

**Harris School of Public Policy/University of Chicago
Policy Lab in Infrastructure and Urban Development
PPHA 60000-2
Winter 2023 – Wednesdays, 3:00 – 5:50 pm
Keller 0010**

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Course Description

In this Policy Lab, students will work on a suite of projects related to urban infrastructure. After all, the United States long enjoyed the use of some of the world's finest, high-quality public infrastructure—roads, bridges, rail, air, water transport, plus water infrastructure, telecommunications and power generating facilities, and so on. But recent years have seen underinvestment in new assets and maintenance of old ones; limited efforts to improve our infrastructure's resilience to threats from climate change and cyber-attacks; and a collective and consistent unwillingness to identify and secure consistent funding needed for public investments—and don't forget COVID!

In this Policy Lab, we will focus on the third challenge: how to pay for what we need without placing undue burdens on individuals, households, and communities least able to pay. *All projects in this Lab qualify as approved electives for the Municipal Finance Certificate. The City of Chicago/Utility Billing Relief project also qualifies as an approved elective for the Data Analytics Certificate.*

Separate project scopes (posted on Canvas) describe the projects in more detail. Under guidance from faculty and professional advisors, teams will conduct research and analysis, draw conclusions, develop recommendations, and present final deliverables to client leadership at the conclusion of the quarter. Client meetings will occur throughout the quarter as needed.

Projects

Project: Paying for Water and Sewerage Services

Client: City of Chicago

The City of Chicago's Utility Billing Relief (UBR) program, launched in the spring of 2020, is intended to assist low-income residents by making their water and sewer bills more affordable and providing a

path to compliance for residents who have past due balances.¹ The program provides three specific benefits to program participants: (1) reduced rates (50% of regular) on water and sewer services and related taxes; (2) suspension of additional late payment penalties and debt collection actions; and (3) debt forgiveness after successfully completing 12 months in the program with no additional accrued past due balance. The City reports over 25,000 enrollments, savings of nearly \$13 million in rate reductions, and over \$15 million in debt forgiven since the program’s inception. In this project, students will analyze accounts data to answer impact questions related to annual city revenues; participant consumption and payment rates; program completion rates; and utility debts forgiven.

Project: Paying for Transit Services

COVID-related disruptions to economic activity and work and leisure travel continue to place enormous pressure on the local transit system. Current weekday transit ridership is less than 65% of pre-pandemic levels, significantly depressing farebox revenues, and COVID-era Federal support for local transit—from the CARES, CRRSAA, and ARPA bills—will essentially run out by the end of FY 2025, leading to an estimated annual “status quo” budget gap of \$730 million in the Chicago region. This Policy Lab will include two projects addressing this challenge.

Project: State Revenues and Support for Transit

Client: Regional Transportation Authority (RTA)

The RTA’s Agenda for Advocacy and Action, an interim document prepared during its strategic planning process, emphasizes that diverse and sustainable revenues—non-farebox revenues in particular--will be needed to ensure financial sustainability.² Students will prepare analysis and recommendations regarding how state governments fund, govern and dictate policy for transit systems in peer regions.

Project: Farebox Revenues and Equity

Client: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)

The Illinois Legislature has directed CMAP to prepare and submit a report by January 1, 2024 with recommendations on changes to state funding support, governance structures, and fare systems to ensure the “long-term financial viability of a comprehensive and coordinated regional public transportation system” in the region.³ Students will prepare analysis and recommendations contributing to this broader initiative, with a specific focus on how ability-to-pay fare structures are currently used—and may be used in the future-- in the Chicago region and elsewhere in the country.

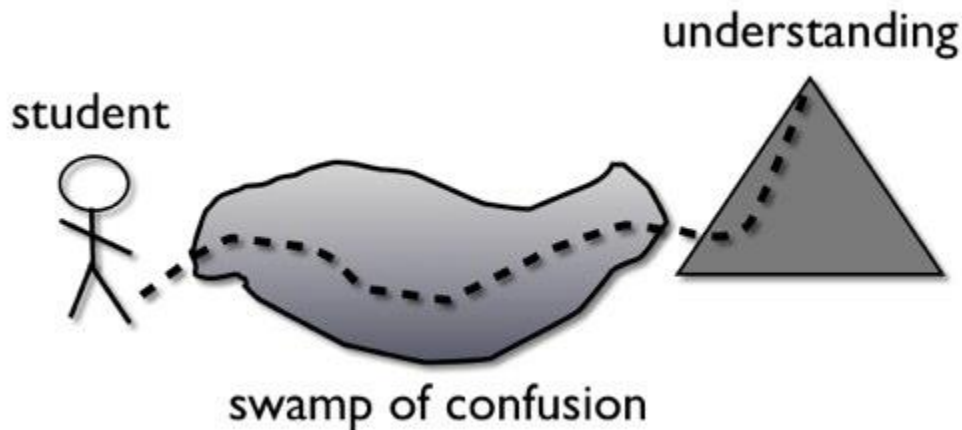
¹ City of Chicago, “Welcome to Utility Billing Relief,” accessed June 17, 2022, https://chicago.docugateway.com/main/guest/billing_relief/.

² Regional Transportation Authority, “RTA Strategic Plan 2023 Agenda for Advocacy and Action,” August 2022, <https://www.rtachicago.org/sites/default/files/documents/StrategicPlan/Action%20and%20Advocacy%20Agenda%20August%202022.pdf>.

³ State of Illinois, “Illinois General Assembly - Full Text of Public Act 102-1028,” Pub. L. No. 102–1028 (2022), <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=102-1028>.

Learning Objectives

Before itemizing any specifics, it is worth emphasizing how this class differs from many others at Harris. In a nutshell, in the Harris Policy Labs program we both fear and embrace the idea that the “path of learning goes through the swamp of confusion.”⁴



(Image from Allain, Rhett. “Learning Goes through The Land of Confusion.” *Wired*, February 3, 2010. <https://www.wired.com/2010/02/learning-goes-through-the-land-of-confusion/>.)

In other words, the Policy Labs experience can be messy and even scary! There are no problem sets or exams, and there are few clear-cut and specific “problems” to solve. In that sense, the course is intended to provide a taste of real-world policy analysis and policymaking, albeit with the structure of a course, advisors, and other supports.

So! We intend that by the end of this course, students will:

- Learn or enhance capacity to work with incomplete data, frustrating clients, conflicting priorities, and other ambiguities
- Learn or enhance capacity to manage a complex project from inception to completion
- Develop or enhance teamwork skills
- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the assigned policy area by researching, analyzing, and synthesizing data related to the topic, drawing conclusions from the analysis, and developing concrete policy recommendations
- Collaborate extensively with fellow students, faculty advisors, and clients to develop and produce deliverables that provide useful information to the client and meet the client’s needs
- Develop or enhance oral and writing skills by delivering final analysis and recommendations to the client organization in the form of verbal and written deliverables

⁴ Rhett Allain, “Learning Goes through The Land of Confusion,” *Wired*, February 3, 2010, <https://www.wired.com/2010/02/learning-goes-through-the-land-of-confusion/>.

Prerequisites

Second-year graduate students and one-year masters students (not in their first quarter) are eligible to enroll.

Class Meetings and Weekly Time Commitment

Formal class meetings are weekly on Wednesday afternoons. *We will meet via Zoom in week 1 but in person thereafter.* Of course, this may all change depending on COVID, etc. Those formal class meetings may be recorded to serve students who may not be able to attend synchronously due to illness, COVID quarantines, etc.

To participate in a Zoom session, please:

- Log into Canvas
- Use the Calendar to get the link for that day's Zoom session
- Do NOT copy the Zoom link and use it from "outside" Canvas

Another important point to emphasize: while some of our Wednesday class time will be devoted to team work on your project, you should plan to spend 7-10 hours per week outside of class on your project (this includes team meetings, client meetings, etc.).

Course Structure and Expectations

As discussed above, this course is structured differently than a traditional academic course. Class meetings will utilize a combination of seminar format with discussion, time for teamwork and other meetings, and hands-on learning activities in place of traditional, one-way lecture. Policy Labs are "experiential learning" courses, and we have found that successful experiences for students, advisors, and clients are built on several key elements:

- **Flexibility, courtesy and respect are important.** Working on a real project with a client organization is generally not as smooth or as structured as working on a hypothetical assignment in a class, and generally involves some unpredictability. Expect the unexpected, be flexible, and be courteous and respectful to your teammates, to your client and to accommodating the client's needs.
- **Expect imperfect and incomplete data—and lack of clarity about your project!** A client will rarely have all of the data needed for a project, and what data are available may be in a terrible format, incomplete, etc. Expect to work with imperfect data, and expect challenges associated with its use. Clients may say one thing in week 2 and another in week 6, complicating your team's efforts. Frustrating! But remember, your advisors are here to help you work with what you have and/or direct you to other sources as needed, and despite these challenges, we set and maintain high quality standards for the work produced and shared with clients.

- **Confidentiality is critical.** In your work for this class, you will interact with confidential information, including not only confidential data provided by clients but also insights gleaned from that data and from client meetings. Clients trust us to help them solve difficult problems, and trust that we will not divulge what we learn in ways that could be detrimental to them. Students are required to keep all data and materials shared by the client confidential, as well as to keep the content of conversations with clients in confidence. All students are required to sign a confidentiality pledge at the start of the quarter. Violation of the pledge may result in academic penalties.

Course Materials

Background materials and client materials will be posted to Canvas. Students may also choose to store and share their work using other platforms as well (Box, Google Drive, etc.).

I will use the Canvas site intensively. The site's navigation tabs on the left-hand-side panel will help you find what you need; key tabs include:

- Syllabus: links to this document, plus links to project team pages
- Modules
 - Week 00: General resources for all students and teams
 - Weeks 01 to 09: weekly plans and schedules
- Assignments, by category, with assignment weights

Teaching and Learning in In-Person, Dual Modality, and Remote Environments

In the current sometimes on, sometimes off remote environment, using Canvas and other web-based resources will be essential. The university's "Learning Remotely" [website](#) includes student-friendly FAQs, links to tech-related resources and policies, and so on, and I encourage you to become familiar with what is posted there. I will rely heavily on Canvas, and students are responsible for any and all material posted there. I encourage the use of email and try to respond in a timely fashion. **Please do not use the Inbox/Messaging feature of Canvas to communicate with me.** I also do not text, tweet, or Facebook message regarding course matters, and I don't even use Slack! *So please check your UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO email and CANVAS regularly.* **I will schedule office hours as needed throughout the term and post the details to Canvas.**

For the most part, this course is planned as an in-person experience, and students are expected to attend class at the Keller Center, with some exceptions as discussed below. Our practices and expectations include the following:

- Please display your name tent every class so that I can more easily call on you by name.
- To limit COVID risks, I am likely to wear a face mask while in the classroom. If you cannot understand me even when I repeat or "try again" to speak, I will remove my mask temporarily to

clarify, as long as I remain 6 feet away from the nearest person. *Please do not hesitate to ask me to repeat or restate anything that is unclear at any time.*

That said, of course, public health and/or personal health circumstances vary across individual members of the University community and may change abruptly with limited notice. Students, TA's, and instructors may need to participate remotely for a short time or, in some limited instances, for the entire quarter. To guide expectations and plans, please note the following:

- **If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or are required to isolate, do not come to class!**
 - As soon as possible, contact me or the TA by email if you cannot attend class for this reason. You should not send me medical information / doctors' notes or the results of any COVID-19 test.
 - Students are expected to abide by the University's [COVID-19 health requirements](#) AND its specific [Protocol for Addressing Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19 Exposures](#). Note that the Protocol, which addresses self-monitoring, testing, and isolating requirements, represents evolving guidance and is subject to change.
 - Any member of the University community who tests positive for COVID-19 should inform the University contact tracing team at C19HealthReport@uchicago.edu.
 - Students missing class for short spells during the term are encouraged to participate in class via live streaming, watch Zoom recordings of class sessions, and otherwise participate in class as fully as possible, health permitting.
- **If I find that I cannot teach in person at some point during the term, I will communicate this as soon as possible to all the relevant stakeholders, including students!**
 - Health permitting, I will teach remotely via Zoom on such occasions.
 - Students can attend class in the Keller Center but would participate via Zoom on such days. Students can also attend remotely from home (or any other location that is devoid of distractions).
 - I will be in touch with the TA, HSIT, and ASA to make sure things work smoothly.

Finally, please note that the University has developed specific policies and procedures regarding the use of any video/audio recordings associated with the course: these policies are explicitly described in the University's student manual and its "Learning Remotely" [website](#). The basic ideas are clear: By attending course sessions, students acknowledge that:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Any violation of this policy will be referred to the Dean of Students.

Deliverables and Grading

In some sense, the final work product delivered to the client is the “only” thing that matters. However, these Labs are intended to develop your emerging skills—analytical, communications, interpersonal, and overall professional skills. This means the *process* matters along with the *product*. Furthermore, in this course, you will be evaluated at both the individual and group (team) level. Professor Worthington will assign course letter grades after consultation with Ms. Brady and with input from our clients *and your fellow teammates*, and these grades will reflect your quarter-long effort, commitment, and engagement. Products and processes will be judged on quality and timeliness. More specifically, your course grade will be based on the components listed below:

- 15%: Attendance, participation, and professionalism
 - This entails being prepared, on-time, professional, and actively engaged throughout the quarter.
 - For example, students are expected to contribute to positive team dynamics and interactions, receiving and providing feedback with respect throughout the term.
- 15%: “Process” deliverables, such as:
 - Team contract
 - Preparing for initial client meeting
 - Team work plan and execution
 - Preparing for mid-quarter client meeting
 - Reflections on team contract and work plan
- 20%: “Milestone” deliverables, such as:
 - Data assignment
 - Qualitative interview
 - Drafts of slides
 - Drafts of policy brief
- 50% “Final” deliverables such as
 - Policy brief or memo, which likely includes a short “executive summary” as well as technical appendices
 - Presentation
- In some cases, additional materials (computer programs, Excel files, etc.)

A few other comments about grades:

- Your course grade will reflect both your individual effort and accomplishments as well as those of your team. Peer evaluations *will* be a factor in determination of your course grade.
- In general, I do not use rigid numeric scales for assigning letter grades. Instead, I “scale” each item to have a max score of 100 and then compute your numeric course score as the weighted average of those scores (with the assignment weights as specified above). With those numeric scores in hand, I consider the distribution of scores and aim to assign letter grades to scores in a manner no less generous than the “standard” Harris School grade distribution:

- A (1/8)
- A- (1/4)
- B+ (1/4)
- B (1/4)
- B- or lower (1/8)
- Students sometimes wish to request review and regrading of their returned work. If you wish to request reconsideration of your work, please follow these guidelines:
 - All requests must be submitted by email to me, with appropriate files and documentation, along with an explanation of why your work should be reconsidered.
 - All regrade requests should be submitted within one week of having the work returned to you.

Harris School and University of Chicago Resources and Policies

No surprises here, but all University and Harris School policies apply to this course. Useful information can be found as follows:

- General [University Policies](#)
- [Academic Polices](#) at the University
- University's [Student Manual](#)
- [Harris School Policies](#)
- Policies on audio and video recordings: <https://teachingremotely.uchicago.edu/recording-policy/>
<https://teachingremotely.uchicago.edu/recording-deletion-policy/>

Resources Available to Students

- Harris School supports are described here: <https://harris.uchicago.edu/student-life/dean-of-students-office/academic-support-programs>
- From the home page of the University's [Learning Remotely](#) site, links to learning and health and well-being resources are provided: <https://wellness.uchicago.edu/> and <https://learningremotely.uchicago.edu/learning-resources/> .
- Students needing urgent mental health care can speak with clinicians over the phone 24/7 by calling (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.

- The University's policies regarding academic integrity and dishonesty are described [here](#). It is worth explicitly stating the University's approach: "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.”

- The Harris School’s student policies are available on the [policies page of our website](#).
- Any students suspected of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Harris Dean of Students (Kate Shannon Biddle) for investigation and adjudication. The disciplinary process can result in sanctions up to and including suspension or expulsion from the University. In addition to those penalties, I reserve the right to assign a grade of “F” for any assignment for which a student is found to have committed academic dishonesty; in a subset of such cases, a student may also receive a grade of “F” for the course, earning zero credit.

Disability Accommodations

- The University’s policies regarding students with disabilities are available [here](#). The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by Student Disability Services (SDS) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course must follow the [procedures established by the Harris School of Public Policy](#).
- Students with approved accommodations must notify the Harris Student Disability Liaison, Eman Alsamara (ealsamara@uchicago.edu) of their access requests by the end of the first week of the quarter.

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.

- The University’s policies are available [here](#). 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 [here](#) and clearly articulate expectations around building an environment that welcomes diverse perspectives, does not avoid “difficult conversations,” and engages all in respectful listening and speaking in the classroom.
- Students whose first language is not English are especially encouraged to participate regularly in class, sharing their ideas, questions, and perspectives. We welcome all!

Video and Audio Recordings

The University has developed specific policies and procedures regarding the use of any video/audio recordings: these policies are explicitly described in the University's [student manual](#) as well as in the guidelines for instructors available [here](#). Specifically, by attending course sessions, students acknowledge that:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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