UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Public Policies: Assessment

2122-2-E1601N067-E1601N056M

Learning objectives

The second module 'Public Policies: Evaluation' provides a gentle introduction to the main analytical methods used to make an empirically based judgment on the success of a public policy. Intuitively, the module helps students understanding what does it means to establish whether a public policy has "succeeded", has produced the "desired results" or not, and which tools/methods can be used for this purpose.

By the end of the module, students will be able to:

- Distinguish between perception and evidence of the results achieved by a public policy;
- Evaluate the robustness of the empirical evidences put forward by politicians and policy makers in the public debate in support of the success of a public policy;
- Understand the content and critically discuss evaluation examples published in leading national and international journals in the field;
- Apply the main impact assessment methods based on the counterfactual logic to case studies inspired by real public policies, but simplified in terms of data for didactic purposes.

Contents

The second module 'Public Policies: Evaluation' will address the following topics:

- Evaluating the success of a public policy: what it means and what is it for.
- The counterfactual logic and Rubin's model.
- Randomized controlled trials.
- Difference in differences.
- Regression analysis.

- Statistical matching.
- Regression discontinuity design.
- Instrumental variables approach.
- Interrupted time series.
- Policy analysis in the era of big data.

Detailed program

The second module "Public Policies: Evaluation" is divided into three parts.

The first introductory part presents the key concepts and vocabulary of public policy impact evaluation. Once the 'jargon' of impact evaluation has been acquired, students are introduced to the counterfactual logic and are guided to formalize it through the Rubin's Model.

The second part, the most extensive, presents consolidated experimental and non-experimental methods to assess the success of a public policy, each time emphasizing their conditions of application, potential and limits. In particular, the second part describes and presents applications of the following methods: randomized controlled trials, difference in the differences, regression analysis, statistical matching, regression discontinuity design, instrumental variables approach, and interrupted time series.

Finally, the third part offers students a focus in a seminar format on the potential and challenges that the era of big data poses to policy analysis (topic addressed in Module I) and evaluation.

Prerequisites

Students are allowed to attend classes, to join class exercises, to take the mid-term and final exams and to do the team work of the second module "Public Policies: Evaluation" even if they have not yet taken the written exam of the first module "Public Policies: Decision and Implementation" (Prof. Erica Melloni). However, they have to be familiar with the topics covered by the first module "Public Policies: Decision and Implementation". Besides, the requirements for the second module "Public Policies: Evaluation" are minimal. It assumes only a decent knowledge of algebra and a basic understanding of descriptive and inferential statistics.

Teaching methods

The second module "Public Policies: Evaluation" will make use of standard lectures (with Q&A), class exercises and team work.

Assessment methods

The program is the same for attending and non-attending students. However, the way in which learning is verified is different. Attendance is not compulsory, but it is warmly suggested given the nature of the topics covered in this second module.

Given the possibility of attending the module even remotely (online), the distinction between attending and non-attending students is based on the "active participation" of the student to exercises and team works.

Students who participate to the exercises and team works are "active participants" and thus will be able to access the exam for attending students.

The **exam for attending students** includes:

- An intermediate written exam on the first part of the program (10 questions in 2 hours). The test includes multiple choice questions, table completion, simple calculationsand short open-ended questions (max 6 lines). Scores 0-31. Students scoring <18 or willing to retake the exam will be allowed to take a final written exam for attending students at the end of the module.
- A team work. In small groups (max 5 people), students must read, understand, present and critically discuss in English a scientific paper published in an international journal on public policy impact evaluation. Evaluation: up to +3 points to be added to the average between the intermediate and the final exam (or to the score of the final exam for students scoring <18 or willing to retake the first intermediate exam).
- Final written exam on the second part of the program (10 questions in two hours). Note: an open question concerns the paper read by the student during the team work and grants up to 4 points. Scores: 0-31. Students scoring <18 or willing to retake the first intermediate exam, will have a final written test for attending students on the whole program (open 4 points question on the team work included).

The final mark of the second module "Public Policies: Evaluation" is given by the average of the two written exams (intermediate and final), to which are added up to +3 points deriving from team work. For students scoring <18 or unsatisfied by their first intermediate exam, the final mark of the second module "Public Policies: Evaluation" is given by the final written exam for attending students, to which are added up to +3 points deriving from team work.

The **exam for non-attending students**, instead, is a single final written test on the entire program (10 questions in 2 hours). The test includes multiple choice questions, table completion, calculations and short open-ended questions (max 6 lines). Rating 0-31. Please note: the program is identical to that of attending students. However, non-attending students do not benefit from either the 4-point open question regarding the paper read during the team work, or the potential 3 points for team work to be added to the final evaluation.

The **final mark** of the course 'Public Policies' is given by the average of the scores achieved in Module 1 and Module 2. Students whose final average is <18 must necessarily retake one or both of the written tests. Students with a final average >18, but dissatisfied with the grade, **may ask the Professor via email to take a further oral exam** on the program of both modules. Based on the quality of their answers, the final average of the two written tests can be increased by 10% or lowered.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

The program is the same for attending and non-attending students and includes:

- Martini, Alberto, e Marco Sisti (2009), *Valutare il successo delle politiche pubbliche*, Bologna: il Mulino, capp. Introduzione, 1; 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16.
- Damonte A., Negri F. (eds, forthcoming in February 2022). *Causality in Policy Studies - A Pluralist Toolbox*, Springer Series “Texts in Quantitative Political Analysis”, Cham (Switzerland): Springer Nature, capp. 3, 4.
- Costalli, S., & Negri, F. (2021). Looking for twins: How to build better counterfactuals with matching. Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica, 51(2), 215-230. doi:10.1017/ipo.2021.1
- Ceron, Andrea, e Fedra Negri (2015). “Public policy and social media: How sentiment analysis can support policy-makers across the policy cycle”. Rivista Italiana di Politiche Pubbliche 10(3): 309-338.