



POLC 6317 – PUBLIC POLICY CAPSTONE – SPRING 2025

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DAY AND TIME: Thursdays, 5:30 pm – 8:30 pm

LOCATION: Teaching Unit 2, Room 215

OFFICE HOURS: By appointment

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is intended to cultivate students' analytical skills and abilities to work as a team on a substantive research project. Students will be divided into groups and each group will collaborate to complete an assigned research project. Under the guidance of instructors, students will learn how to collect data, conduct analysis, write a report and do a presentation for a research project. In addition to completing the assigned research project, students will receive training on tools for data and GIS analysis, and writing skills for policy reports.

II. LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

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

1. Think critically and develop oral communication, public speaking, and research skills
2. Develop leadership and team management skills.
3. Acquire knowledge of survey methods.
4. Develop knowledge of data visualization techniques.

III. READINGS AND TEXTBOOKS:

All readings for each class will be posted on Teams channel (no textbooks are required).

IV. STATISTICAL SOFTWARE:

Students will have access to raw data and datasets in different formats and are expected to use statistical packages such as *STATA*, *R*, and *QGIS* to conduct the analysis for the assigned research project.

V. GRADING:

Students will be assessed on the basis of:

- Attendance and engagement (10%)
- Data collection, management and analysis (25%)
- Presentations:
 - First presentation (10%)
 - Second presentation (10%)
- Peer Evaluations (15%)
- Two policy briefs (30%)

Late submissions will not be accepted for a grade. Students are expected to work together with group members on the research project which includes two presentations, two drafts, and a final, revised draft. The submission deadline for the final report *with revisions* is **8:30 PM on May 2, 2025**. All students are expected to actively participate in class including but not limited to participation in lectures, attending group meetings, contributing to the design of research proposal and research plan, review of relevant literature, data collection and analysis, write-up of draft and final reports, presentation of the progress and final projects to the class, make the require revisions before final submission of the group projects, provide feedback on the presentations of other team projects, and engage in any and all class activities.

Final letter grades will be calculated using the following percentages:

| | | | |
|-------------|------------|------------|----------------|
| 93-100% = A | 87-89 = B+ | 77-79 = C+ | 67-69 = D+ |
| 90-92= A- | 83-86 = B | 73-76 = C | 63-66 = D |
| | 80-82 = B- | 70-72 = C- | 60-62 = D- |
| | | | 59 or less = F |

VI. COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE:

WEEK 1 (JANUARY 16): INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

- Overview and course requirements

WEEK 2 (JANUARY 23): ACCESSING CENSUS DATA WITH R

- Materials posted on Canvas
- Before class download RStudio and apply for Census API (instructions will be provided on Canvas prior)
- Readings:
 - Review Powner, especially Chapters 3 and 9, and Studenmund, Chapter 11
 - Berry and Sanders (2000), pp. 1-50 (Canvas)
 - Brown and Ravallion (2020) (Canvas)
 - Accessing Census data with R and TidyCensus (Canvas)

WEEK 3 (JANUARY 30): VISUALIZING CENSUS DATA USING QGIS

- Instructor: Maria Paula Perez Arguelles
 - Background readings and materials will be distributed before the session
 - Before class download QGIS on to your laptop

WEEK 4 (FEBRUARY 6): PROGRESS CHECK-IN

- Meet in class to discuss progress
- Submit outline with 2-3 topic ideas and scope of work by February 5 at 8.30pm

WEEK 5 (FEBRUARY 13): INDEPENDENT GROUP MEETINGS

- No formal class meeting

WEEK 6 (FEBRUARY 20): DATA VISUALIZATION WITH STATA

- Data visualization tools in Stata
- See Canvas for do files and datasets

WEEK 7 (FEBRUARY 27): GROUP PRESENTATIONS

- Each group will give a 20-minute formal presentation of first research project
- Submit data, code, and codebook by February 26 (day before!) at 8:30pm

WEEK 8 (MARCH 6): FIRST POLICY BRIEF AND PEER EVALUATIONS DUE

- Submit first policy brief by March 6 at 8.30pm
- Submit first peer evaluation form for self and group members by 5.30pm

WEEK 9 (MARCH 13): SPRING BREAK

WEEK 10 (MARCH 20): INTRODUCTION TO VRAP DASHBOARD

- Instructor: Maria Paula Perez Arguelles
 - Background readings and materials will be distributed before the session

WEEK 11 (MARCH 27): FIRST POLICY BRIEF FEEDBACK

- Meet with groups to discuss feedback on first policy briefs

WEEK 12 (APRIL 3): INDEPENDENT GROUP MEETINGS

- No formal class meeting
- Submit *revised* first policy brief by April 3 at 8.30pm

WEEK 13 (APRIL 10): INDEPENDENT GROUP MEETINGS

- No formal class meeting

WEEK 14 (APRIL 17): GROUP PRESENTATIONS

- Each group will give a 20-minute formal presentation summarizing progress
- Submit second policy brief by April 17 at 8.30pm

WEEK 15 (APRIL 24): FINAL PRESENTATION OF SECOND POLICY BRIEF

- Each group will give a 20-minute formal presentation of second research project
- Submit peer evaluation form for self and group members by 5.30pm
- Receive feedback on second policy brief

WEEK 16 (MAY 2): SECOND POLICY BRIEF DUE

- Submit *revised* datasets, code and codebooks by 8:30pm
- Submit *revised* second policy brief by May 2 at 8.30pm

CAPSTONE TEAM ASSIGNMENTS

FIRST PROJECT: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

TEAM 1: DEMOGRAPHICS AND POLITICS

- EMMANUELLA AINA
- SHANNAY BARADARAN
- SERGIO LONGORIA JR
- JENNIFER SCHIRMER
- GARRETT UPCHURCH

TEAM 2: ECONOMICS

- TENI FAYIGA
- JORDAN GUIDRY
- TIA HUFSTETLER
- JADA WYATT

TEAM 3: HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- SANA DADABHOY
- MATTHEW KNIOWSKI
- SAMUEL LOCASTO
- XIMENA MONDRAGON

TEAM 4: HOUSING AND MOBILITY

- ANDREW CREWS
- MICHELLE GABRIEL
- NICOLE KING
- ALFREDO PRIETO PE
- SYDNEY TRAN

TEAM 5: EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE

- RACHEL JONES
- MARWAH KHAN
- CATHERINE MIERS
- DREW TONJES
- ANDREW WALLACE

SECOND PROJECT: VRAP INDEX

TEAM 1: VULNERABILITY

- ANDREW CREWS
- SANA DADABHOY
- CATHERINE MIERS

- ALFREDO PRIETO PE
- JENNIFER SCHIRMER
- GARRETT UPCHURCH

TEAM 2: RESILIENCY

- SHANNAY BARADARAN
- TENI FAYIGA
- SERGIO LONGORIA JR
- DREW TONJES
- JADA WYATT

TEAM 3: ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

- EMMANUELLA AINA
- JORDAN GUIDRY
- TIA HUFSTETLER
- RACHEL JONES
- MATTHEW KNIOWSKI
- SAMUEL LOCASTO

TEAM 4: PREPAREDNESS

- MICHELLE GABRIEL
- MARWAH KHAN
- XIMENA MONDRAGON
- NICOLE KING
- SYDNEY TRAN
- ANDREW WALLACE

Mental Health and Wellness Resources

The University of Houston has a number of resources to support students' mental health and overall wellness, including [CoogsCARE](#) and the [UH Go App](#). UH [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) offers 24/7 mental health support for all students, addressing various concerns like stress, college adjustment and sadness. CAPS provides individual and couples counseling, group therapy, workshops and connections to other support services on and off-campus. For assistance visit uh.edu/caps, call 713-743-5454, or visit a [Let's Talk](#) location in-person or virtually. [Let's Talk](#) are daily, informal confidential consultations with CAPS therapists where no appointment or paperwork is needed.

The [Student Health Center](#) offers a Psychiatry Clinic for enrolled UH students. Call 713-743-5149 during clinic hours, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. to schedule an appointment.

The [A.D. Bruce Religion Center](#) offers spiritual support and a variety of programs centered on well-being.

Need Support Now?

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call CAPS crisis support 24/7 at 713-743-5454, or the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text [988](tel:988), or chat 988lifeline.org.

Academic Honesty Policy

High ethical standards are critical to the integrity of any institution, and bear directly on the ultimate value of conferred degrees. All UH community members are expected to contribute to an atmosphere of the highest possible ethical standards. Maintaining such an atmosphere requires that any instances of academic dishonesty be recognized and addressed. The [UH Academic Honesty Policy](#) is designed to handle those instances with fairness to all parties involved: the students, the instructors, and the University itself. All students and faculty of the University of Houston are responsible for being familiar with this policy.

Title IX/Sexual Misconduct

Per the UHS Sexual Misconduct Policy, your instructor is a “responsible employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which they become aware to the Title IX office. Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report in confidence. You can find more information about resources on the Title IX website at <https://uh.edu/equal-opportunity/title-ix-sexual-misconduct/resources/>.

Reasonable Academic Adjustments/Auxiliary Aids

The University of Houston is committed to providing an academic environment and educational programs that are accessible for its students. Any student with a disability who is experiencing barriers to learning, assessment or participation is encouraged to contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center (Dart Center) to learn more about academic accommodations and support that may be available to them. Students seeking academic accommodations will need to register with the Dart Center as soon as possible to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations. Please contact the Dart Center by visiting the website: <https://uh.edu/accessibility/> calling (713) 743-5400, or emailing jdcenter@Central.UH.EDU.

Excused Absence Policy

Regular class attendance, participation, and engagement in coursework are important contributors to student success. Absences may be excused as provided in the University of Houston [Undergraduate Excused Absence Policy](#) and [Graduate Excused Absence Policy](#) for reasons including: medical illness of student or close relative, death of a close family member, legal or government proceeding

that a student is obligated to attend, recognized professional and educational activities where the student is presenting, and University-sponsored activity or athletic competition. Under these policies, students with excused absences will be provided with an opportunity to make up any quiz, exam or other work that contributes to the course grade or a satisfactory alternative. Please read the full policy for details regarding reasons for excused absences, the approval process, and extended absences. Additional policies address absences related to [military service](#), [religious holy days](#), [pregnancy and related conditions](#), and [disability](#).

Hobby School students are expected to arrive on time for all their classes and remain in class until officially concluded. Students who miss more than three classes without a university approved excuse (e.g., military service, religious holy days), written note from a medical provider, or pre-approval from the course instructor will receive an F for the course. Students who are more than 15 minutes late for a class will be counted absent. Students who leave class more than 15 minutes before its conclusion will also be counted absent. Any student for whom this attendance policy represents a special hardship should talk to their instructors. Disruptive behavior inside or outside class may result in disciplinary actions and academic failure. Students must refrain from disturbing the peace and good order of the university. For more details, please refer to the UH Student Conduct Policies: (<http://www.uh.edu/dos/pdf/codeofconduct.pdf>).

Recording of Class

Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the [Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center](#). If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor's recordings for their own studying and notetaking. Instructor's recordings are not authorized to be shared with anyone without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.

Resources for Online Learning

The University of Houston is committed to student success, and provides information to optimize the online learning experience through our [Power-On](#) website. Please visit this website for a comprehensive set of resources, tools, and tips including: obtaining access to the internet, AccessUH, Blackboard, and Canvas; using your smartphone as a webcam; and downloading Microsoft Office 365 at no cost. For questions or assistance contact UHOnline@uh.edu.

UH Email

Please check and use your CougarNet email for communications related to this course. Faculty use the CougarNet email to respond to course-related inquiries such as grade queries or progress reports for reasons of FERPA. To access your CougarNet email, [login](#) to your Microsoft 365 account with your CougarNet credentials. Visit [University Information Technology \(UIT\)](#) for instructions on how to connect your CougarNet e-mail on a mobile device.

Webcams

Access to a webcam is required for students participating remotely in this course. Webcams must be turned on (*state when webcams are required to be on and the academic basis for requiring them to be on*). (Example: *Webcams must be turned on during exams to ensure the academic integrity of exam administration*.)

Security Escorts and Cougar Ride

UHPD continually works with the University community to make the campus a safe place to learn, work, and live. The security escort service is designed for the community members who have safety concerns and would like to have a Security Officer walk with them, for their safety, as they make their way across campus. Based on availability either a UHPD Security Officer or Police Officer will escort students, faculty, and staff to locations beginning and ending on campus. If you feel that you need a Security Officer to walk with you for your safety, please call [713-743-3333](tel:713-743-3333). Arrangements may be made for special needs.

Parking and Transportation Services also offers a late-night, on-demand shuttle service called “Cougar Ride” that provides rides to and from all on-campus shuttle stops, as well as the MD Anderson Library, Cougar Village/Moody Towers and the UH Technology Bridge. Rides can be requested through the UH Go app. Days and hours of operation can be found at <https://uh.edu/af-university-services/parking/cougar-ride/>.

Syllabus Changes

Please note that the instructor may need to make modifications to the course syllabus. Notice of such changes will be announced as quickly as possible through Canvas.