

Harris School of Public Policy
University of Chicago
PPHA 60000-2

Faculty Advisor
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Philanthropy and Public Policy Lab: Spring Quarter 2025
Mondays, 3:00 pm - 5:50 pm CST (in person)

Background and Goals

The Spring Quarter 2025 Philanthropy and Public Policy Lab will focus on efforts by Chicago's largest philanthropic organizations to advance equity and inclusivity in the Chicago metropolitan region. Students will be divided into three teams, and each team will be assigned to work on a project for a client organization for the duration of the quarter. Under the guidance of the Faculty Advisor, Shelley Davis, and with support from the Professional Advisor, teams will conduct research and analysis, draw conclusions, and present final deliverables to client leadership at the conclusion of the quarter. Client meetings will occur throughout the quarter as needed.

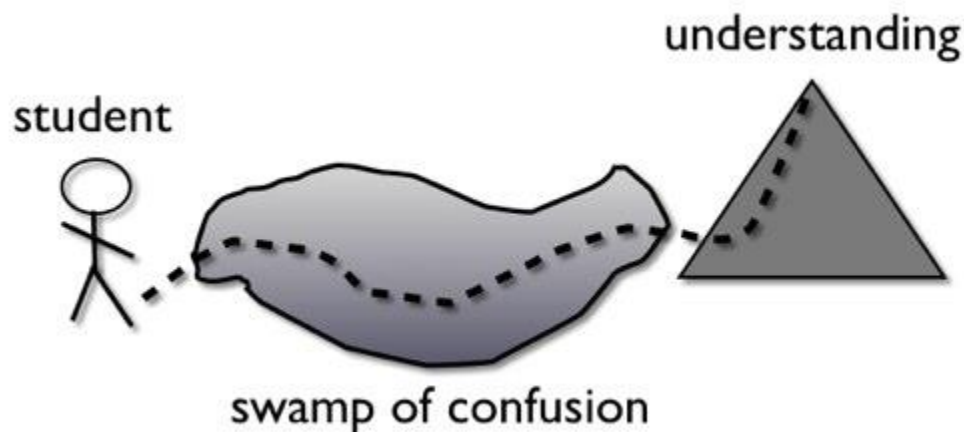
The three Spring Quarter 2025 clients for this Policy Lab are The Chicago Community Trust, the Legacy Foundation, and A Better Chicago. While these foundations are structured differently, they both work to support and improve the communities and residents in the regions they serve. Each enrolled student will be a team member on one of the following projects, project scopes that describe these projects in more detail will be shared at the beginning of the quarter:

Client: The Chicago Community Trust
Project: Improving Economic Mobility of Low-to-Moderate Wage Workers through Employer Programs

Client: Legacy Foundation
Project: Piloting Urban Institute's Upward Mobility Initiative as a Framework to Assess Grant Impact

Client: A Better Chicago
Project: Analyzing School Absenteeism Trends in Chicago

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.”¹



(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.

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

- Learn or enhance capacity to work with incomplete data, conflicting priorities, and other ambiguities in order to deliver a high-quality product
- Learn or enhance capacity to manage a complex project from inception to completion
- Develop or enhance teamwork, communication, and project management 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 high-quality 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 a policy memo and presentation

Prerequisites

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

¹ 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/>.

How this class will work

Formal class meetings will occur weekly on Mondays, 3:00pm to 5:50pm Central Standard Time in The Keller Center. Class time will include lecture, discussion, breakout sessions with teams, and meeting with clients via Zoom, and, consistent with Harris policies, you are expected to be physically present for all scheduled classes for the full time allotted. Given the rapid pace of these projects, we cannot allow any unexcused absences; in the event of an emergency, we ask that you immediately contact your Advisors via email.

While some of our Monday class time will be devoted to team work on your project, each student should plan to spend 7-10 hours per week outside of class on the project (this includes independent research, regular team meetings, client meetings outside of class as required, preparing materials, etc.). In-person collaboration for team meetings is highly encouraged but not required.

Class meetings will utilize a combination of seminar format with discussion and occasional guest speakers, 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, communication, and respect are important, both with your client and with your teammates. Working on a real project with a client organization is generally not as smooth or as structured as working on a hypothetical assignment or problem set 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. If conflicts arise, they need to be addressed quickly given our short time together, so continue to hold each other accountable to deadlines and expectations on a regular basis, and communicate with your Advisors immediately if you need assistance or input.
- 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.

Student assignments

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, communication, 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 team level. Professor Davis will assign course letter grades after consultation with the Professional Advisor and with input from our clients and your fellow teammates, and these grades will reflect your quarter-long effort, commitment, and engagement; additionally, this course cannot be taken Pass/Fail. Products and processes will be judged on quality and timeliness. More specifically, your course grade will be based on the components listed below; most are “team” items, but some are marked “individual”:

- 20%: Attendance and active participation in class; this entails being prepared, on-time, professional, and engaged throughout the quarter (individual).
- 10%: “Process” deliverables, such as:
 - Preparing for client meetings (team)
 - Team contract and project plan (team)
 - Presenting during class and client meetings (individual)
 - End of quarter peer reviews (individual)
- 10%: Preliminary work products
 - “What is the problem” assignment (individual)
- 10%: “Milestone” deliverables (team), such as:
 - Drafts of slides
 - Drafts of policy brief
- 50%: “Final” deliverables (team), such as
 - Policy brief, which likely includes a short “executive summary” as well as technical appendices
 - Presentation
 - In some cases, additional materials (computer programs, Excel files, etc.)

Readings, topics, and schedules

Background materials, client materials, assignments, weekly announcements, and a detailed course outline will be posted to Canvas, and students are responsible for any and all material posted there. Students may choose to store and share their work using other platforms as well (Box, Google Drive, etc.) so long as final deliverables are uploaded to Canvas directly by the assigned deadline.

I encourage the use of email and try to respond in a timely fashion, but 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 use Slack. So please check your UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO email and CANVAS announcements regularly.

Grading policies and procedures

Due to accelerated nature of the quarter, extensions cannot be allowed, and this course cannot be taken pass/fail; all deadlines for this are communicated clearly on Canvas at the start of the

quarter. I do not use rigid numeric scales for assigning letter grades. Instead, 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)
- (1/4)
- B+ (1/4)
- B (1/4)
- 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 students.

Use of Generative AI software

A detailed **Policy on Generative AI Use by Harris Policy Labs Students** has been posted to Canvas; please read the document in its entirety.

In general, students are only allowed to use AI tools as individuals or as a team, including but not limited to ChatGPT or Dall-E, on assignments in this course when advance permission is given by the Faculty Advisor and the client directly in accordance with their internal GenAI policies. Students must submit a written request via email with an explanation of how they will use a particular tool in their assignment and justification for why it is necessary for delivery of final deliverables; students are not permitted to use these tools until permission is granted in writing.

If you are unclear if something is an AI tool, please check with me. Unauthorized use of AI tools for any purposes in this course will violate the University’s academic integrity policy as it can put your client’s data at risk or lead to inaccurate findings that will adversely impact your research findings. Potential violations of academic integrity will be referred to the Dean’s office for further review.

Instructor Office Hours

Office hours will be by appointment only, so please email Shelley and/or David directly.

Teaching assistant(s) and/or graders

The Professional Advisor for this course will be David Fuentes dfuentes@uchicago.edu. His role is to support the Faculty Advisor and student groups in their project plans, facilitate communication with the client, and provide input/feedback on project deliverables as needed.

Teaching and learning in person, dual-modality, and/or remote environments

While students are required to attend class meetings in-person on a weekly basis, we ask that students inform both the Faculty and Professional Advisors immediately if you experience COVID symptoms, have childcare disruptions, or are required to quarantine. The classroom will be equipped to enable remote participation in these specific instances only. Failure to attend class without prior notice will be considered an unexcused absence that will have an adverse impact on your attendance/participation score.

General Resources Available to Students

The University has long offered a comprehensive set of student support services linked below. 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 Student Wellness below). Students seeking new services/resources can call **773-834-9355** to make an appointment 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** or via TimelyCare, the phone/video on-demand service: timelycare.com/uchicago.

- [Harris Academic Support Programs and Handbook](#)
- [Student Wellness](#)
- [University Learning Resources](#)
- [UChicagoGRAD](#)

Harris School and University of Chicago Policies

The University has developed specific policies and procedures regarding academic integrity, disability accommodations, diversity and inclusion, and video and audio recordings, please take the time to review all of these below as they will be all be strictly enforced.

- [Harris School Policies](#)
- [University General Policies](#)
- [University Academic Polices](#)
- Policy on audio and video [recordings](#)