**Health Policy Lab**
**(PPHA 60000-1)**
**Winter 2026**

**Alexandra Tate, PhD**
Department of Medicine
atate@uchicago.edu

**TIME AND LOCATION**
Thursdays, 3:30p-6:20p, Keller 0010

**OFFICE HOURS**
My office hours are by appointment and take place via Calendly; see Canvas for the Calendly booking link. Office hours will be held via Zoom link, sent via Calendly. Students may make individual or group appointments. Office hours are offered in 20 or 30-minute increments

**PROFESSIONAL ADVISOR**
**Alex Knitter, MPH,** Senior Clinical Research Data Manager, Section of General Internal Medicine, Department of Medicine, University of Chicago.

Alex contributes applied statistical expertise, a systems-based approach, and passion for data best practices to her research team at the University. Her ongoing research projects concern pediatric asthma management and disparities, biomedical workforce equity, and neighborhood health disparities. As a graduate student at Washington University in St. Louis, Alex served as a teaching assistant and provided guidance to students throughout the research process. Her graduate capstone project utilized advanced statistical methods to analyze Medicaid patient perinatal complications, providing evidence-based recommendations for alternative prenatal care models.

Office hours: Drop-in Mondays 5:00-6:00pm CT or by appointment via Calendly; see Canvas for the link to sign up. Office hours will be held virtually via Zoom: the drop-in Zoom link will be shared on Canvas, and the by-appointment zoom link will be shared via Calendly.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**
The Winter Quarter 2026 Health Policy Lab concentrates on practical policy solutions for delivering mobile health care to vulnerable urban populations. Students will be divided into three teams, and each team will be assigned to work on a project for the Lab's client for the duration of the quarter. Under the guidance of the Faculty Advisor, Alexandra Tate, and with support from the Professional Advisor, Alex Knitter, teams will conduct research and analysis, draw conclusions, and present final deliverables to client leadership and staff at the conclusion of the quarter. Client meetings with Project Leads will occur throughout the quarter at the discretion of the Project Lead and/or student teams.

The Health Policy Lab has a single client, described below, and 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: <u>David Meltzer, MD, PhD</u>,** Fanny L. Pritzker Professor of Medicine and Section Chief, Hospital Medicine, University of Chicago, Faculty Director, Center for Health and the Social Sciences and the Health Lab at UChicago's Urban Labs.

Dr. Meltzer is a globally recognized expert in health economics and public policy, focused on the theoretical foundations of medical cost-effectiveness analysis and the cost and quality of hospital care, and on pragmatic policy solutions to address unmet social needs at the community level as a critical component for improving health outcomes of vulnerable populations. Students will work on projects that support and advance three of Dr. Meltzer's ongoing initiatives in the area of mobile health care delivery.

<u>Mobile Dental Project</u>: **Optimizing a Mobile Dental Care Research Program for Older Adults in Chicago's South Side and Suburbs (Project Lead: Kopal Mathur, MPP)**

<u>Comprehensive Mobile Care</u>: **Economic Models for Mobile Comprehensive Care on Chicago's South Side (Project Lead: Emily Perish, MPP)**

<u>Learning Health Systems</u>: **Integrating Clinical Care and Research: Addressing Barriers to Operationalizing Learning Health System Approaches in Mobile Care (Project Lead: David Meltzer, MD, PhD**

**Faculty Advisor:** Alexandra Tate, PhD, is a medical sociologist and Research Director in the Department of Medicine at the University of Chicago, Lecturer in the Department of Comparative Human Development and Affiliate in the Department of Sociology and in the Center for Health and the Social Sciences. A mixed-methods sociologist, she studies how the culture and structure of American health care impact the way people with different backgrounds and experiences make decisions about care. Her current work examines how the doctor-patient relationship and health policies influence decision-making, particularly in difficult contexts like oncology care and near the end-of-life. To do this, she brings together conversation analytic, ethnographic, causal inference, and natural language processing methods to study the complex machinery of how decisions are made and their impact on larger health policy and social issues such as health disparities, the dying process, and relations with institutions. Dr. Tate also serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. Her work has been published in interdisciplinary journals such as *Social Science and Medicine, Journal of Health and Social Behavior, Health Communication,* and *Patient Education and Counseling,* and in clinical research journals such as *Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine*. She also teaches courses for the Health & Society major in the Department of Comparative Human Development at the University of Chicago.

**Professional Advisor:** Alex Knitter, MPH, is a Senior Clinical Research Data Manager in the Section of General Internal Medicine. Alex contributes applied statistical expertise, a systems-based approach, and passion for data best practices to her research team at the University. Her ongoing research projects concern pediatric asthma management and disparities, biomedical workforce equity, and neighborhood health disparities. As a graduate student at Washington University in St. Louis, Alex served as a teaching assistant and provided guidance to students throughout the research

process. Her graduate capstone project utilized advanced statistical methods to analyze Medicaid patient perinatal complications, providing evidence-based recommendations for alternative prenatal care models.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this course,
- Students will demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the assigned policy area by researching, analyzing, interpreting and synthesizing data related to the topic, drawing conclusions from the analysis and developing concrete policy recommendations.
- Students will collaborate with students, faculty, advisors and clients to create deliverables that provide useful information to the client and meet the client's needs.
- Students will learn or enhance their capacity to manage a project from inception to completion.
- Students will develop and enhance teamwork skills.
- Students will develop and enhance presentation skills by delivering their final analysis to leadership at the client organization.

## OTHER POLICIES AND LOGISTICS

**Prerequisites:** All Policy Labs count towards the Policy Analysis Specialization as long as either Program Evaluation or Cost-Benefit Analysis is completed before enrollment in a Policy Lab.

**Expectations:** Setting clear expectations is the key to any successful working relationship.  As students, you can expect the following from your Faculty Advisor and Professional Advisor:
- We will come to class prepared and ready to engage in lively (and respectful) discussion.
- We will support you through all of your work with your client (but we won't do the work for you or have difficult conversations for you.) Relatedly, we expect you to incorporate our feedback into your client deliverables.
- When we are in class, our attention will be only on our work together.
- We will hold regular office hours, and we will do our best to be responsive to your questions.
- We will be clear about the limitations of our expertise.

 As the advisors, we expect students to:
- To attend class on time and regularly, as attendance is mandatory.
- To come to class prepared by 1) actively listening, 2) contributing to discussion, and 3) asking questions when clarification is needed.
- To be respectful of others in the class.
- To come to meetings (with us, with each other, with the client) prepared. If we provide feedback on your project between meetings, we expect that you address the feedback before our next meeting or come with questions. Your preparation will affect your overall project evaluation.
- Ask for help when needed. The term is very short, so there is not much time to get off track. This is why check-ins will be important.
- Be inclusive. Each team has diverse skill sets. Work together to leverage them all.
- Be curious.

**Project Evaluation:** We have constructed the course so that we can provide you guidance throughout. This coaching is critical to your success, and your ability to deliver a successful project to your client. While we won't be grading you on these project milestones, we will be evaluating your effort throughout the term—the time you are putting in, the degree to which you delve into the related literature, and the understanding of your data and topic. <u>Your grade for the final project and presentation will reflect not just the final deliverables but will reflect the process as well. This will be based on our discretion, and our expertise.</u>

**Class Meetings:** At the start of some classes, there will be a lecture and discussion on a relevant topic for all students. During every class period, the FA and PA will meet with each group for approx.. 20-30 minutes, called "FA/PA check-ins". Other parts of class time will be used for group work or client meetings. <u>Groups should expect to spend, on average, 7-10 hours outside of class time on their project.</u>

It is each group's responsibility to coordinate meetings outside of class time with group members. Each group should meet at least once per week outside of class time. It is also each group's responsibility to coordinate and schedule client meetings outside of the pre-scheduled intro and midpoint meetings. The cadence of these is at the discretion of the client/project lead.

**Weekly in-class FA/PA check-ins** should follow the following format:
1. Students lead the check-in, <u>not</u> FA/PAs.
2. Students provide an update on each project deliverable, including
    a. Progress towards each milestone of the deliverable, including specific actions or items that have been accomplished.
    b. Barriers to progress towards the milestone, which includes asking questions or seeking advice from the FA/PA.
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**Attendance:** In-person attendance and on-time arrival is required. If you cannot attend class, please inform Dr. Tate, Alex, and your teammates as soon as you are aware of the need to miss class. It is your responsibility to arrange Zooming in with your teammates to in-class group meetings after lecture or catch up on the material from your teammates.

**Participation:** Experiential learning requires active participation by all students.  Participation will be 20% of your total grade. Participation will be graded as follows:

- Asking questions and participating in dialogue during class discussions and/or during group meetings and/or discussion boards
- Attending and actively participating in group meetings outside of class
- Respectfully collaborating with your teammates and Policy Lab staff
- Attending class meetings (50% of the total participation grade)
- Timely completion of CITI/HIPAA training

**Course Materials:**  Readings will be listed in the module for the week on Canvas and provided in .pdf form or via web link. Most reading you will do is focused on your project. Background materials and client materials will be posted to Canvas.  Please check Canvas regularly for updates or changes to materials.

**Technology:** Students are expected to bring working computers to class with any needed technology for client deliverables so they may contribute to working towards final deliverables during designated periods of class time.

**Technology distractions:** Cell phones are prohibited in class and should be kept off desks. Students are asked to use their laptops <u>ONLY</u> for work relevant to the class. Students who are doing other work or using their laptop for personal purposes (including messaging) during class will have their participation grade substantially impacted.

**Assignments:** Unless otherwise noted, assignments due in each week are due by Friday at 11:59pm CT, and on behalf of the group. Canvas will make clear which assignments are individual versus which assignments are submitted on behalf of the group.

**Getting in touch:** The best way to get in touch with us is via email. Please allow <u>2 business days</u> for a response (a business day does not include weekend or University holidays). If we don't respond within that time, please feel free to send a nudge. We always intend to respond to students promptly, but reminders can be helpful.

**ADA student accommodations:** Any student who believes they may need assistance should inform the Office of Student Disability Services by the end of the first week of class. Once you have received an accommodation letter, it should be presented to the course instructor immediately. [https://disabilities.uchicago.edu/](https://disabilities.uchicago.edu/)

**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 ensure that we remain a place where difficult issues are discussed with kindness and respect for all.

- The University's policies are available [here](#).
- The Harris School's commitments to lively, principled, and respectful engagement are available [here](#): "Consistent with the University of Chicago's commitment to free expression, we believe that open discourse is vital to our mission as a policy school. Harris encourages its leadership, faculty, student body, and administrative staff to respect and engage with others of differing backgrounds or perspectives, even when the ideas or insights shared may be viewed as unpopular or controversial. Recognizing that diverse views, as well as political, cultural, religious, and social differences, can sometimes create tensions, Harris aims to foster thought-provoking discourse by encouraging community members to speak freely about all issues. We are a place where difficult questions are discussed with mutual respect and open minds."

**Academic honesty:** From the University's [policy](#): "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. Proper acknowledgment of another's ideas, whether by direct quotation or

paraphrase, is expected. In particular, if any written or electronic source is consulted and material is used from that source, directly or indirectly, the source should be identified by author, title, and page number, or by website and date accessed. Any doubts about what constitutes 'use' should be addressed to the instructor."

For further reading, please see the University's Student Manual. Potential violations of academic integrity will be referred to the Dean's office for further review.

**Use of Generative AI software in this class:** Students are only allowed to use AI tools, including but not limited to ChatGPT or Calude.ai, on assignments in this course when advance permission is given by the instructor.

Students must submit a written request with an explanation of how they will use a particular tool in their work. Students are not permitted to use these tools until permission is granted in writing. I will give permission to students to use AI tools during class activities and in other contexts when it is considered in support of the course learning goals and supports students in ultimately creating their own original work. Unless I have given permission to use those tools, each student is expected to complete each course assignment without assistance from AI tools. 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 above, potential violations of academic integrity will be referred to the Dean's office for further review.

→Note: Students are expressly prohibited from feeding data from the client, or any other confidential/proprietary data from the course, into any type of generative AI software.

**Self Care:** If you find yourself overwhelmed or in need of additional mental health support, please do not hesitate to reach out to Student Counseling Services. Note: All SCS services are covered by the Student Life Fee, and there is no additional cost for students to access their services. 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.**

**Recorded material policy:** The University has developed specific policies and procedures regarding the use of video/audio recordings:  these policies are explicitly described in the University's student manual as well as in the guidelines for instructors available here. A couple of points I want to highlight here:

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

**COURSE STRUCTURE AND GRADES:**

This course is different from a traditional academic course. Class meetings will utilize a combination of seminar format with classroom discussion, time for teamwork and other meetings, and hands-on learning activities in place of traditional, one-way lectures. Grades are based on attendance, participation, and a set of comprehensive client deliverables as described below.

The nature of a Policy Labs "experiential learning" course requires attention to some specific issues not always present in more traditional academic coursework. Some helpful hints:
- **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 and uncertainty. Expect the unexpected, be flexible, and be courteous and respectful to your teammates, to your client and to accommodating the client's needs.
With regard to courtesy and respect, this will be included as part of your participation grade. See below.
- **Expect imperfect data.** A client will rarely have all of the data needed for a project. Expect to work with imperfect data and expect challenges associated with an imperfect data set. This is one of the realities that this course is designed to help you understand more fully, especially as policy makers you will often have to make decisions with imperfect or incomplete data. Faculty advisors and professional advisors are here to help you work with what you have and/or direct you to other sources as needed.
- **Confidentiality is important.** 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 they trust that we will not divulge what we learn in ways that could be detrimental to them. Students are expected to keep all data and materials shared by the client confidential, as well as to keep the content of conversations with clients in confidence. Thanks in advance for your cooperation.

**Grading:**
Individual (40%)
- Participation = 20% (see description above)
- Data analysis assignment = 10%
- Peer Evaluations assignment = 10%
Group (60%)
- Group process (client meeting agenda, workplan, policy memo draft): 10%
- Stakeholder interview assignment: 10%
- Final presentation and memo: 40%
Further assignment details will be available on Canvas.

**Late assignment policy:** Unless arrangements are made in advance, any assignment that is late will receive one-grade level penalty for each 12-period late (for example, an assignment receiving a B+ that is 24 hours late will receive a B- because it is two 12-hour periods late).

**SCHEDULE OF CLASS SESSIONS AND MILESTONES**

<u>Note:</u> course schedule are subject to change. Any changes to the below schedule will be communicated via Canvas.
Unless otherwise specified, all assignments are due on Friday of that week by 11:59pm CT.

→ **Due BEFORE FIRST CLASS** <u>Wednesday, January 7th by 5:00pm CT</u> via Canvas upload:
- CITI training certificate in .pdf form for the following Biological Sciences Division (BSD) course: "CITI Basic/Refresher Course for Faculty/Investigators, Research Staff, or Administration Staff". You must register for the BSD training. <u>NO other division training is allowed.</u>
- HIPAA completion page in .pdf form
- Secure computing pledge in .pdf form
- AURA IRB account info

**Week 1: January 8th**

Due by class time: Read your Project Scope document in full

In class: Introductions; Review of syllabus; Review of projects; Confidentiality pledge; First client meeting agenda

Due: Readings provided by the client in your project scope document; readings on group dynamics/prepping client meetings

**Week 2: January 15th**

Due Monday January 12th by 12:00pm CT: Agendas for first client meeting (1 per group)

In class: Meet with client to discuss Project Scope (first 90 minutes) at client's office in the Section of Hospital Medicine (860 E. 59th St, Suite W300); group meetings and build Draft Project Plan (remaining time)

Due: Draft Project Plan (1 per group)

**Week 3: January 22nd**

In class: Lecture on methods and ethics in human subjects research (first half); group meetings to work on Revised Project Plan and project milestones (second half)

Due: Revised Project Plan (1 per group)

**Week 4: January 29th**

In class: Lectures on 1) How to Write a Policy Memo- Tate and 2) System Dynamics- Knitter (first half); group meetings to work on project milestones (second half)

Due: Part 1 of Stakeholder Interview Assignment (1 per group)

**Week 5: February 5th**

Due by Monday February 2nd at 12:00pm CT: Individual data assignment (1 per student); Two questions for Emily Perish,MPP, Harris Policy Lab alum (1 per student)

In class: Guest Lecture from Harris Policy Lab Emily Perish, MPP (first hour); group meetings to work on midpoint meeting agenda and slides (remaining class)

Due: Midpoint meeting agenda and final slides (1 per group)

**Week 6: February 12th**

In class: Hold mid-point meeting with client to discuss progress at Client's office (first half); group meetings to work on project milestones (second half)

Due: Part 2 of Stakeholder Interview Assignment (1 per group)

**Week 7: February 19th**

In class: In-depth work based on mid-point meetings, group meetings to work on Policy Memos

Due: Nothing this week. Work on your policy memos.

**Week 8: February 26th**

In class: In-depth work on projects; group meetings

Due: Draft policy memo and draft slide deck for final presentation (1 per group)

**Week 9: March 5th**

In class: Practice presentations and feedback from FA/PA and peers

Due by Thursday March 5th 11:59pm: Final presentation slide deck (1 per group)

**Final presentations: Friday March 6th 9:00am**
Final presentations in H300 conference room, Billings Hospital, 860 E. 59th street, Section of Hospital Medicine (W300 corridor)

**Final deliverables due to client & peer evaluations due: Wednesday March 11th 12:00pm CT**
Policy memo and all supplemental materials, including Box folder links, must be emailed to client and Project Lead, with FA and PA copied on correspondence.  (1 email per group)


**\*Wishing everyone a wonderful spring break!\***