Carnegie Mellon University
Heinz College

90-822 Immigration Research: Interpretation and Critique
Course Syllabus, Spring 2016 (Mini 3)

INSTRUCTOR

Brian Kovak
Office: 3012 Hamburg Hall
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Home Phone: 610-772-0877 (for use only in emergencies)

LECTURE

Location: 1002 Hamburg Hall
9:00-10:20 Tuesdays and Thursdays, Jan 12-Feb 25

TEACHING ASSISTANT

Namho Kwon
E-Mail: nkwon@andrew.cmu.edu
Office Hours: Mondays 10:30-11:30, 2:00-3:00 (3013 Hamburg Hall)

OBJECTIVES

This course prepares students to understand, interpret, and critique existing research relating to immigration policy topics. The course focuses on the development of three essential skills for policy analysts: 1) Read and interpret empirical results in published research. 2) Understand the assumptions needed to infer causal relationships and assess their plausibility. 3) Recognize common problems in policy research, including reverse causality, omitted variables, measurement error, etc., and use graphical methods to determine the direction of the resulting statistical bias. Using these three skills, students will practice understanding and critiquing research in immigration policy, though these skills also apply to most other policy research areas as well. Moreover, by identifying and understanding potential problems in the research, students can make valid conclusions even from seriously flawed research. At the end of the class, students demonstrate these skills by independently evaluating an existing piece of immigration research, presenting their findings in a written report and in-class presentation.
COURSE ORGANIZATION

*Web site:* This course will use the **Blackboard system** (http://www.cmu.edu/blackboard/). As of the first day of class, all registered students should have access to the course web site. Important class information, including readings and copies of the lecture notes will be distributed regularly via this web site.

*Reading materials:* All readings listed below will be available through Blackboard. Required readings should be completed before the associated lecture, and students must be prepared to discuss the readings during lecture. Supplemental readings provide more in-depth information for the interested student.

*Assignments:* Students will complete two assignments during the course, with due dates listed below. Assignments are due at the beginning of the relevant lecture. Late assignments will be deducted 20 percentage points per day, beginning just after the start of class. Each assignment is worth 20% of the overall course grade. Assignments must be completed individually.

*Final Project:* As mentioned above, the course will culminate in a final project evaluating research on an immigration policy topic. Further information on this project is provided in the document entitled “Final Project Description,” available on blackboard. The final project is worth 50% of the overall class grade.

*Class participation:* Class discussions are an integral part of the course, and class participation will account for 10% of the total grade. To receive full credit for this portion of the grade, students must consistently demonstrate through participation in class discussions that they have completed the required readings and thought through the related issues in advance of the class.

*Grading Summary:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignments</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**POLICIES**

Please be courteous to your fellow students by coming to class on time. We have a lot of material to cover in a short amount of time, and I plan to start and end class on time. This requires you to be on time. Attendance is required, and students are expected to have completed the relevant readings and to be engaged in class discussions (see above regarding class participation in grading).

Students are discouraged from using laptops in class, except for the purposes of taking notes. Please do not use class time to check e-mail, trade stocks, or play video games. Similarly, turn off cell phones during class. If you have a special situation that requires constant communication, please let me know.
All sources used for written assignments must be appropriately cited based on standard citation guidelines and CMU policies. Students are responsible for knowing how to cite sources appropriately. The official university definitions of cheating and plagiarism and sanctions for any violations are described here: http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Cheating.html See me if you have any questions about appropriate citation before handing in an assignment.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

The following represents a tentative schedule that is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and through the blackboard system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan 12</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Interpreting Empirical Research</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jan 14</td>
<td>Interpreting Regressions (part 1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jan 19</td>
<td>Interpreting Regressions (part 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jan 21</td>
<td>Project Introduction / How to Read Empirical Research</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Causality</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jan 26</td>
<td>Correlation vs. Causation (part 1)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Regression Interpretation Assignment Due</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jan 28</td>
<td>Correlation vs. Causation (part 2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Final Project Proposal Due</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Threats to Causal Interpretation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Feb 2</td>
<td>Omitted Variables / Reverse Causality</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Feb 4</td>
<td>Measurement Error / Missing Data</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Presentation Slots Assigned</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Feb 9</td>
<td>Instrumental Variables</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Feb 11</td>
<td>Catch-up / work period</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Feb 16</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Feb 18</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Feb 23</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Feb 25</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>final</td>
<td>Mar 3</td>
<td><strong>Final Paper Due by 10:20 am</strong> (end of official exam period)</td>
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READINGS BY TOPIC

Class 1: Introduction
No Reading

Class 2: Interpreting Regressions (part 1)
Required Reading
Handout “Interpreting statements with ’percent’ vs. ‘percentage point’” [1p]

Supplemental Reading
Regression interpretation with logged variables and other transformations.

Class 3: Interpreting Regressions (part 2)
Required Reading

Supplemental Reading
[Binary independent variables].
[Binary dependent variables].

Class 4: Project Introduction / How to Read Empirical Research
Required Reading
Final Project Description. [15p]
Sample Final Paper.pdf. [25p]

Supplemental Listening
Class 5: Correlation vs. Causation (part 1)

Required Reading


Supplemental Reading


[Deep investigation of the potential outcomes framework. Focus on Sections 1-4].

Class 6: Correlation vs. Causation (part 2)

Required Reading

Counterfactual Worksheet.pdf. [4p]

Manski, Charles F. *Public Policy in an Uncertain World*. Chapter 2 p.47-84. 2013. [38 p]

[Focus on the portion on p.47-67].

Class 7: Omitted Variables / Reverse Causality

Required Reading


Cadena and Kovak (2013) Section 3, p.10-18 (see Class 2) [9 p]

Supplemental Reading

Stock and Watson (2011) Chapter 6 (see Class 3) for omitted variables.

Class 8: Measurement Error / Missing Data

Required Reading


Supplemental Reading

Class 9: Instrumental Variables

Required Reading


Supplemental Reading


Class 10-14: Catch-up / Work Period and Presentations

No Reading