The Scale-Up Effect In Public Policy: Understanding And Addressing Threats To Scalability
(DRAFT SYLLABUS)
PPHA 43650
Autumn 2021
Thursdays 2:00-4:50PM (CST)*
*For weeks 3, 5, and 6, class will meet on Tuesday (Oct 12, Oct 26, Nov 2) instead of Thursday

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Office Hours Teaching Assistant
TBD TBD

Course Description and Learning Objectives
In recent years, citizens and lawmakers have become increasingly enthusiastic about adopting evidence-based policies and programs. Social scientists have delivered evidence on countless interventions that positively impact people’s lives. And yet, most programs, when expanded, have not delivered the dramatic societal impacts promised. In order to truly reap the benefits of evidence-based interventions (practices, programs, and policies), researchers and practitioners must figure out how to take these programs from small-scale experiments and implement at scale in a way that enables population-level impacts.

This course will examine some of the most critical questions of public policy: Why have we failed to bring evidence-based programs found to be effective in small-scale experiments to the population level? How can we scale such programs effectively? How can researchers, practitioners, and policymakers work together to bring about fundamental changes in research and program design? The course uses the lens of early childhood to explore these questions. We’ve chosen early childhood in hopes that focusing on disentangling challenges in a particularly vexing domain will draw conclusions that resonate in all public policy domains that experience similar scaling challenges, including health, education, energy, and employment.

Methodologically, the course builds on an economic model (presented in “The science of using science: towards an understanding of threats to scalability” by Omar Al-Ubaydli, John List, and Dana Suskind) to explore the threats to scalability, i.e., phenomenon by which the magnitude of a treatment effect changes when an intervention moves from research setting to population-wide implementation.

Course Learning Objectives
By the end of this course, students will be able to:
- Describe a novel economic model to explore threats to scalability and use it as a framework to evaluate social programs.
- Understand the principles of field experiments, which are often the source of experimental evidence used to justify scaling.
- Critically evaluate social programs for their evidence of effectiveness and potential for scale.
• Put forth recommendations to design programs and research studies with an eye towards scaling.
• Describe the importance of early childhood as it relates to policymaking and scaling programs.

Course requirements
Students will be evaluated based on three components: class participation, reflection papers and a quarter-long project proposal.

1. Class participation
Every class will involve a mix of assigned readings (which are expected to be completed before class), small-group exercises, and discussion. Therefore, regular attendance is crucial, as is active participation in exercises and discussions.

2. Reflection papers
There will be three individual reflection papers during the quarter. The objective is to summit a brief memo (no longer than 2 pages) reflecting on your learnings and how your thinking about scaling has evolved over the semester, including any questions that remain unanswered. Detailed instructions will be posted on Canvas. No late assignments will be accepted.

3. A quarter-long project
Students will work on a project throughout the quarter. They will work in groups of no more than four. Each group has to turn in a single project. There are two options for projects:
• Option 1: Develop an innovative program or research proposal, focused on early childhood or education, which is designed to reduce disparities in learning, behavior, and/or health outcomes.
• Option 2: Prepare a policy brief for a policymaker comparing 4 to 5 interventions, their evidence-base, and what is known about the threats to scalability. This can be focused on any policy-relevant domain.

Detailed instructions will be posted on Canvas under the Assignments tab.

Grades and Grading
Students will be evaluated based on three components:

1. Class participation (20%): We will evaluate contribution to class discussion and exercises, and reflection on readings. Sharing examples from previous professional experience is highly valued.
2. Reflection papers (30%): Three reflection papers, each one represents 10% of the final grade.
3. A quarter-long project proposal (50%): As part of their work on the project, each group must deliver two outputs throughout the quarter. The first output, the project proposal draft is worth 10% of the final grade. The second output, the final project proposal is worth 40% of the final grade.

We will make every effort to return assignments within a maximum of two weeks after the deadline. If you believe that your grade on an assignment is incorrect or unfair, please submit your concerns in writing to the TA within a week of the assignment being returned.
Course Material

Throughout the course, students are required to read several chapters of the following book:


Class Policies

By attending course sessions, students acknowledge that:

1. They will not: (i) record, share, or disseminate University of Chicago course sessions, videos, transcripts, audio, or chats; (ii) retain such materials after the end of the course; or (iii) use such materials for any purpose other than in connection with participation in the course.
2. They will not share links to University of Chicago course sessions with any persons not authorized to be in the course session. Sharing course materials with persons authorized to be in the relevant course is permitted. Syllabi, handouts, slides, and other documents may be shared at the discretion of the instructor.
3. Course recordings, content, and materials may be covered by copyrights held by the University, the instructor, or third parties. Any unauthorized use of such recordings or course materials may violate such copyrights.
4. Any violation of this policy will be referred to the Area Dean of Students.

Resources available to students

The University has long offered a comprehensive set of student support services (described here), including student health services. And in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated disruptions, the University has provided links for students via its “Learning Remotely” website; specific resources are listed here.

If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, remote counseling services are available. Student Counseling Service (SCS) urges you to attend to your mental wellbeing and to reach out to them for support during these challenging times. All SCS services are covered by the Student Life Fee, and there is no additional cost for students to access their services. See https://wellness.uchicago.edu/mental-health/student-counseling-service-spring-quarter-faq/. Students seeking new services/resources can call 773.702.9800 during business hours (Monday–Friday 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m.) and ask to speak with a clinician. **Students needing urgent mental health care can speak with clinicians over the phone 24/7 by calling the SCS at 773.702.3625.**

Academic Integrity

All University of Chicago students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic Integrity and honesty. Among other things, this means that students shall not represent another’s work as their own, use un-allowed materials during exams, or otherwise gain unfair academic advantage.

It is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another’s statements or ideas as one's own work. To do so is plagiarism or cheating, offenses punishable under the University's disciplinary system. Because these offenses undercut the distinctive moral and intellectual
character of the University, we take them very seriously. All students suspected of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Harris Dean of Students for investigation and adjudication. The disciplinary process can result in sanctions up to and including suspension or expulsion from the University.

*In addition to disciplinary sanctions, I will impose a grade penalty of 20% for students who have committed academic dishonesty.

**Disability Accommodations**
Students who have disability accommodations awarded by the University Student Disability Services Office should inform the Harris Dean of Students office by the end of the first week of class. The Harris Dean of Students Office will work with the student and instructor to coordinate the students’ accommodations implementation. Harris students are not required to submit their accommodations letter to the instructor. Students from other divisions in the University must submit their accommodations letter to either the instructor or the Harris Dean of Students Office. The University's policies regarding students with disabilities are available [here](#).

**Diversity and Inclusion**
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 insure that we remain a place where difficult issues are discussed with kindness and respect for all. We foster thought-provoking discourse by encouraging community members not only to speak freely about all issues but also to listen carefully and respectfully to the views of others.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction to evidence-based policymaking: What and why?

Week 2: Human behavior change
- Project Outline Due! (Not graded)

Week 3: Why early childhood is a good lens through which to study scaling and a primer on experiments
- 1st Reflection Paper Due! (10% of the final grade)
- Note: Class will meet on Tuesday, Oct 12, 2021

Week 4: Science of using science
Week 5: Threats to scalability – Part 1


**Project Proposal Draft Due! (10% of the final grade)**

**Note: Class will meet on Tuesday, Oct 26, 2021**

Week 6: Threats to scalability – Part 2

- Straight Talk on Evidence. (2018). Large randomized trial finds state pre-k program has adverse effects on academic achievement. Reform is needed to increase effectiveness. Article available at Straight Talk on Evidence’s website.

**2nd Reflection Paper Due! (10% of the final grade)**

**Note: Class will meet on Tuesday, Nov 2, 2021**

Week 7: Developing scalable interventions and Human Centered Design


Week 8: Enabling contexts: What is takes to scale an intervention


Week 9: The role of data, continuous quality improvement and integrated data systems


- 3rd Reflection Paper Due! (10% of the final grade)
- Final Project Proposal Due! (40% of the final grade)