Instructor: Reynaldo T. Rojo Mendoza  
Office: PSFA 157  
E-Mail: rrojo@mail.sdsu.edu  
Office hours: TTH 11:00-12:30PM; Mondays and Wednesdays by appointment.

The best way to reach me and receive a timely response is by email. Please include an appropriate subject line and the corresponding course number (PA 605) in all your class-related emails.

Course Overview

This course is a graduate seminar in research methods focusing on impact evaluation of public policy. Since the main goal of impact evaluation is to uncover the causal effect(s) of a public policy intervention on pre-specified outcomes, the course places an emphasis on the logic of causal inference and on the challenges inherent in making causal claims. Throughout the semester, students will learn how and when to apply various methodological tools for overcoming such challenges, including: random assignment, instrumental variables, regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences, and matching. Students will also learn the necessary steps for designing a rigorous impact evaluation, such as: asking the right questions, building a theory of change, developing outcome indicators, collecting data, determining the required sample size to detect an effect, and identifying threats to validity of the findings. While students are not expected to have advanced training in statistics, they should at least feel comfortable with quantitative research and be ready to learn basic statistical concepts and scientific notation.

Course Objectives

Students are expected to gain a deep understanding of impact evaluation methods and recognize their usefulness for designing public policies and social programs that are based on evidence of what works most effectively. By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand and explain the logic of causality as it pertains to public policy
• Apply the appropriate methodological tools for estimating the effect of public policies (e.g., social programs, information campaigns, new regulations, etc.)
• Plan and execute an impact evaluation research design
• Analyze impact evaluation research and assess the validity of the findings
• Appreciate the value of impact evaluation for public administration

Note: This syllabus is subject to change at the instructor’s discretion.

Course Materials

Required book:


Available Online:

  - Link: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2550

  - Link: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2693

***Additional readings and assignments will be made available on Blackboard***

Course Requirements

Participation: Attendance to every session and active participation in class discussions are mandatory. Students should be on time for class and well-prepared to discuss the topic(s) of the day.

Assignments: Students will receive short homework assignments every other week. These can be, for example, a rapid reaction from a journal article, blog post, news
report, etc., a small research task, or a problem set. In addition to turning assignments in, students should be ready to discuss them during class.

Impact Evaluation Plan: Students are required to develop an impact evaluation plan (12-15 pages) and present it in class (15 minutes). You will choose a public policy intervention, which can take the form of a social program, information campaign, regulatory change, legislation, etc. Your selected policy can be an existing one or a new policy you are proposing to implement. The rough outline of the IE plan should be as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Description of the policy intervention
   2.1 Objective(s)
   2.2 Policy targets
   2.3 Expected outcomes
3. Objectives of the evaluation
   3.1 Theory of change/results chain
   3.2 Hypotheses
   3.3 Key outcome indicators
4. Evaluation method
   4.1 Definition of treatment and comparison groups
   4.2 Estimation of policy effects
5. Sampling and data collection plan
   5.1 Sampling strategy
   5.2 Power calculations
   5.3 Baseline/follow-up surveys

***A one-page “idea” paper on your chosen policy is due on Feb. 16***

Grading

The grade will consist of the following components:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignments</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>IE Plan</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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**Laptop/Tablet and Cell Phone Policy**

The use of laptops and tablets in the classroom is permitted but only for taking notes and for class-related matters. Phones must be silenced during class. Students are expected to behave in a mature and professional manner in this regard.

**Academic Honesty**

San Diego State University adheres to a strict policy regarding cheating and plagiarism (http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/conduct1.html). These activities will not be tolerated in this class. It is your responsibility to become familiar with the policy. Cheating or plagiarism will result in failing this class and a disciplinary review by Student Affairs. If you have questions on what plagiarism is, please consult this guide: (http://infodome.sdsu.edu/infolit/exploratorium/Standard_5/plagiarism.pdf).

Students agree that by taking this course all written assignments may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. You may submit your assignments in such a way that no identifying information about you is included.

**Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473 (Calpulli Center, Suite 3101). To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services.

**Course Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Introduction to the Course</td>
<td>IEP p. 1-30</td>
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<td>HIE p. 1-19</td>
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<td>GK p. 66-97; 180-190</td>
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<td>Ravallion (2009)</td>
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<td>February</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Determining Evaluation Questions Building a Theory</td>
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<td>of Change Policy Outcomes and Indicators</td>
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<td>Week</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading Material</td>
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| 9    | Counterfactuals and Causal Inference  
\> Potential Outcomes Framework  
\> Invalid Counterfactuals | IEP p. 33-47  
HIE p. 20-27  
GK p. 24-34  
Sobel (2000) |
| 16   | Randomization I  
\> Intro to Randomized Evaluations | GK p. 44-59  
IEP p. 49-80  
HIE p. 33-51  
Burtless (1995) |
| 23   | Randomization II  
\> Randomization in Practice | GK p. 98-180 |
| 1    | Randomization III  
\> Threats to Validity  
\> Data Analysis | GK p. 298-323  
GK p. 324-385 |
| 8    | Instrumental Variables | HIE p. 87-100  
Deaton (2010)  
Angrist (2006) |
| 15   | Regression Discontinuity | IEP p. 81-93  
HIE p. 103-112  
Cook (2007)  
Matsudaira (2007) |
| 22   | Difference-in-Differences | IEP p. 95-105  
HIE p. 71-84  
DiTella et al. (2005)  
Galiani et al. (2005) |
| 29   | **NO CLASSES (Spring Recess)** |  |
| 5    | Matching | IEP p. 107-116  
HIE p. 53-68  
Finkel et. al. (2012)  
Jalan et al. (2003) |
| 12   | Implementing Impact Evaluations  
Sampling and Data Collection  
Statistical Power | IEP p. 139-209  
GK p. 241-297 |
| 19   | Drawing Policy Lessons  
Scaling Up | IEP p. 211-222  
GK p. 386-419  
Duflo (2004) |
| 26   | Normative and Ethical Considerations | GK p. 60-65  
Belmont Report |

**March**

**April**

**May**

3 & 10  
Student Presentations