Mixtape," **Potential Outcomes Causal Model**.

What is due?

- N/A

Week 5: Matching Methods

October 3 — Required Material:

- Chapter 5 from Scott Cunningham (2021) "Causal Inference: The Mixtape," **Matching and Sub-classification**.

What is due?

- *Article Review
 - Anderson, M.L. (2017) "**The Benefits of College Athletic Success: An Application of the Propensity Score Design**," *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, volume 99, number 1.

Week 6: Regression Discontinuity Designs

October 10 — Required Material:

- Chapter 6 from Scott Cunningham (2021) "Causal Inference: The Mixtape," **Regression Discontinuity**.

What is due?

- *Article Review
 - Almond, D. and Doyle, J.J. (2011) "**After Midnight: A Regression Discontinuity Design in Length of Postpartum Hospital Stays**," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, volume 3, number 3.

Week 7: Instrumental Variables

October 17 — Required Material:

- Chapter 7 from Scott Cunningham (2021) "Causal Inference: The Mixtape," **Instrumental Variables**.

What is due?

- *Article Review
 - Angrist, J.D. and Evans, W.N. (1998) "**Children and Their Parents' Labor Supply: Evidence from Exogenous Variation in Family Size**," *American Economic Review*, volume 88, number 3.

Week 8: Midterm Exam

October 24 — Required Material:

- N/A

What is due?

- At-home exam

Week 9: Panel Data

October 31 — Required Material:

- Chapter 8 from Scott Cunningham (2021) "Causal Inference: The Mixtape," **Panel Data**.

What is due?

- *Article Review
 - Ferraro P.J. and Miranda, J.J. (2017) "**Panel Data Designs and Estimators as Substitutes for Randomized Controlled Trials in the Evaluation of Public Programs**," *Journal of the Association of Environmental and Resource Economists*, volume 4, number 1.

Week 10: Difference-in-Differences, Part 1

November 7 — Required Material:

- Chapter 9, part 1 (pp. 406–433, through the "Providing Evidence for Parallel Trends..." subsection) from Scott Cunningham (2021) "Causal Inference: The Mixtape," **Difference-in-Differences**.

What is due?

- *Article Review
 - Card, D. (1990) "**The Impact of the Mariel Boatlift on the Miami Labor Market**," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, volume 43, issue 2.
- First draft submission

Week 11: Difference-in-Differences, Part 2

November 14 — Required Material:

- Chapter 9, part 2, (pp. 433–510) from Scott Cunningham (2021) "Causal Inference: The Mixtape," **Difference-in-Differences**.

What is due?

- *Article Review:
 - Goodman-Bacon, A. (2021) "**The Long-Run Effects of Childhood Insurance Coverage: Medicaid Implementation, Adult Health, and Labor Market Outcomes**," *American Economic Review*, volume. 111, number. 8.

Week 12: Synthetic Control

November 21 — Required Material:

- Chapter 10 from Scott Cunningham (2021) "Causal Inference: The Mixtape," **Synthetic Control**.

What is due?

- *Article Review (only need to review one article):
 - Peri, G. and Yassenov, V. (2022) "**The Labor Market Effect of A Refugee Wave: Synthetic Control Method Meets the Mariel Boatlift**," *Journal of Human Resources*, volume 57, number 3.
 - Mitze, T., Kosfeld, R., Rode, J., and Walde, K. (2020) "**Face masks considerably reduce COVID-19 cases in Germany**," *Proceedings of the National Academies of Science*, volume. 117, number. 51.
- Peer Review

Week 13: Front-Door Criterion

November 28 — Required Material:

- Bellemare, M.F., Bloem, J.R., and Wexler, N. (2022) "The Paper of How: Estimating Treatment Effects Using the Front-Door Criterion," **Working paper available online here**.

What is due?

- N/A

Week 14: Program Evaluation Proposal Presentations

December 5 — Required Material

- N/A

What is due?

- Brief in class presentation

Week 15: End of Semester

December 12 — Required Material

- N/A

What is due?

- Final draft submission