



NYU

**ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE**

PADM-GP 2875

Estimating Impacts in Policy Research

Spring 2020

Instructor Information

- Professor Jan Blustein
- Email: jan.blustein@nyu.edu
- Office Address: The Puck Building, Room 3042
- Office Hours: 12:00 - 12:45 PM Wednesdays, or before or after EIPR or by appointment.

Course Information

- Class Meeting Times: Tuesdays, 1/29 – 5/6, 6:45 pm – 8:25 pm
- Class Location: 45 West 4th St, Rm B02

Course Prerequisites

1. Statistical Data Analysis: Multiple Regression (PADM-GP 2902)
2. Program Analysis and Evaluation (PADM-GP 2171) or instructor's permission

Skill prerequisites. Stata is used in this course, and I will assume that you are familiar with basic data analysis using that package. If you are not, K.C. Longest's **Using Stata for Quantitative Analysis** is an excellent primer, and working through over a period of a few weeks is an excellent way to get up to speed—I will expect all students to be ready to do the following in Stata by the Week 4 lab: open a .do file, get a dataset, generate basic descriptive statistics, save a .do file, open a log file, and deal with .smcl files. Also: perform basic bivariate analysis and interpret output (tests of difference of means, crosstabs, analysis of variance), and conduct an OLS regression analysis. Most of this is demonstrated in the videos posted under "Preparing for the Week 4 lab;" you may also want to refresh/review the corresponding SPSS maneuvers in "The Wagner Way," which is posted under "Core documents."

I will also assume that you are capable with algebra at the pre-calculus level, are comfortable with algebraic notation, and understand the concept of a function.

Course and Learning Objectives

This advanced course is offered for students who want to work as policy analysts in the not-for-profit or governmental sectors.

Your goals in this course should be to:

1. extend your familiarity with methodologic issues in policy research, including sampling, study designs, analytic approaches, and ethical matters.
2. get hands-on experience in analyzing and presenting data, including managing datasets, selecting appropriate analyses, interpreting computer output, and presenting your findings in writing and tables.
3. improve your skills in reading, understanding, and reporting on journal articles. You'll learn to interpret tables and findings and weigh the strengths and weaknesses of research reports.
4. enrich your professional vocabulary, drawing from the language of program evaluation, econometrics and epidemiology.

In other words, you should aim to become more confident and competent with the skills that are required of junior policy analysts.

Textbook

We will use **Angrist and Pischke's Mastering Metrics** (Princeton University Press, 2015); hereinafter, MM. Other course readings will be available electronically through the Bobst library. A few readings that aren't available as hardcopies are at Bobst as photocopies; you will need to plan to take the time to access them.

Stata

We will have 2 or 3 in-class labs using Stata. For those sessions, you should bring a laptop to class, or share with one of your classmates. The class website has information on buying/accessing Stata.

Class Website

This is managed via NYU Classes. The site houses a number of resources, including our syllabus, PowerPoints for each lecture, videos, assignments, datasets, article links and other core course documents. NYU Classes will be used to broadcast urgent matters such as assignment changes or glitches, class cancellations, and changes in office hours.

Class Policies

Keeping up/missed classes

This course moves quickly. There is a lot of work— most students spend many hours each week on the course. There is a fair bit of informal in-class give-and-take. Students who miss a class should consult a partner student.

Preparation for class

So that we can use class time efficiently, I will post a number of resources and exercises for review before class, including non-graded assignments. I will assume that you are prepared; come ready to contribute. I could call on students, drawing on the non-graded assignments (as is done in law schools). Bring your answers to the non-graded assignments as hardcopies—I will collect some of them, marking them “complete” or “incomplete.” Also bring electronic files or hardcopies of the PowerPoints that we will use, so that you can follow along.

Activity in class

In addition to lecture and discussion of non-graded assignments, I will provide exercises for you to work in groups during class. These are meant to test and consolidate your understanding of the lecture content. You’ll work in groups, and then we’ll discuss answers together. Solutions to these exercises will be posted online after class, so that you don’t need to scribble or type while we discuss.

Getting help with assignments

Most of the class assignments use Stata, and students often have questions. If/when you do, you can ask me, either during office hours or via email. I’m happy to take email questions at any time. I can respond efficiently if you ask your questions clearly, attaching as a Word, or .pdf any output, tables, etc. Please don’t send .smcl files, or anything that I can’t read on my phone. Please always attach the relevant assignment sheet, so that I have it on hand to see what you’re working on – this saves me going to the course website.

Other options for getting Stata help are:

- (a) through the consultants at NYU Quantitative Data Services at Bobst or
- (b) asking a fellow student.

You’re welcome to work together on assignments, though each of you must do your own Stata runs (create your own code) and write your own papers.

A note on journal articles

Articles used in the course are taken from journals representing an array of sectors and disciplines. There is great variation in emphasis, presentation, and statistical approaches. Some articles are dense and complex and may take hours to digest. You should keep at it, because

reading journal articles is a skill that you can only learn by doing. I have tried to select papers that are accessible and not excessively technical. In some cases, these are oldies-but-goodies. Don't worry that the research findings may be obsolete. Your goal is to learn to read and think critically.

During class, we will discuss some of the articles in depth. Other articles will only be mentioned in passing. For the final exam, you will be expected to understand the gist of all articles. I'll specify ten of them that you should know in depth.

Grading

Course grades will be based on:

1. Assignment 1: (15%) – Medicare costs and supplemental insurance
2. Assignment 2: (5%) – Estimating impacts with dichotomous data
3. Assignment 3: (15%) – High school mentoring program
4. Assignment 4: (15%) – Program to decrease school suspensions
5. Final Examination: (35% of grade)
6. Class preparation and participation: (15% of grade)
 - a. This includes your readiness with non-graded assignments, some of which will be collected.

The [Wagner School policy on incomplete grades](#) will be followed.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by [Wagner's Academic Code](#). All Wagner students have already read and signed the [Wagner Academic Oath](#). Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

Detailed Course Overview

Week 1: 1/28 - A framework for estimating impacts

- Goals of the course, course mechanics
- Impacts, outcomes and the counterfactual
- Review of estimation concepts with extension to the regression framework

To prepare:

- Take two hours to review your class notes and textbooks from Stat 1, Stat 2, and Program Analysis & Evaluation.
 - Pay attention to these terms: statistic, parameter, sample, population, estimation, confidence interval (aka “interval estimate”), sampling distribution, standard deviation, standard error (in general; specifically, as it applies to means and differences of means), hypothesis test, p-value, OLS regression assumptions, coefficient, unbiased-ness, efficiency, “controlling for,” “holding constant,” impact, counterfactual.
 - Review the Stata analyses that you did in Stat 2.
- Review the 11 points document (posted under “Core course documents” on our website), and bring it to class.
- By Week 3, read Chapters 1 and 2 of MM. For Ch. 1, focus on pp. 1-30; for Ch 2, focus on 47-79.

Week 2: 2/4- Validity in social research

- What is validity?
- Internal validity, external validity, validity in measurement, conclusion validity (aka “statistical power”)
- In-class exercise on statistical power

To prepare:

- Take time to review basic study designs and threats to validity from Program Analysis and Evaluation. Pay special attention to internal validity, threats to internal validity (but not in great detail), external validity.
- Watch the course video on statistical power (link posted on our course website), and be prepared to use this information for an exercise in class
- Read
 - Measurement: Validity and Reliability, a QMSS e-lesson. (url on course website).
 - Jones D, Molitor D, Reif J. [What do workplace wellness programs do? Evidence from the Illinois Workplace Wellness Study](#). Working Paper 24229

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- Keep working on the first two chapters of MM
- Complete the non-graded assignment posted on our course website.

Week 3: 2/11 - “Holding constant,” “controlling for,” “conditioning on observables”

- What does it mean to hold constant?
- Discussion of strategies beyond regression: matching, stratification, propensity scoring

To prepare:

- Watch class video on adding third variables (link posted on our course website)
- Read
 - Chapters 1 and 2 of MM. For Ch. 1, focus on pp. 1-30; for Ch 2, focus on 47-79.
 - Devaney B, Bilheimer L, Schore J. Medicaid costs and birth outcomes: The effects of prenatal WIC participation and the use of prenatal care. *Journal of Policy Analysis & Management*. 1992; 11(4): 573-592.
- Complete an “11-points” discussion of the Devaney et al. article.
- Skim, without getting into the details
 - Austin PC. An introduction to propensity score methods for reducing the effects of confounding in observational studies. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*. 2011; 46(3): 399–424.

Week 4: 2/18 - In-class lab Preparation for Assignment 1

To prepare:

- Use the Wagner Way to review bivariate statistics from Stat 1 (WW Ch. 5 & 6) and regression with dummies (WW Ch. 9 of the Wagner Way. Note that WW is posted under “Course documents”).
- Watch three course videos: these will acquaint you with some Stata maneuvers, and introduce you to bivariate analysis with Stata; see links posted on our website.
- Complete the non-graded assignment that goes with the videos; bring hardcopy to class.
- Bring your laptop to class.

Week 5: 2/25 - Dichotomous outcomes, non-linear functions & heterogeneous treatment effects.

- The linear probability, logit and probit models
- Clarification of what “non-linearity” means
- Solidifying your understanding of the models

To prepare:

- Complete the non-graded assignment on percent change and percentage point change.
- Download, review and print the Master Table that is posted on our course website.
- Bring to class a calculator that can take natural exponents (e^x).
- Read
 - Stock JH, Watson MW. Introduction to Econometrics, Second edition, Chapter 11, “Regression with a binary dependent variable” (on reserve @ Bobst)

Week 6: 3/3 - Heterogeneous treatment effects, continued: coding using interaction terms

- In-class exercises with interactions
- Preparation for Assignment 3

To prepare:

- Watch three course videos on interactions (links on course website). Bring your questions to class.
- Read
 - Magnuson K, Lahaie C, Waldfogel J. Preschool and school readiness of children of immigrants. *Social Science Quarterly*. 2006; 87.5(Supp.): 1241-1262.
- Download and read Assignment 3 and bring it to class.

ASSIGNMENTS 1 & 2 due

Week 7: 3/10 – Difference-in-differences

- Logic of D-in-D
- Assumptions, strengths, limitations of the D-in-D strategy
- In-class exercise applying D-in-D

To prepare:

- Read
 - Chapter 5 in MM. Focus on pp. 178-204.
 - Newcomb, TM. Conservation program evaluations: The control of self-selection bias. *Evaluation Review*. 1984; 8(3): 425–440.
- Watch the course video on D-in-D (link on course website). The video draws on the Newcomb study.
- Then, read these two advanced papers
 - Currie J, Walker R. Traffic congestion and infant health: Evidence from EZ-Pass. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*. 2011; 3: 65-90.
 - Torche F. The effect of maternal stress on birth outcomes: Exploiting a natural experiment. *Demography*. 2011; 48:1473–1491.

- Complete an 11 points discussion of the Currie and Walker paper and the non-graded assignment on our course website.

Spring Break: No class on 3/17

Week 8: 3/24 - Panel data 1 (Theory)

- The logic of panel data analysis
- True panels versus pooled cross sections
- Two period panel data, multi-period panels
- Method of first differences
- Fixed effects estimation
- Assumptions, strengths, limitations of the panel data strategy

To prepare:

- Read
 - Stock JH, Watson MW. Introduction to Econometrics, Second edition, Chapter 10 (“Regression with panel data”); on reserve in Bobst, and then
- Watch the course video (link on course website), and then
- Read
 - Ferdinand AO, Menachemi F, Sen B et al. Impact of texting laws on motor vehicular facilities in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2014;104(8):1370- 1377.
 - Kowalski-Jones L, Duncan G. Effects of participation in the WIC program on birth weight: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2002;92(5):799- 804.
 - ~~Xu Z, Hannaway J, Taylor C. Making a difference? The effects of Teach for America in high school. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. 2011; 30(3):447-469.~~
- Complete: The non-graded assignment on our course website.

Week 9: 3/31 - Panel data 2a (Practice)

- Review of characteristics of panel data
- Time fixed effects
- In-class lab: analysis using Stata

To prepare:

- Review from last week : Chapter 10 of S & W, (“Regression with Panel Data”).
- Watch the course video on ‘if’ (conditional) statements in Stata
- Download and read Assignment 4 before class and arrive with an analysis plan.
- Bring your laptop to class

ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE

Week 10: 4/7 – Panel data 2b (Practice)

This week's lab will be an extension of last week's lab. Time will be used to complete all of the analyses for Assignment 4 and discuss your findings and how to write them up, as a group. This should make it much easier for you to complete Assignment 4.

Week 11: 4/14 – Regression Discontinuity (RD)

- The paradigm for classic RD: examining the data, analyzing the data
- Assumptions and consequences of violations of the assumptions
- Interpretation of estimates
- Strengths and limitations of the RD strategy

To prepare:

Read

- MM Chapter 4. Focus on pp. 147-164.
- Niu SX, Tienda M. The impact of the Texas top ten percent law on college enrollment: A regression discontinuity approach. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. 2010; 29(1) 84-110.
- Dee TS, Wykoff J. Incentives, selection, and teacher performance: Evidence from IMPACT. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. 2015; 34(2): 267-297.
- Complete the non-graded assignment on our course website.

Week 11: 4/21 - Instrumental Variables

- Assumptions and consequences of violations of assumptions
- Interpretation of estimates
- Strengths and limitations of the IV strategy

To prepare:

- Read this paper for the “story”
 - Doyle JJ. Causal effects of foster care: An instrumental variables approach. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 2013;35: 1143-1151.
- Watch the course video (link on course website), and then
- Go back and study the Doyle paper to get some of the technical aspects of IV (we'll do more of this in class!) , and then
- ~~Read~~
 - ~~An additional paper posted on our course website (TBD)~~

- ~~A critique of the literature: French MT, Popovici I. That instrument is lousy! In search of agreement when using instrumental variables estimation in substance use research. Health Economics. 2011; 20:127-146.~~
- Complete the non-graded assignment on our course website.

Week 12: 4/28 - Randomized experiments

- Review of the logic of random assignment
- Residual threats to validity for experiments
- Applying the IV approach to get impact estimates beyond ITT
- ~~Cluster randomized trials~~

To prepare:

- Review the material on IV from last week
- Watch the course video "Different estimates of program impact," which is an introduction to the chapter from Bloom (below).
- Read
 - Bloom, HS. Constructing instrumental variables from experimental data to explore how treatments produce effects (Chapter 3) pages 75-88 from H. Bloom, ed. Learning More from Social Experiments.
 - MM Chapter 3. Focus on pp. 98-122.
 - Leventhal T, Brooks-Gunn J. Moving to Opportunity: An experimental study of neighborhood effects on mental health. American Journal of Public Health. 2003;93(9):1576-1581.
 - ~~Quint, J. Research advances: Using cluster random assignment. Document posted on MDRG's website.~~
- Complete the non-graded assignment on our course website.

~~Week 13: 4/28 - Ethics in social research~~

- ~~Overview of issues in social research ethics~~
- ~~Federal regulations to protect human subjects~~
- ~~The Institutional Review Board (IRB)~~
- ~~Case discussion: Evaluation of the NYC Homebase program.~~

To prepare:

- ~~Read~~
 - ~~Blustein J. Toward a more public discussion of the ethics of federal social program evaluation. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management. 2005; 24 (4): 824-846; and 851-852; and the exchange that followed.~~
 - ~~Oakes JM. Risks and wrongs in social science research: An evaluator's guide to the IRB. Evaluation Review Vol. 26 No. 5, October 2002 443-479.~~
 - ~~Epstein, H. Lead poisoning: The ignored scandal. The New York Review of Books. 2013.~~

- ~~○ Pollack J. The lead-based paint abatement repair and maintenance study in Baltimore: Historic framework and study design. J. Health Care Law and Policy. 2002;6: 90—110.~~
- ~~○ Ericka Grimes v. Kennedy Krieger Institute (Court of Appeals, Maryland; September term, 2000. Nos. 128, 129). Excerpt: pages 25-29.~~
- ~~○ Buckley C. To test housing program, some are denied aid. NY Times. 12/9/2010, page A1~~
- ~~○ Testimony in favor of the Homebase evaluation. New York City council hearing, Document dated December 9, 2010.~~
- ~~○ 1/25/14NYC Department of Homeless Services. Findings from the Homebase Evaluation (.pdf of presentation, June 2013)~~
- Complete the non-graded assignment on our course website.

Week 14: 5/5 – Wrap-up and review

ASSIGNMENT 4 DUE

Final Exam

The exam will be offered twice, on Wednesday May 13th during the 6:45 – 8:25 PM slot, and then again on Tuesday May 20th during the same time.

When you take the final exam, you may bring a “cheat sheet” to the exam (an 8.5x11 inch page with handwritten notes on one side).

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at NYU

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities \(CSD\) website](#) and click on the Reasonable Accommodations and How to Register tab or call or email CSD at (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

[NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#) states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.