UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

SYLLABUS DEL CORSO

Politiche Pubbliche: Valutazione

2526-2-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.

Consequently, the second module, "Public Policies: Evaluation", will address and enable students to develop all the Dublin Descriptors (DdD). In particular:

- DdD 1 – Theoretical knowledge and understanding of counterfactual logic and the main techniques for evaluating the impact of public policies.
- DdD 2 – Applied knowledge and understanding, developed through exercises and case studies on the evaluation of public policy impacts.
- DdD 3 – Independent judgment and DdD 4 – Communication skills, both fostered through the implementation of a group project.
- DdD 5 – Learning skills, supported by the availability of bibliographic references and online materials to allow students to independently deepen their understanding of the topics and techniques covered in the course.

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.
- Linear regression.
- Statistical matching.
- Regression discontinuity design.
- Instrumental variables approach.
- Interrupted time series.

Detailed program

The second module "Public Policies: Evaluation" is divided into two 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, linear regression, statistical matching, regression discontinuity design, instrumental variables approach, and interrupted time series.

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". 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 course will employ the following teaching methods:

- In-person lectures in an expository mode, aimed at presenting theoretical concepts and content;
- In-person lectures in an interactive mode, characterized by active student participation through practical

exercises and guided discussions.

Most in-person lessons will be structured in two parts: a first expository session introducing new concepts and content, followed by a second interactive session allowing students to test their understanding in real time.

- A two-hour in-class exercise will be held to simulate the final exam.
- At least three sessions (the exact number may vary depending on student participation in group work) will be organized in workshop mode, allowing students to work collaboratively on a project and engage directly with the instructor.

Up to a maximum of three lessons (equivalent to 6 hours, or 14.2% of the total course time) may be delivered remotely in asynchronous online mode, via pre-recorded videos made available by the instructor in advance on the course's e-learning platform. These lessons will be expository only, with no real-time interaction.

A detailed course schedule, specifying for each session the date, topics covered, teaching method, and delivery mode (in-person or asynchronous online), will be made available by the instructor on the course's e-learning platform before the start of classes.

Assessment methods

The exam syllabus is the same for both attending and non-attending students. Attendance is not mandatory but is highly recommended.

All students, whether attending or not, will have the opportunity to participate in a group project. Non-attending students who wish to take part in the group project must contact the instructor via email (fedra.negri@unimib.it) within one month from the start date of the course.

Assessment method for students participating in the group project:

- Group project: In small groups (max 6 people), students are required to read, understand, present, and critically discuss in English a scientific paper published in an international journal. Grading: Up to +3 points to be added to the final written exam score. The group project allows the instructor to assess the students' ability to independently explore and reflect on the course content, as well as their teamwork, problem-solving, and communication skills.
- Final written exam (2 hours): The exam consists of 10 questions, including closed-ended questions (true/false, matching, multiple choice), numerical exercises, short open-ended questions (max 5 lines), and one medium-length open-ended question (max 15 lines).
  Important: The medium-length question, worth 4 points, will focus on the scientific paper covered during the group project. This written exam allows the instructor to evaluate the student's knowledge of the course content. Grading scale: 0–31.

Assessment method for students not participating in the group project:

- Final written exam (2 hours): The exam consists of 10 questions. The syllabus and questions 1–9 will be identical to those for students who completed the group project. However, question 10 (medium-length open-ended question) will be different: it will not concern a scientific paper, but rather address general course content, like the previous questions. This written exam allows the instructor to evaluate the student's knowledge of the course content. Grading scale: 0–31.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

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

- Martini, A., Sisti, M. (2009), *Valutare il successo delle politiche pubbliche*, Bologna: il Mulino, capp. Introduzione, 1; 6, 7, 8, 9, (10), 11, 12, 13, 14, 16.
- Battistin, E., Bertoni, M. (2023). Counterfactuals with Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Variation. In: Damonte, A., Negri, F. (eds) Causality in Policy Studies. Texts in Quantitative Political Analysis. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-12982-7_3
- Negri, F. (2023). Correlation Is Not Causation, Yet… Matching and Weighting for Better Counterfactuals. In: Damonte, A., Negri, F. (eds) Causality in Policy Studies. Texts in Quantitative Political Analysis. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-12982-7_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

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