Syllabus

Spring Quarter 2025 – Economics and the Social Safety Net Policy Lab (PPHA 60000-2)

Faculty Advisor: Robert Goerge (goerge-bob@norc.org)

Professional Advisor: David McQuown (mcquown-david@norc.org)

Wednesdays 3-5:50

Office hours: By appointment

This Policy Lab focuses on domestic social policy with three projects that aim to support and improve the lives of economic well-being of individuals and families. Students will take direction from state and local policymakers and administrators on priority topics and may have access to unique datasets to address these topics.

This is practicum style course. Students work in teams to develop and execute a project for their client. There are no quizzes or exams. Grades are based on active participation in class and team project work, and the quality of the final presentation, final slide deck, and the policy memo. Note that while teams collaborate on all products, team members will complete a peer evaluation of their teammates at the end of the quarter.

All HPL students will receive a letter grade at the conclusion of Winter Quarter. Pass/Fail is not permitted. Grading criteria:

- 20%: Attendance and active participation in class: This entails attending all classes, scheduled client meetings, and presentations; and being prepared, professional, and engaged throughout the quarter
- 20%: "Process" and "Milestone" deliverables, such as: Being prepared for client meetings, team project work plan, preliminary results, policy memo draft, and the practice presentation
- 60%: "Final" deliverables, such as: Policy memo, presentation (slides & delivery) and in some cases, additional materials (code files, Excel files, survey draft, etc.)

Please take careful note of assignment deadlines, including both dates and times. We have set the calendar to give you as much time as possible to finish products, while also allowing time for us to review materials and you to make any necessary revisions before products are client facing.

All assignments will be submitted via Canvas. For team assignments, only one member of the team needs to submit.

This class is designed to be an in-person experience, and we will not be recording any content by default. Of course, if you are ill or are required to quarantine, you should not attend. Please notify me as soon as possible in this situation; we will make alternate arrangements on a class-by-class basis.

WEEK #/CLASS DATE	KEY MILESTONES
Week 1/March 26	
	Course Orientation & Overview
In class	Course overview, introduction to Lab projects, meet in project teams
	Sign confidentiality pledge and turn in before leaving class
	Project Background and Start Up
	Review all project background materials
After class	**Develop a short list of written questions you wish to ask the client during your meeting on 4/2. Also include notes about which team members will play which roles during the meeting: Who will kick off discussion? Who will take the lead on questions? Who is responsible for closing out? Who will be taking notes?
*Assignments marked by ** are due by 4pm on 4/2*	
	**Determine team schedule and provide instructors with 3-5 hours of common availability during the week of 5/19) that can be used for scheduling the final presentation
Week 2/April 2	
In class	Understanding the Client, Client's Organization and Client's Goals for Lab Projects
	Project team meetings with advisors.
After class	Project Planning
All assignments are due by midnight on 4/7	Draft project plan
Week 3/April 9	
	Client meetings
In class	Meet with clients to review draft project planning materials and discuss project scope, timeline, and potential challenges
After class	Analysis Week 1

See product-specific deadlines in bold. **Week 4/ April 16**	Revised project plan **due by 12pm on 4/14** Continue project activities Team Information Exchange and Working Class
In class	Student teams present project scope, process, preliminary results, challenges, etc., followed by class Q&A/discussion. This is an opportunity for students to learn about other team's projects and issues, provide feedback, and share suggestions. Remaining class time for project teams to meet with each other and with advisors.
After class	Analysis Week 2
See product-specific deadlines in bold. **Week 5/ April 23**	Working Class
In class	Class time for project teams to meet with each other and with advisors. This time is also available to schedule midpoint client check-in conversations, if useful. Analysis Week 3
After class	Continue project activities Major analytic activities should wrap up this week, as teams look toward synthesizing and communicating findings Come to class ready to informally share preliminary findings
Week 6/ April 30	Presentation of Preliminary Results; Writing a Policy Memo + Visualizing Results
In class	Student teams present preliminary findings and get feedback from peers and instructors Policy memo writing workshop in class, together with short lecture on data visualization tips
After class	Project Synthesis and Dissemination Week 1

*Assignments marked by ** are due by **12pm on 4/29***	**Draft executive summary paragraph: what are your top takeaways? **Submit key draft data visuals (charts, infographic, tables, etc.) Begin work on draft slides for final presentation
Week 7/May 7	<u>Working Class</u>
In class	Student teams meet with instructors to review assignments, discuss progress, and troubleshoot outstanding issues
After class	<u>Project Synthesis and Dissemination Week 2</u>
See product-specific deadlines in bold.	Complete draft slides for final presentation and submit **by 3pm on 5/12** Prepare for mock presentation in class on 5/14
Week 8/May 14	<u>Team Mock Presentations</u>
In class	Student teams do a practice presentation for the class and give and receive feedback from faculty and classmates <u>Finalize Client Materials Week 1</u>
After class	Revise slides in response to faculty feedback (revised slides are due to instructors **48 hours before scheduled time of final presentation**)
See product-specific deadlines in bold.	Prepare to present
	Draft policy memo (due by **9pm on 5/22**)
Week 10/May 19-23	<u>No class: Student teams make final presentations to clients this week *(client site or on campus or Zoom)*</u> <u>Finalize Client Materials</u> Revise policy memo
*Due by **9pm on May 29***	Submit electronic versions of final presentation and policy memo Complete peer evaluations of project teammates

Requirements and Administrative Information for all Harris Policy Labs

Objectives of Harris Policy Labs

Harris Policy Labs (HPL) is intended to provide students with an action-based academic experience that offers important "hands-on" learning opportunities to analyze, develop, advocate for and help drive the execution of effective policy solutions in a real world context, involving actual client organizations. In addition, HPL is intended to strengthen and expand students' professional experience, professional skills development and professional networks in the public policy sector.

To meet these objectives, HPL students are expected to develop strong working knowledge in a number of areas during the quarter, including but not limited to the following:

* Familiarity with the client organization's mission, scope and policy context in which it operates

* Understanding of the assigned policy area, including background, critical research, current debates, and context as it relates to the client organization

* Ability to obtain data, identify research, and conduct and present rigorous policy analysis in a manner that is appropriate and relevant to the client organization

* Ability to work as a part of a multi-disciplinary team to scope, undertake and manage a project from start to finish

* Experience engaging with senior level policy professionals and managing a client relationship

 In general, students will find that the more they put into a "Labs" experience, the more value they will obtain from it, academically, professionally and personally.

Important issues regarding HPL (and experiential learning environments generally):

The process of working on a real policy challenge for an outside client organization raises certain issues not typically encountered in other academic courses. It is essential for students to be aware of these issues upfront.

* 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. For instance, clients may occasionally need to reschedule a meeting with students or slightly modify the direction of a project. Expect challenges and be flexible, courteous and respectful in accommodating them.

* Expect imperfect data: A client will rarely have all the data needed for a project. Expect to work with imperfect data and expect challenges associated with an imperfect data set. Faculty Advisors and Professional Advisors may be able to help you work with what you have, and help direct you to other data sources to fill gaps.

* Confidentiality: Unless a Faculty Advisor explicitly states otherwise, students are expected to keep strictly confidential any data and materials shared by the client organization and keep strictly confidential the content of any conversations with clients. Any breaches of confidentiality are extremely serious and could jeopardize the project and the relationship between UChicago and the client.

* Additional data management requirements for sensitive data sets: In certain instances, students may need to work with sensitive data sets for which there are additional protocols (e.g., more restrictive confidentiality requirements, very specific data handling requirements, etc). Faculty Advisors will inform students about these restrictions and requirements where relevant, and students are expected to abide them without exception. Any breaches of data management requirements for sensitive data sets are extremely serious, could jeopardize the project and the relationship between UChicago and the client organization, and may have additional legal ramifications.

Team dynamics:

An important component of the HPL experience is working with peers on a team. Students should invest time at the beginning of the project to establish the team's purpose and how the team will work together to jointly achieve project goals. All team members are expected to make substantive contributions to the project.

Grading:

All HPL students will receive a letter grade from their Faculty Advisor at the conclusion of Fall Quarter, including students who intend to remain in a Lab for Winter Quarter. Pass/fail is not permitted.

Requesting reasonable accommodations:

Any student requesting accommodations related to disabilities should review UChicago's policy at https://disabilities.uchicago.eduLinks to an external site. and communicate requests as soon as possible to both the Faculty Advisor and Kate Biddle, Director of Student Affairs at Harris, (773) 702-4753 or kbiddle@uchicago.edu.

Questions:

Faculty Advisors and Professional Advisors can likely answer most questions. General questions about the Labs may be brought to Carol Brown, Executive Director, at carolbrown@uchicago.edu, or Paula Worthington, Academic Director, at pworthington@uchicago.edu.

General Resources Available to Students

Include any texts and links as desired:
- Harris Academic Support Programs and Handbook
- Student Wellness
- UChicagoGRAD

Harris School and University of Chicago Policies

Include any text and links as desired to highlight or emphasize issues related to academic integrity, disability accommodations, diversity and inclusion, and video and audio recordings.
- Harris School Policies
- University General Policies
- University Academic Polices
- Policy on audio and video recordings