

Public Policy 200A: Senior Seminar

Thursdays 2:15-4:05 PM

GESB 134

Fall 2009

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Office hours: By Appointment

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Course description

In this course, you will analyze a policy-related question or problem using the skills and knowledge you have obtained in the public policy curriculum. Your topic and method of analysis will be chosen by you in consultation with the instructor. At different stages in the research process, you will present your research through written work and oral presentations and receive feedback. The course culminates with a paper and presentation of your research. You will also present and critically discuss the work of others. These course components are designed to not only give you the opportunity to apply what you've learned as a public policy major, but also improve your analytical, research, writing and communication skills.

Course requirements

For all assignments:

Papers and presentations need to be free of spelling and grammar errors. For written assignments, include your name and the date on the first page and include page numbers on every page. Use 12-point font with double-spaced text.

Attendance and participation (10%)

Since this class is a seminar, your attendance and participation are crucial even when you are not presenting. You are not only expected to be on time to class and meetings, but also to contribute to discussion. If you must miss a class, please notify me ahead of time.

You will find that your peers are one of the best resources throughout the research process. In the first class, you need to find a partner to whom you are responsible for assisting in reviewing drafts and practicing presentations. One person in each pair will be assigned to Group #1 and the other to Group #2 – this numbering determines the order for the presentations (see schedule on last page).

Research proposal and discussion (10%)

(Prepare 2-3 double-spaced pages of text to turn in, and a 1-page handout summarizing your proposal to lead class discussion. Email me your handout by 6pm the day before your discussion and I'll make copies to distribute in class.)

In your research proposal, provide some brief background information on your policy-related research question. Include your plan for answering that question, such as the method of analysis and data to be used. Your proposal should also include any questions you have about your project that you want feedback on from the class. You will lead a discussion regarding your proposal during class. You are not expected to have everything figured out at this point. These discussions are intended to introduce your

research project and get suggestions for advancing and improving it.

Honors thesis writers: Your proposal should include your advisor's name and a brief progress report, with a discussion of obstacles you have encountered and the ways you have addressed them. Your proposal can be longer if you have written one previously that you want to use.

Presentation of a relevant article (10%)

Choose a paper from an academic journal (e.g., *American Economic Review*, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*) that is related to your research topic. In your PowerPoint (or PDF) presentation, present the paper's research question, the data and methodology used to answer the question, and the results. You should also address how successful you think the authors were in answering the question. Lastly, explain how the paper is related to your research project. This paper will be part of your review of the related literature in your research paper.

Presentation guidelines: Do not put too much information on a slide. Do not use small font, distracting graphics, flying text and sound effects. Practice with your partner.

Peer review (5%): Your partner is required to practice his/her presentation with you no later than 3 days before his/her class presentation to provide enough time to incorporate your comments. Fill out the peer evaluation form handout during the practice; it must be turned in on the day of your partner's presentation.

Draft of the first half of your research paper and an outline for the rest of it (10%)

In the draft of the first half of your paper, introduce and motivate your research question, briefly describe related literature, and explain your data and method of analysis. Your outline should be a one page description or list of steps you will need to take to finish the paper. This description should be as detailed as possible – that is, more than stating that you need to run your regressions. I will meet with you individually to discuss your draft and outline.

If you are doing a *qualitative analysis*, you must have at least one full page in which you discuss your preliminary results (e.g., list of costs and benefits, application of criteria to a policy option).

If you are doing a *quantitative analysis*, you need to attach some descriptive statistics from your data (e.g., means and standard deviations of dependent and independent variables, plots of the dependent variable with each independent variable). For papers with regression analysis, explain why you include *each* variable in your model, and what the expected effect is (positive, negative, null). If you cannot come up with a convincing reason for including a variable in your model, it probably should not be in it (avoid data mining).

Papers should be kept as concise as possible. For those writing an honors thesis who have a complete draft, you may hand that in instead of a draft of the first half of the paper with an outline.

Peer review (5%): Proofread your partner's draft and write a 1-2 page "referee report" that gives substantive comments on the draft. The report should give a brief summary of the paper (no more than a paragraph), including the question the paper is analyzing and how the paper proposes to proceed. Then, give substantive comments and suggestions about what your partner can do to improve the paper and analysis.

Presentation of your research (10%)

In your PowerPoint (or PDF) presentation, introduce your research question, describe your data and method of analysis, and present and interpret some of your results.

Research paper (40%)

In your paper, you must provide a clear, well-supported, and well-written analysis of your research question. You need to introduce and motivate your research question, discuss (briefly) related literature, describe your data and methodology, and present and interpret your results.

For papers with regression analysis, you should include relevant descriptive statistics of the variables used in your analysis before presenting your regression results. It is imperative that you justify your use of every variable, appealing to your knowledge of economics and the institutional details of your topic. When discussing your results, mention whether they met your expectations regarding the sign and magnitude (it is possible for the expected sign to be ambiguous). If they did not meet them, explain why you think they did not. Be sure to distinguish between statistical and economic/policy significance. Descriptive statistics and regression output need to be presented in well-formatted tables and figures with variable names that can be understood by the reader and with no more than 4 significant digits (i.e., 4.353 not 4.35289; .1049 not .1049231). Typically, 3 significant digits are sufficient. Tables and figures should be "stand alone," meaning they should include appropriate titles and detailed table notes that allow someone who has not read the text to understand the table or figure.

Paper Guidelines:

- a. *Writing:* Your paper should have many sections with headings to help guide the reader. Make it clear how all your ideas fit together. Avoid long paragraphs. Edit your paper for clarity, flow, gaps in reasoning, insufficient evidence, and grammar and spelling mistakes.
- b. *Citations:* Use parenthetical citations and a reference list (APA style). Unless a claim is common knowledge or your own idea, you *must* provide a citation to support it.
- c. *Formatting:* Use page numbers, double-spacing, 12-point font, and 1-inch margins.
- d. *Late penalty:* 1/3 letter grade per day (A becomes A-)

Honor Code: Attach a signed copy of the Honor Code to your paper (<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/guiding/pdf/honorcode.pdf>). Note that plagiarism violates the Honor code (for more information on plagiarism, see <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/students/plagiarism.sources.htm>).

Schedule

<u>Week</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Agenda</u>
1	September 24 (Th)	Introduction
2	September 28 – 30	Individual meetings about paper topics (Landau 147)
3	October 8 (Th)	Research proposals #1
4	October 15 (Th)	Research proposals #2
5	October 22 (Th)	Article presentations #1 (alternate meeting time TBD)
6	October 29 (Th)	Article presentations #2
7	November 5 (Th)	<u>DRAFT AND OUTLINE DUE</u> by 6 pm in my inbox. I will send your draft to your partner after 6 PM.
8	November 9 (M)	<u>REFeree REPORT DUE</u> by 6 pm in my inbox.
	November 10 – 11	Individual meetings about drafts (Landau 147)
9	November 19 (Th)	Research presentations #1
	November 26	NO CLASS - <i>Thanksgiving break</i>
10	December 3 (Th)	Research presentations #2
	December 10 (Th)	<u>PAPER DUE</u> by 6 pm in my inbox