PPHA 35750 School Quality, Accountability, and Change Management in Chicago Public Schools – Spring 2024

Time: Thursdays 5:00pm – 7:50pm

Location: Keller 0023

Units: 100

Instructor: Jeff Broom

Instructor Information:

- Name: Jeff Broom
- Email: jbroom@uchicago.edu
- Office: Virtual
- Office hours: By appointment; evenings only

Teaching Assistant

- TBD

Textbooks (required)

- Ewing, Eve. *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side*, University of Chicago Press (2018)
- Wilson, James Q. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do And Why They Do It*, Basic Books, Inc. (1989)

Additional Required Readings/Viewings:

- [Reform Before the Storm: A Timeline of the Chicago Public Schools from Chicago Magazine](#). Chicago Magazine (2012)
- [The Second Window: How a Focus on Freshmen Transformed a System](#). UChicago Network for College Success, Uchicago Consortium on School REsearch, The To & Through Project (2020)
- June 2019 Chicago Board of Education [meeting](#) - presentation at 1:30 mark and discussion/vote at 5:34 mark.
- April 2023 Chicago Board of Education [meeting](#) - presentation and discussion at 3:38 mark.

- Additional book chapters, articles, podcasts, etc. assigned throughout the course.

Course Description: PPHA 35750 (School Quality, Accountability, and Change Management in Chicago Public Schools) is an upper division class covering topics in education policy. The course will address key considerations in the practical work of public policy change, through a detailed case study of such an effort in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The multi-year process of redesigning CPS's approach to accountability culminated in April 2024 with the unanimous adoption of the District's [policy](#) for Continuous Improvement and Data Transparency (CIDT). The work of operationalizing this policy is very much in progress, so there may be adjustments or additions to the content as the quarter progresses. The foundations of the course will be stable, however, as these cover issues involving the historical, political and legislative context for policy making, as well as discussions about the proper use of data in informing these kinds of discussions.

In addition to exploring the history of school reform and the United States and Chicago specifically (including legislators' attempts to improve education over the years), the course will cover related topics as needed based on students' familiarity with them. These are ideas that can be usefully referenced during policy making and include, but are not limited to:

- Improvement Science
- Cost-Benefit Analysis
- Program Evaluation
- Psychometrics
- Game Theory
- Theory of the Firm
- Systems Thinking
- Human-Centered Design

The foundational assumption of this class is that the students are aspiring policy makers who will benefit from a first-hand account of the pitfalls and lessons learned of a specific attempt to revise a major component of one of the largest public education systems in the country.

Course Objectives: At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Established a better understanding of the ways in which societies organize themselves. This will be at a very high level, but understanding these dynamics will help students understand the path taken by the District in the case study and why it was effective.

- Improve their understanding of how bureaucracies operate and why.

- Articulate the role (and limits) of data in defining shared narratives and driving decision making.

- Articulate why, in a liberal democracy, the process of co-creating solutions in partnership with those impacted by institutional decisions is more important than the actual decisions public institutions make. This will include the critical role transparency and institutional accountability play in these processes.

- Articulate some of the key factors in policy implementation, including change management; the importance of building out required capacity; and maintaining constructive mindsets.

Evaluation

This course is about learning to think like a policy maker. As a result, I will be assessing your work based on this margin rather than upon the extent to which your final answer matches the one I have arrived at. This is an inherently subjective process. I will do my best to explain the rubric that I use to assess your work but it is your responsibility to digest my feedback and learn to assess your work from the policy maker point of view. I am always happy to discuss what questions you miss on quizzes and homework and how I arrive at project grades, but I do not discuss the points allocated.

This course will be challenging. Realize that doing poorly in percentage terms does not necessarily translate into receiving a poor grade overall. Please come see me if you are concerned or want clarification.

I won't have in-person exams but I will require two large individual projects due at the middle and end of the course. The first project counts for 25% of your final grade and the final for 35%. There will also be a group project (presented in class) worth 20%. The remaining 20% comes from quizzes and in-class participation. I place a premium on the last because our group discussions will help me assess what topics I need to emphasize in order to convey the key dynamics of policy making at play in our case study.

These weights are fixed–improvement on later projects will not retroactively raise your grades on earlier projects. Those who struggle on the first project will be required to meet with me individually to discuss their results.

Final Project 35%

Midterm Project 25%

Group Project 20%

Homework/Quizzes 15%

In-Class Participation 5%

Total 100%

The following provides a guideline for grades:

A   Demonstrates complete mastery of the tools of the semester. Additionally, exhibits an ability to apply them consistently and correctly to new situations and to draw insightful conclusions using the tools.

B   Demonstrates mastery of the tools of the semester. Additionally, exhibits an ability to apply them consistently and correctly to new situations.

C   Demonstrates a competent understanding of the tools and an ability to apply the tools consistently and correctly.

D   Demonstrates some understanding of the tools of the course but does not exhibit an ability to apply them consistently and/or correctly.

F   Fails to exhibit an ability to use or an understanding of the tools of the term.

Project Options:

Midterm Project:

- Option 1:
  - Pick an area of public policy you consider ripe for reform. This is a purely subjective definition and can (and probably should) be reflective of your own personal areas of interest. This can be in the education space or another area of public policy. Research the legislative or regulatory history and constraints and outline them. Also conduct a literature review of what works in the space and outline key findings from research.

  - Based on the lessons learned and approaches discussed in the first half of the class, make some recommendations on how to go about the reform you propose. Your project will be evaluated on the quality of your recommendations regarding the process of policy reform more than the likely impact of the reform you're proposing, though you should include a plan for incorporating research on best practices into your reform process. Your recommendations should include a plan to identify and navigate the pitfalls of the policy making process for your chosen area of public policy.

- Option 2:
  - Find real-world example(s) of the use of descriptive statistics for program evaluation. Specifically, find examples where policy makers drew inappropriate inferential conclusions using data unfit for the purpose.

  - Relying on readings and discussions from class, critique the methodology and how the data was used, explain what was wrong. Also work to articulate (as best you can gather) why the public officials in question made the choices about data use they did.

- Develop and describe a program evaluation project (data collection, analysis, etc.) that would better answer the policy problem being addressed. This does not need to be a recommendation for a randomized control trial, per se. But I will evaluate your recommendations based on their practicability in the policy making context you describe. A good example of a non-RCT study that used available administrative data while also reaching some surprising and potentially impactful conclusions is [this report](#) from the UChicago Consortium on School Research.

- Option 3:
  - Research an example of failed policy change and diagnose the failure using the tools discussed in the first section of the class. Upon request, I will provide some information about a recent failure in public policy making, namely the Illinois State Board of Education's attempt to transition to a through-year assessment system. You can choose to do a deep dive on that example or merely use it as a template for what I consider a failure of policy making.

Final Project:

- Option 1: Stakeholder Learning Demands for CIDT
  - Read the final CIDT policy, find an indicator that you find interesting, and research best practices in the education field for that indicator. Your indicator can be a student outcome measure (e.g., graduation rate) or a practice measure (e.g., high quality curriculum). Your goal is to find something that you are interested in learning more about.

  - Once you've chosen and researched your indicator, develop some materials to help stakeholders achieve a better understanding of said indicator - what it is; why it's important; what good practice looks like, etc. Your main learning objective here is to help a neophyte understand the indicator you've chosen.

  - Your project should be driven by basic basic adult learning principles, and can include presentations, informational videos, links to additional learning resources, etc. Your grade will be based on how thoughtful you are in communicating information to stakeholders.

  - If you are n't specifically interested in CIDT, feel free to pick something you'd like to explain in another policy area. All of the other guidance above should apply.

- Option 2: Analyze and Critique Stakeholder Engagement
  - Produce a report on CPS efforts to engage stakeholders on the revised accountability policy. This should include your attendance or viewing of any

public touchpoints that take place during the course (e.g., Board meetings, public presentations, etc.), and review of publicly available materials. Using the framework of the course and values and standards articulated during our discussions, analyze how well the District has engaged (and continues to engage) stakeholders in this effort. Compare and contrast this process to the school closings in 2013, referencing both Ghosts in the Schoolyard and contemporary reporting. What has gone well in the current process? How does the current process reflect any lessons learned and implemented by the district? How could the district have performed better? What should the District start, stop, or improve moving forward? Responses to the latter question should be as detailed as possible, including candidate alternative materials, project plans, etc.

Group Project:

This assignment will be formatted as either an in-class debate or a fishbowl facilitation exercise, depending on final class enrollment.

Policy on collaboration:

- **Midterm and Final Projects:** Students may consult with other students, for brainstorming and feedback, but students are not allowed to collaborate in the actual writing of the projects.
- **Homework:**
- **Debate:** Students are expected to work with their assigned groups for both the debate and group presentations

Class Policies and Information

Course Format: Class meetings will consist of lecture based on slides as well as group discussion. There will be at least one group discussion each class meeting, in which students will be called upon to work in groups in response to a prompt. Slides will be posted to Canvas website once all content from the slide has been covered. Readings that we discuss in class must be completed before class meets to discuss them, as they will be referenced in the discussion prompts. Reading due dates will be updated as we progress.

 Attendance: As the main content of the course will be through slides and discussion in class, however, and quizzes will be administered at the start of each class and after the return from each mid-class break, attendance is highly recommended.

Zoom attendance: Students are encouraged to attend in-person, but in circumstances when that is not possible, students will be able to attend via zoom. **Students should email the professor if they plan to attend any class via zoom.**

Zoom link:

TBD

Late Assignments: Students can turn in late assignments **one day after the due date**. If students do this, the maximum number of points that will be available for that assignment will be **reduced by 25%.** Assignments will not be accepted two days after the assignment is due. This policy will be amended to with the university's guidelines on [religious accommodationsLinks to an external site.](#).

Turning in Assignments: Homework must be turned in via Canvas by midnight on the assigned due date (see late assignments policy above). Homework not turned in by that time will be considered late and be subject to the late assignment policy. The midterm and final projects must be turned in online on Canvas.

Diversity and Inclusion

In this course, we will strive to uphold the norms and expectations of the University of Chicago and the Harris School. The Harris School welcomes, values, and respects students, faculty, and staff from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, and we believe that rigorous inquiry and effective public policy problem-solving requires the expression and understanding of diverse viewpoints, experiences, and traditions. The University and the Harris School have developed distinct but overlapping principles and guidelines to ensure that we remain a place where difficult issues are discussed with kindness and respect for all.

The University's policies are available [hereLinks to an external site.](#). Specifically, the University identifies the freedom of expression as being "vital to our shared goal of the pursuit of knowledge, as is the right of all members of the community to explore new ideas and learn from one another. To preserve an environment of spirited and open debate, we should all have the opportunity to contribute to intellectual exchanges and participate fully in the life of the University."

The Harris School's commitments to lively, principled, and respectful engagement are available [hereLinks to an external site.](#): "The Harris School of Public Policy welcomes and respects students, faculty, and staff from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and

perspectives as part of our commitment to building an inclusive community. *Fostering an environment that encourages rigorous inquiry and effective public policy problem-solving requires the involvement and understanding of diverse viewpoints, experiences, and traditions.* As a leading public policy school, Harris holds diversity as a core value. That includes not only diversity of opinion, but diversity along a broad spectrum of factors, including race, ethnicity, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability status, religion, socio-economic background, and social or political belief. Recognizing the value of diversity and inclusion is essential to combating discrimination, addressing disparities, and cultivating ethical and clear-eyed policy leadership."

Academic Integrity

Please note that an important element of academic integrity is fully and correctly attributing any materials taken from the work of others. Feel free to consult with me before completing assignments if you have concerns about the correct way to reference the work of others. More generally, please familiarize yourself with the [University's policyLinks to an external site.](#) on academic honesty, which applies to this course. Of course, I do not anticipate any problems with academic integrity. In the unlikely event that any concerns do arise regarding this matter, I will forward all related materials to the College for further review and action.

Acting with academic integrity means, in brief, not submitting the statements, work, or ideas of others as one's own. Students are expected to comply with university regulations regarding honest work. If you are in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, speak with me before the assignment is due. Failure to maintain academic integrity on an assignment will result in a penalty befitting the violation, up to and including failing the course and further University sanctions. For more information, consult the student manual.

Accommodations for Disabilities

If you require any accommodations for this course, please bring a copy of your Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) to me as soon as possible so that we may discuss how your accommodations may be implemented. The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the University's programs or services, you are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. To receive reasonable accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with Student Disability

Services. Please contact the office at 773-702-6000/TTY 773-795-1186 or disabilities@uchicago.edu, or visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu. Student Disability Services is located at 5501 S. Ellis Avenue.

University policies: You can find more information on the university's policies [hereLinks to an external site.](.).