PUBLIC POLICY 290: BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE IN PUBLIC POLICY
ELIZABETH LINOS

TUESDAYS 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM   UC BERKELEY
GSPP ROOM 105   SPRING 2019

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Office hours: Sign up online here.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Behavioral science uses findings from psychology, economics and other fields to better
understand how people actually behave, as opposed to how we would like them to
behave. Many of these insights carry significant implications for how to design policies
in education, health, energy, taxation, criminal justice, and more. In this course we will
review how government agencies and other policymaking institutions have tried to use
behavioral insights to improve policy; what have been the successes and failures; what
are the ethical considerations in using behavioral science; and what new ideas are on
the horizon.

STUDENT GRADES WILL BE DETERMINED AS FOLLOWS:
Class participation: 15%
Three (3) short responses: 25%
Midterm: 30%
Final group presentation + paper: 30%

Final Group Presentation and Paper
Everyone will take part in a group project (3-4 people per group) that will involve
applying an idea(s) from the course to a policy problem.   Groups will develop a
proposed behavioral intervention to solve a public policy, managerial, or social welfare
problem with a particular client in mind and will develop an argument for why their
proposal should be implemented by the client.   For example, a problem of interest
might be high rates of worker absenteeism in a specific government agency (federal,
state, or local). A behavioral intervention to address the problem might involve mailings
to workers emphasizing low absenteeism rates among their peers. Your group would
put together a compelling proposal designed to convince management at the agency
that they should implement your intervention, detailing both how to deploy it and how
to measure its effectiveness. Groups must research their client setting in detail, define
the problem to be addressed, describe their proposed intervention, provide a brief
review of past research that gave rise to the proposed intervention, and briefly note the
methods that could be used for evaluating the intervention.

• INITIAL GROUP SELECTION (By February 26): Please plan to sign-up with the group you plan to work with on your final project in class on February 26th.

• PROPOSAL (April 2): Each group must submit a 1-page, single-spaced summary of its planned project. I will provide feedback on these project proposals. Prior to submitting this assignment each group should plan on meeting with me to talk through their potential project ideas and choose the best one to work on.

• PRESENTATIONS (April 16 and April 23): On these two days of class, each group will have between 5 and 15 minutes (depending on the final number of groups) to present its project to the class.

• PAPERS (Due May 10): Each group must submit a 10-page, double-spaced paper (details will be provided as the semester advances).

REQUIRED READINGS:
All readings will be available online on bcourses.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES:

DATE   TOPIC

1. JAN 22   INTRODUCTION: BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE IN PUBLIC POLICY

2. JAN 29   PROSPECT THEORY

3. FEB 5   PROSPECT THEORY: POLICY DEEP DIVE

4. FEB 12   SYSTEM 1 AND SYSTEM 2 THINKING

5. FEB 19   SYSTEM 1 AND SYSTEM 2 THINKING: POLICY DEEP DIVE

6. FEB 26   NUDGES vs SLUDGES (ETHICS OF NUDGES)

7. MAR 5   MIDTERM

8. MAR 12   WANT/SHOULD TRADEOFFS

9. MAR 19   COMMITMENT DEVICES

MAR 26: NO CLASS/ SPRING BREAK

10. APR 2   HOW TO MAKE A NUDGE UNIT

11. APR 16   GROUP PRESENTATIONS

12. APR 23   GROUP PRESENTATIONS

13. APR 30   LAST CLASS: WHERE TO GO NEXT?