



Robert M. La Follette
School of Public Affairs
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

PA240: Evidence-Based Policymaking¹
Spring 2023

Professor: Mariel Barnes

Email: mariel.barnes@wisc.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30 – 3:30pm. You can schedule a meeting here: <https://calendly.com/mjbarnes/office-hours>.

Office: 216 Observatory Hill Office Building

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

This is a three credit course. We will meet for two 75 minute class periods per week (TTh) over the Fall semester. You should plan to spend two hours on learning activities outside the classroom for every hour of classroom time. I expect you to complete all readings for each session *before coming to class* and come prepared to discuss.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

- **Examine** how evidence is (and is not) used in policymaking and identify common opportunities and obstacles in evidence-based policymaking.
- **Describe** the types of evidence used in policymaking, their strengths and weaknesses, and approaches to making policy in the face of uncertainty.
- **Evaluate** the appropriateness of evidence for particular policy problems, including analyzing real world cases where evidence was used (or misused) in policy.
- **Synthesize** evidence about a complex policy problem for policymakers using policy memos, infographics, op-eds, and presentations.

¹ Adapted from Prof. Morgan Edwards' PA240 Spring 2021 syllabus.

ASSESSMENTS

Your progress towards the course learning objectives will be assessed in multiple ways. Parentheses indicate the weights given to these components in your final grades.

Participation (20%): This course will be a mixture of lectures, discussions, and hands-on activities. I expect you to complete all readings before class and come ready to *actively* participate. For example, you may be called on to summarize the main arguments from a reading and provide your reaction or explain how you would approach a particular research or policy problem. Remember learning is a collaborative experience, and engagement means not only sharing your ideas but listening and responding to what others have said.

Class attendance is mandatory and I take it very seriously. If you are unable to attend class for a legitimate reason (e.g. illness, family emergency, etc.), let me know in advance. Repeated or unexcused absences will reduce your participation grade.

It should also be noted that attending class is a necessary but not sufficient condition for receiving a good participation grade. If you are uncomfortable speaking up in class, please come to office hours so we can discuss possible solutions.

Citation Exercise (10%): You will find five sources (minimum three academic) which present evidence on your group topic, and summarize and synthesize them with references produced by a citation manager. You will then submit two identical summaries – however, one will have Chicago-style citations (footnotes) and the other use MLA citations (in-text). You will also submit a screenshot of your citation management library. We will discuss how to use a citation manager in Lab 1. Your summary should be related to the broad policy area in your group case study, but you should identify your sources and complete your assignment individually. If you have a strong preference to complete this citation exercise on a different topic, please contact me to discuss.

Policy Memo (20%): You will create a policy memo to practice communicating scientific evidence to a policy audience. We will discuss how to write memos in Lab 2. Your policy memo should be related to the broad policy area in your group case study, but you should identify your topic and complete your assignment individually. If you have a strong preference to write a memo on a different topic, please contact me to discuss.

Data Visualizations (20%): You will create two data visualizations (graphs, maps, pictorials, etc.) of data from your group case study. One of these visualizations should attempt to convey information in a clear and accurate manner. The second visualization, however, should be created to be deliberately biased, incorrect, or misrepresentative. The data visualizations should be accompanied by an explanation that explains and justifies your design choices, and highlights why one is a better representation of data. We will be discussing data visualization in Lab 3. Your data visualizations should be related to the broad policy area in your group case study, but you should identify your topic and complete your assignment individually. If you have a strong preference to create visualizations on a different topic, please contact me to discuss.

Group Case Study and Guide (30%): You will work in a group to explore how evidence is used (and misused) in a particular policy area, prepare a case study and guide, and lead a half class session. The goal of the case study is for you to develop expertise in a particular policy area and share that expertise with your classmates. You will have the opportunity to think creatively about an important policy problem and educate yourself and your peers about how evidence is used in policies related to that problem. Your presentation will also enable you to experience taking on the role of class facilitator and give you the opportunity to reflect on what makes for an engaging and effective class session.

POLICIES

Email Policy: Please feel free to email me with quick questions. Longer discussions and *all* discussions about grades must take place in-person. I will guarantee a response to email within 48 hours during the week and will check my email more regularly in the day or two before assignments are due. *Please do not wait until the last minute.*

Grading Policy: Assignment expectations will be discussed in class before each due date. If you have concerns about your ability to complete an assignment, please schedule an office hours appointment to discuss *before* the assignment is due. Once grades are returned, there is a 72 hour "cooling off" period before appeals will be heard. Grade appeals will involve a written component. Keep in mind that appeals may result in a lower grade.

Late assignments will lose one full letter grade per day.

COVID-19: Although it is less acute, we are still learning together in the midst of a global pandemic, which has been an unprecedented experience for everyone. Plans for this course may change as the situation evolves. I recognize that COVID-19 may impact your ability to engage with this course in ways that are not always easy to predict. I hope that we can all navigate this semester with flexibility and compassion. We are partners in this learning process, and I welcome suggestions for new ways to engage with course content. If you require COVID-19 accommodations, please let me know and feel free to update me as your needs change during the semester. For more information, see: [UW-Madison's COVID Response website](#).

Academic Integrity: By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin Madison. Examples of misconduct include cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts. Misconduct may result in disciplinary action including but not limited to failure on the assignment or course, probation, suspension, or expulsion. For more information please see: <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/syllabus-statement>. You can also contact me directly if you have any doubts or concerns.

The vast majority of gradable work for this course is written assignments. You are responsible for understanding and applying the rules for acknowledging, paraphrasing, and quoting sources. You can refer to the Writing Center Handbook: <https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook>.

Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion are central to our work in the classroom and beyond. I echo the university's statements on diversity and inclusion:

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world. Source: [UW-Madison Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion](#)

I recognize the importance of eradicating systemic oppression of all kinds and am actively committed to this work. Research and policy analysis methods have played roles in both uncovering and obscuring – and therefore perpetuating – sources of injustice. I aim to center justice in this course. I welcome your feedback and suggestions on how to further these efforts.

In this classroom, Black Lives Matter. For resources on dismantling anti-Black racism in science, please see: [Particles for Justice](#) and [Shutdown STEM](#).

Land Acknowledgement: I join the university in acknowledging the occupied Ho-Chunk land on which the University of Wisconsin Madison campus sits:

The University of Wisconsin Madison occupies ancestral Ho-Chunk land, a place their nation has called Teejop since time immemorial. In an 1832 treaty, the Ho-Chunk were forced to cede this territory. Decades of ethnic cleansing followed when both the federal and state government repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, sought to forcibly remove the Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin. This history of colonization informs our shared future

of collaboration and innovation. Today, UW-Madison respects the inherent sovereignty of the Ho-Chunk Nation, along with the eleven other First Nations of Wisconsin. Source: [Office of the Chancellor](#)

For more information on the Ho-Chunk Nation, please refer to: [Ho-Chunk Nation](#).

To learn about other places of significance to you or land acknowledgements in general, please see: [Native Land Digital](#).

Accessibility and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: I am committed to making this class accessible for all students, including upholding all university disability policies:

The University of Wisconsin Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. Source: [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#)

Additionally, I recognize that accessibility needs may arise that are not explicitly covered by these policies. You are invited to contact me directly to discuss any situation that impacts your ability to engage with this course and how I can best support you and your learning.

IMPORTANT DATES

All assignments are to be submitted as PDFs through Canvas by 5:00pm on the due date. Assignments should be in a "standard font" (e.g. Times New Roman, Ariel, Calibri, Garamond), double-spaced with one inch margins and numbered pages. Any citation style is acceptable (footnotes, endnotes, in-text) as long as it is consistent. Assignments will also be automatically checked by Turnitin.

Citation Exercise Due: February 14

Policy Memo Due: March 7

Data Visualization Due: March 28

Case Presentations Due: April 20, 25, 27, and May 2

Case Study Guides: May 4

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Jan 24: Introduction, Course Overview, and Wisconsin Idea

- “The Wisconsin Idea: The Vision that Made Wisconsin Famous”, pp. 1-12.

Jan 26: What is EBPM? History of EBPM and Group Agreements

- Bhatt, Arun. “Evolution of Clinical Research: A History Before and Beyond James Lind.” *Perspectives in Clinical Research* 1, no. 1 (2010): 6–10.
- Worrall, John. *Evidence-Based Everything (but Let's Do the Basing Properly)*. LSE Podcasts, 2018. <https://soundcloud.com/lsepodcasts/evidence-based-everything-but>.

Jan 31: Lab 1 – Zotero

- No reading

Feb 2 & 7: Obstacles to using evidence in policy

- Haskins, Ron, and Greg Margolis. “The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative.” In *Show Me the Evidence: Obama’s Fight for Rigor and Results in Social Policy*, 67–101. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2014. <http://muse.jhu.edu/book/36692>.
- *The Homeless Homed*. The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. Comedy Central US, 2015. <https://www.cc.com/video/lntv3q/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-the-homeless-homed>.
- “Once a National Model, Utah Struggles with Homelessness.” *Reuters*, January 10, 2019, sec. Big Story 10. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-homelessness-housing-idUSKCN1P41EQ>.

Feb 9: Observational Data and Analysis

- Engler, Alex. “What All Policy Analysts Need to Know about Data Science.” *Brookings* (blog), April 20, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/what-all-policy-analysts-need-to-know-about-data-science/>.
- Adler, David, and Ben Ansell. “Housing and Populism.” *West European Politics* 43, no. 2 (February 23, 2020): 344–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1615322>.

Feb 14: Lab 2 – Policy Memos

- Weimer, David L. “Memoranda Writing”, January 2017.
- Davis, Jennifer. “Guide to Writing Effective Policy Memos”, 2004.
- Bruecker, Ellie. “Assessing the Fiscal Impact of Wisconsin’s Statewide Voucher Program.” *National Education Policy Center*, October 5, 2017. <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/funding>.

CITATION EXERCISE DUE

Feb 16: Problems with Observational Data Analysis

- Aschwanden, Christie. “We’re All ‘P-Hacking’ Now.” *Wired*. Accessed September 7, 2021. <https://www.wired.com/story/were-all-p-hacking-now/>.
- Nuzzo, Regina. “Scientific Method: Statistical Errors.” *Nature* 506, no. 7487 (February 1, 2014): 150–52. <https://doi.org/10.1038/506150a>.
- Angwin, Julia, Jeff Larson, Surya Mattu, and Lauren Kirchner. “Machine Bias.” *ProPublica*, May 23, 2016. <https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing>.
- Smith, Genevieve, and Ishita Rustagi. “When Good Algorithms Go Sexist: Why and How to Advance AI Gender Equity.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (blog), March 31, 2021. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/when_good_algorithms_go_sexist_why_and_how_to_advance_ai_gender_equity.

Feb 21: Experiments

- *Social Experiments to Fight Poverty*. TED Talks, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zvrGiPkVcs>.
- The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL). “A Mass Media Intervention to Reduce Violence Against Women in Rural Uganda.” <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/mass-media-intervention-reduce-violence-against-women-rural-uganda>.
- The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL). “Contraceptive Adoption, Fertility, and the Family in Zambia.” <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/contraceptive-adoption-fertility-and-family-zambia>.

Feb 23: Problems with Experiments

- Harriet Washington - *Book Discussion on Medical Apartheid*, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsg5qUA2_Ac.
- Camerer, Colin F., Anna Dreber, Felix Holzmeister, Teck-Hua Ho, Jürgen Huber, Magnus Johannesson, Michael Kirchler, et al. "Evaluating the Replicability of Social Science Experiments in Nature and Science between 2010 and 2015." *Nature Human Behaviour* 2, no. 9 (September 2018): 637–44. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0399-z>.

Feb 28: Modeling

- Morgan, M. Granger. "The Use of Models in Policy Analysis." In *Theory and Practice in Policy Analysis: Including Applications in Science and Technology*, 309–42. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316882665>.
- Hordijk, Leen. "Use of the RAINS Model in Acid Rain Negotiations in Europe." *Environmental Science & Technology* 25, no. 4 (April 1, 1991): 596–603. <https://doi.org/10.1021/es00016a002>.
- Oreskes, Naomi, Kristin Shrader-Frechette, and Kenneth Belitz. "Verification, Validation, and Confirmation of Numerical Models in the Earth Sciences." *Science* 263, no. 5147 (February 4, 1994): 641–46.

March 2: Challenges of Quantitative Data

- Geertz, Clifford. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." *Daedalus* 101, no. 1 (January 1, 1972): 1–37.

March 7: Lab 3 – Data Visualization

- Rosling, Hans. *The Best Stats You've Ever Seen*. TED Talks, 2006. https://www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_the_best_stats_you_ve_ever_seen.
- "The Data Visualisation Catalogue." <https://datavizcatalogue.com>.

*****POLICY MEMO DUE*****

March 9: Case Studies

- Eckersley, Peter. "Cities and Climate Change: How Historical Legacies Shape Policy-Making in English and German Municipalities." *Politics* 37, no. 2 (May 1, 2017): 151–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395716670412>.

March 14 & 16: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS

March 21: Interviews and Focus Groups

- Newman, Christy E., Limin Mao, Asha Persson, Martin Holt, Sean Slavin, Michael R. Kidd, Jeffrey J. Post, Edwina Wright, and John de Wit. "'Not Until I'm Absolutely Half-Dead and Have To': Accounting for Non-Use of Antiretroviral Therapy in Semi-Structured Interviews with People Living with HIV in Australia." *AIDS Patient Care and STDs* 29, no. 5 (May 1, 2015): 267–78. <https://doi.org/10.1089/apc.2014.0301>.
- Hewett, P. C., B. S. Mensch, and A. S. Erulkar. "Consistency in the Reporting of Sexual Behaviour by Adolescent Girls in Kenya: A Comparison of Interviewing Methods." *Sexually Transmitted Infections* 80, no. suppl 2 (December 1, 2004): ii43–48. <https://doi.org/10.1136/sti.2004.013250>. (skim)

March 23: Ethnography

- Desmond, Matthew. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Crown, 2016. Prologue: Cold City and Chapter 6: Rat Hole

March 28: Special Session with Tamara Keith, LFS Journalist in Residence

- TBD

DATA VISUALIZATION DUE

March 30: Presentation Lab

- “Six Steps to Developing an Effective Presentation”
- “Delivering an Oral Presentation”
- Doumont, Jean-luc. “Effective Oral Presentations.” *Principia: Structuring Thoughts*, 2006.
- Watch two TED (or TED-style) talks related to your broad policy topic and make notes on the strengths and weaknesses of the presentations: <https://www.ted.com/talks>

April 4: Indigenous Knowledge

- Mistry, Jayalaxshmi, and Andrea Berardi. “Bridging Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge.” *Science*, June 10, 2016. <https://www.science.org/doi/abs/10.1126/science.aaf1160>.
- Diver, Sibyl. “Negotiating Indigenous Knowledge at the Science-Policy Interface: Insights from the Xáxli’p Community Forest.” *Environmental Science & Policy* 73 (July 1, 2017): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2017.03.001>.

April 6: Ethics in evidence-making

- Scott, Dylan. “Profs Bumble Into Big Legal Trouble After Election Experiment Goes Way Wrong.” *Talking Points Memo*, October 27, 2014. <https://talkingpointsmemo.com/dc/montana-election-mailer-state-seal-stanford-dartmouth-professors>.
- Coville, Aiden, Sebastian Galiani, Paul Gertler, and Susumu Yoshida. “Enforcing Payment for Water and Sanitation Services in Nairobi’s Slums.” NBER Working Paper No. 27569, July 2020.

April 11: Uncertainty

- Berger, Loïc, Nicolas Berger, Valentina Bosetti, Itzhak Gilboa, Lars Peter Hansen, Christopher Jarvis, Massimo Marinacci, and Richard D. Smith. “Rational Policymaking during a Pandemic.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 4 (January 26, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2012704118>.
- Krepes, S. E., and D. L. Kriner. “Model Uncertainty, Political Contestation, and Public Trust in Science: Evidence from the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *Science Advances*, October 2020. <https://www.science.org/doi/abs/10.1126/sciadv.abd4563>.

April 13 & 18: Misinformation

- Soll, Jacob. “The Long and Brutal History of Fake News.” *POLITICO Magazine*. <http://politi.co/2FaV5W9>.
- Osmundsen, Mathias, Alexander Bor, Peter Bjerregaard Vahlstrup, Anja Bechmann, and Michael Bang Petersen. “Partisan Polarization Is the Primary Psychological Motivation behind Political Fake News Sharing on Twitter.” *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 3 (August 2021): 999–1015. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000290>.
- Bond, Shannon. “Just 12 People Are Behind Most Vaccine Hoaxes On Social Media, Research Shows.” *NPR*, May 14, 2021, sec. Shots - Health News. <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/13/996570855/disinformation-dozen-test-facebooks-twitthers-ability-to-curb-vaccine-hoaxes>.
- Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway. “Defeating the Merchants of Doubt.” *Nature* 465, no. 7299 (June 2010): 686–87. <https://doi.org/10.1038/465686a>.

April 20, 25, 27 and May 2: Group Presentations and Synthesis

May 4: Future Visions for EBPM

- McCarthy, Rebecca. "What Would It Be Like to Live in an Era of Geoengineering?" Gizmodo. Accessed September 7, 2021. <https://gizmodo.com/what-would-it-be-like-to-live-in-an-era-of-geoengineeri-1838638953>.
- TBD

*****GROUP CASE STUDY GUIDES DUE*****