

## POSC 3101. WRITING AND ARGUMENTATION IN POLITICAL SCIENCE: NUMBERS, POLICY, AND DEMOCRACY



(Census Tabulation, 1971)

Tu Th 12:30–1:45 PM

Wehr Physics 212

Professor Philip Rocco

Office Hours: Th 2–5 (or by appointment) via Microsoft Teams

[philip.rocco@marquette.edu](mailto:philip.rocco@marquette.edu)

---

[Thanks to statistics] public broadsheets will be to the social world what the sensory organs are to the organic world.

Gabriel Tarde (1903)

It's not the voting that's democracy, it's the counting.

Tom Stoppard (1972)

This writing-intensive seminar invites students to collaborate in the production of knowledge about how the political economy shapes and is shaped by calculative practices. Democracy runs on numbers. Votes must be tallied before election winners are declared. Census counts determine whom Congress represents and how much representation they receive. To justify their decisions, policymakers rely on numbers like death counts, the Gross Domestic Product, the Gini Coefficient, the national debt, as well as rates of unemployment and the uninsured. Yet precisely because numbers

matter, they can also be manipulated in ways that threaten democracy. Numbers themselves become a subject of a debate. Policymakers may cite dubious figures. Government's collection of—and public access to—vital data has become a hotly contested issue. Political division, partisanship, and gridlock have also undermined trust in public statistics.

To better understand the politics of numbers, we will draw on and synthesize a wide range of perspectives from political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, history, science and technology studies (STS), and law. Class meetings will serve the purpose that a studio or lab might play in other fields. Throughout the semester, students will develop a better ability to understand and interpret the role of numbers in contemporary politics. Students will hone their skills for writing and communicating about intricate policy issues. Grades will be based primarily on the completion of an intensive, iterative writing project that will take place throughout the semester.

## Readings

There is one required book available for purchase at Book Marq, or wherever fine books are sold: Diane Coyle, *GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History* (Princeton, 2015)

All other required reading is available on D2L.

## Requirements

**Blog Posts (15%):** To develop your expository writing skills, you are expected to contribute seven (7) short (300–400-word) blog posts to the forum on D2L on the dates/times indicated in the syllabus. These blog posts can pose questions or note issues or contradictions within the reading. Alternatively, they could apply a concept or topic from the reading to a current event.

**Research topic (5%):** Early in the semester, you will submit a short description of a proposed topic of research for the semester. The topic should be a current controversy related to the use of numbers in politics or public policy. This could involve a debate about the measurement of a particular quantity (e.g. unemployment, poverty), issues related to counting in national statistics (e.g. census undercount, classification of mortality data, issues surrounding data privacy), challenges related to the use of numbers in litigation (e.g. measurements of gerrymandering), conflict over the effects of particular policy experiments (e.g. minimum-wage studies), and so on. A list of potential topics is on the last page of this syllabus.

**Explainer (20%):** Midway through the semester, you will write a 750-word “explainer” piece that explains the number (or numbers) at the center of the controversy you have chosen. The purpose of this piece is to translate the basics of the issue you are

working on for a lay audience. A writing workshop will offer a chance to investigate multiple approaches to writing this piece.

**Issue Brief project (45%):** Building on your Explainer piece, you will prepare an Issue Brief that fully analyzes the numerical controversy you identified at the beginning of the semester. A writing workshop will be held to introduce some of the basics of the Issue Brief form and to allow students to evaluate existing Issue Briefs.

Grading for the Issue Brief project breaks down as follows:

- Rough draft (15%): Students will complete a rough draft of their Issue Brief. This will be graded for completion only, and will be the subject of a workshop and peer review.
- Peer-review report (10%): Students will be responsible for writing short, structured peer-review reports for two (2) of their colleagues.
- Lightning talk (5%): During the final week of class, students will be responsible for giving a short (5–6 minute) lightning talk on their findings.
- Final draft (25%): The final draft of the Issue Brief will be due on 5/10.

**Participation (15% total: 10% in-class, 5% attendance of one-on-one sessions):**

This course requires an extensive amount of reading and preparation prior to class. To facilitate this, weekly reading questions will be posted to D2L. You are expected to attend each class session having read and digested all assigned material, ready to engage in an informed, lively discussion with the instructor and with other students. If you do not speak at all during the semester or are absent for more than 6 class sessions, you will receive a 0 for participation. Additionally, all students are required to come to at least two scheduled one-on-one sessions with the professor to discuss their writing projects. These will occur via Microsoft Teams and will be scheduled in advance.

### Grading Scale

≥ 93	A	≥ 73	C
≥ 90	A-	≥ 70	C-
≥ 87	B+	≥ 67	D+
≥ 83	B	≥ 60.0	D
≥ 80	B-	< 60.0	F
≥ 78	C+		

### Policies

**Academic Misconduct:** Information on Marquette’s Academic Misconduct Policy can be found here: <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/> Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, individual violations, helping another student with any form of academic misconduct, failing to report any form of

academic misconduct, or intentionally interfering with the educational process in any manner. Academic misconduct of any type is unacceptable and will result in immediate referral to Marquette's Academic Integrity Director. If you are in doubt as to whether an action or behavior is subject to the academic misconduct policy, you should consult an appropriate member of the Academic Integrity Council, faculty or staff.

**Attendance and Participation:** Our class meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 12:30 to 1:45pm, following the format described above. Class participation and active learning are important aspects of this class. However, I understand that sometimes you must miss academic obligations affecting your grades because of illness, personal crises, and other emergencies. I will work with you as best I can to help you succeed in the course. Please contact me as soon as possible when such absences arise so we can make arrangements to get you caught up. This policy will not apply in the case on non-emergency absences.

Please regularly evaluate your own health according to current CDC, State of Wisconsin, and city guidelines. Do not attend class or other on-campus events if you are ill. You are encouraged to seek appropriate medical attention for treatment of illness from Student Health Services. In the event of having a contagious illness such as influenza or COVID-19, please complete the voluntary form upon diagnosis and do not come to campus. Please email me about your absence as soon as you are able so that appropriate accommodations can be explored.

Please note that documentation (a Doctor's note) for medical absences is not required. As part of their commitment to maintain confidentiality, to encourage more appropriate use of healthcare staff resources, and to support meaningful dialogue between instructors and students, Marquette Student Health Services will not provide documentation of illness.

I am committed to working with students with pre-existing medical and mental health needs, as well as new needs that may arise within the semester. I encourage you to reach out to me as early as possible to discuss any adjustments you think may be necessary in this course. Reasonable accommodations may include leveraging the course modules that have been developed in creative ways to maximize your access during times when students need to quarantine due to COVID exposure, or during an absence related to a disability or COVID-19 diagnosis. While I cannot guarantee any specific outcome, I am committed to working with you to explore all the options available in this course. To begin this process, contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS).

**Late Policy:** All assignments are due in Dropbox by the date and time listed on their assignment guidelines. Assignments delivered between 1 and 24 hours late will lose 50% of their grade. Assignments delivered more than 24 hours late will receive a zero. Extensions can be granted by your professor, but only if you request them at least two days in advance of due date.

**Accommodations:** If you need course adaptations or accommodations, or if you have medical information that may be pertinent to your performance in this course, please make an appointment with your instructor by the close of the first week of classes. For a student to receive special accommodations during exams, instructors must have a written notification from Marquette's Office of Disability Services (<http://www.marquette.edu/disability-services/>). If you know you need accommodations, please speak to ODS no later than the first week of classes. A policy and procedure document containing more information about accessibility for all students with disabilities at Marquette is available from the Coordinator of Disability Services (phone: 414-288-1645). All information is confidential.

**Covid-specific Accommodations:** If you have a health or acquire condition that affects your ability to complete work in this class, please Contact Marquette's Office of Disability Services (<http://www.marquette.edu/disability-services/>) to explain your situation. They'll give you options. Contact me to discuss the situation. If some other Covid-related life event comes up that affects your ability to complete work in this class (ie family illness or obligations), please contact me to let me know what's going on. I will do whatever I can to accommodate you.

**Collegiality:** This course depends on a collegial atmosphere for debate and discussion, including of topics that may be controversial. It works best, in other words, as a team. This requires both your engagement with, and willingness to listen to, both your classmates and your professor. Incivility is any behavior that is done to disrespect another person. Incivility in the classroom (including the online classroom) includes eye-rolling, small talk while others are talking, insulting other students or instructors, and distracting behaviors that are meant to create a negative environment. This behavior will not be accepted.

**Email:** Email is the official method of contacting students, as per university policy. The student's email address as recorded in d2L is the only email address that will be used. Students are expected to check their email daily for messages. Student emails to the professor will be responded to within 48 hours.

**Faculty Support of Students:** I am committed to creating a supportive learning environment for students. If you have difficulties in meeting the class requirements or due dates, it is your responsibility to contact the instructor to discuss concerns early in the semester.

**Office Hours:** Office hours will occur weekly from 2-5 PM via Microsoft Teams (see link on D2L).

## Learning Technologies

**D2L (Desire to Learn)** is the web-based learning platform where students will find a multitude of course materials, including the syllabus, readings, assignment guidelines, and links to weekly lectures. When checking D2L, be sure to check the News page for updates and course information.

**Microsoft Teams** is the web-based platform where students will participate in one-on-one meetings with the instructor and office hours.

## Schedule of Course Readings

Date	Subject	Readings [D2L, unless otherwise noted]	Assignments due
<b>1. Introduction: Fighting and Writing About Numbers</b>			
1/26	Course Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nikolas Rose, "Governing By Numbers: Figuring Out Democracy," <i>Accounting, Organizations and Society</i> 16, no. 7 (1991): 673-692.</li> </ul>	
1/28	Trust in numbers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ted Porter, <i>Trust in Numbers</i> (Princeton University Press, 1995), 3–8.</li> <li>Reply All Podcast, Episodes 127 and 128, "The Crime Machine" (Parts 1 and 2)</li> </ul>	
2/2	Interpreting a numerical controversy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carrie Arnold, "Death Counters," <i>Nature</i>, February 7, 2019</li> <li>Optional: Langdon Winner, "Do artifacts have politics?" <i>Daedalus</i> 109 (1,1980).</li> </ul>	Blog post #1 due 2/2, by 5 PM
<b>2. Census Taking: The "Spine" of Democracy</b>			
2/4	How census taking stabilizes democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teresa A. Sullivan, "Coming to Our Census: How Social Statistics Underpin Our Democracy (and Republic)," <i>Harvard Data Science Review</i> 2 (1, 2020).</li> <li>Constance Citro, "Are We Up to the Challenge of Protecting Federal</li> </ul>	

		Statistics?," <i>Harvard Data Science Review</i> , 2 (1, 2020).	
<b>2/9 No Class -- Mental Health Day</b>			
2/11	Undercounts as a democratic dilemma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Margo Anderson, <i>The American Census: A Social History</i> (Yale University Press, 2015), Ch 11.</li> <li>• Denise-Marie Ordway, "2020 census: how undercounts and overcounts can hurt US communities," <i>Journalist's Resource</i>, July 2, 2019.</li> <li>• Anna Maria Barry-Jester, "A Million Children Didn't Show Up In The 2010 Census. How Many Will Be Missing In 2020?," <i>FiveThirtyEight</i>, Mar 19, 2018.</li> </ul>	Blog post #2 due 2/11, by 5 PM
2/16	How do we know if census data is "good enough"?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Statistical Association, 2020 Census Quality Indicators (Washington, DC: ASA, 2020).</li> </ul>	
<b>3. Threshold Politics: Defining and Measuring Poverty</b>			
2/18	The problem of thresholds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "How is Poverty Measured?" Institute for Research on Poverty, UW Madison.</li> <li>• Rourke O'Brien and David Pedulla, "Beyond the Poverty Line," <i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i>, Fall 2010.</li> </ul>	Blog post #3 due by 2/18 @ 5 PM
2/23	Redefining the poor?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emily Moon, "Experts Have Wanted to Update the Poverty Line for Years—But Not the Way Trump is Planning to Do It," May 28, 2019, <i>Pacific Standard</i>, May 22, 2019</li> <li>• Optional: Commentary from the U.S. Collaborative of Poverty Centers in response to OMB-2019-0002: Request for Comment on the Consumer Inflation Measures Produced by Federal Statistical Agencies.</li> </ul>	
<b>4. Knowledge Infrastructures: the Case of Infectious Disease</b>			

2/25	Counting the the dead in a pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maggie Koerth, “The Uncounted Dead,” <i>FiveThirtyEight</i>, May 20, 2020.</li> <li>• Philip Setel, et al., “A scandal of invisibility: making everyone count by counting everyone,” <i>The Lancet</i>, Nov 3, 2007: 1569–77.</li> </ul>	Blog post #4 due 2/25 @ 5 PM
3/2	Making sense of knowledge infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caroline Chen, “How to Understand COVID-19 Numbers,” <i>ProPublica</i>, July 21, 2020.</li> <li>• Philip Rocco, Jessica Rich, Kasia Klasa, et al., “Who Counts Where? Varieties of Federalism and COVID-19 Surveillance,” Working Paper, November 2020.</li> </ul>	Research topics due by 3/2 @ 5 PM
3/4	The heterogeneity of surveillance data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No readings -- in-class activity</li> </ul>	
<b>5. Writing Workshop I: The Explainer</b>			
3/9	Elements of the explainer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No readings</li> </ul>	
3/11	One-on-one meetings w/ Dr. Rocco		
<b>6. Valuation: Putting a Price on Life</b>			
3/16	What is VSL?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• W. Kip Viscusi, “The devaluation of life,” <i>Regulation &amp; Governance</i> no. 3 (2009): 103–127</li> </ul>	Blog post #5 due by 3/16 @ 5 PM
3/18	Mapping the VSL controversy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marion Fourcade, “The political valuation of life,” <i>Regulation &amp; Governance</i> no. 3 (2009): 291–297</li> </ul>	
3/23	The politics of applying VSL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Todd Frankel, “The government has spent decades studying what a life is worth. It hasn’t made a difference in the covid-19 crisis,” <i>Washington Post</i>, May 23, 2020.</li> <li>• CDC Update: The True Burden of COVID-19 in the United States</li> <li>• Michelangelo Landgrave, “How do Legislators Value Constituents’ (Statistical) Lives,” Working Paper, UC Riverside, 2020.</li> </ul>	

<b>7. The Social Construction of the Economy</b>			
3/25	GDP origins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diane Coyle, <i>GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History</i> (Princeton, 2015), Introduction, Chapters 1–3.</li> </ul>	Blog post #6 due 3/25 @ 5 PM
3/30	Contesting GDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coyle, <i>GDP</i>, Chapters 5–6.</li> <li>• Justin Wolfers, “GDP Doesn’t Credit Social Distancing but it Should,” <i>New York Times</i>, May 14, 2020.</li> </ul>	Explainer due 3/30 @ 5 PM
4/1	Cost analysis and the politics of austerity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robert Saldin, “Gaming the Congressional Budget Office,” <i>National Affairs</i>, Fall 2014</li> </ul>	Blog post #7 due 4/1 @ 5 PM
4/6	Explaining the CBO’s power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ryan Cooper, “The Tyranny of the Congressional Budget Office,” <i>The Week</i>, May 18, 2020</li> <li>• Philip Rocco, “Keeping Score: The Congressional Budget Office and the Politics of Institutional Durability,” <i>Polity</i> (forthcoming).</li> </ul>	
<b>8. Writing Workshop 2: The Issue Brief</b>			
4/8	Elements of the issue brief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No reading—in-class activity</li> </ul>	
4/13	Evaluating issue briefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No reading—in-class activity</li> </ul>	
4/15	One-on-one meetings w/ Dr. Rocco		
<b>4/20 -- No Class: Mental Health Day</b>			
4/22	Peer review of issue briefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No reading—in-class peer review / workshop</li> </ul>	Rough draft of issue brief due 4/21 @ 5 Pm
4/27	Peer review of issue briefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No reading—in-class peer review / workshop</li> </ul>	Turn in peer review reports at the end of class
<b>9. Symposium</b>			
4/29	Lightning talks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No reading</li> </ul>	Slides for talks due by 5 pm on 4/28
5/4	Lightning talks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No reading</li> </ul>	
5/6	Lightning talks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No reading</li> </ul>	<b>**Final issue briefs due to</b>

			<b>Dropbox by 5 PM on 5/10</b>
--	--	--	------------------------------------

## Major Writing Assignments

Throughout the semester, you will prepare writing assignments that describe and analyze a current political controversy that involves quantitative information. Given the complexity of most of these controversies, Explainers and Issue Briefs play an essential role in distilling relevant information in an objective way for a broad, lay audience. Your goal will be to take apart one of these controversies, expose its component parts, and present information that will enhance public understanding of it.

*Nota Bene:* In the process of doing the research for this brief, you will invariably find yourself in uncharted and confusing waters. That is because at their core, these issues involve both political and technical debates. Writing a good Issue Brief requires becoming well versed in both types of debates. It will also require distinguishing them from one another, and recognize where a technical debate is being used instrumentally for a political purpose (what Gabrielle Hecht calls “techno-politics”). Throughout all of this, you should feel free to avail yourself of office hours (scheduled or by appointment) for assistance.

### 1. Research Topic (worth 5% of your grade)

The first assignment involves choosing a potential topic that you might want to investigate over the course of the term for your explainer and your Issue Brief. In class I will suggest various ways to “discover” a topic but the important thing is not to wait. You should start working on this assignment by the second week of the course, because finding sources, reading, and writing will take a while.

*What to turn in:*

You should turn in no more than 3 pages (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font) defining the issue as follows:

- Describe what is happening and how numbers are involved in the dispute. For example, are public officials debating how to count or measure something? Are there debates about interpreting the effects of a public policy? Are there privacy concerns related to data collection? In short: tell us what is at the heart of the debate and what numbers have to do with it.
- Describe who seems to be involved in the issue: members of Congress, state legislatures, activists, statisticians, economists, and so on.
- Then, describe what is at stake for the persons/groups involved. In other words, what do each of the parties stand to win or lose?
- What are the potential outcomes of the issue or controversy? Is it likely to be

resolved any time soon? If so, in what venue will it be resolved? If it doesn't seem likely to be resolved soon, why not?

- What kind of data would you need to investigate this issue?
- Some resources about your cases (such as a web page list or a the beginnings of a bibliography).

*How to prepare this assignment:*

Begin by jotting down some notes about current political issues or policy debates that are of interest to you. Consider how, if at all, numbers might become a part of these issues or debates. Potential topics (listed on syllabus) could include micro-political controversies relating to the use and ownership of individual data and the deployment of quantitative performance indicators. Alternatively, you could examine controversies related to statistical citizenship (e.g. Census counts, redistricting data). You could also examine issues related to counting and accountability, such as the use of quantitative information in the evaluation of public programs (proposed or existing), the ranking and rating of organizations or governments, or the use of social/economic indicators in policy debates. Your focus may be local, state, national, or international. If you're having difficulty choosing a topic, feel free to scan the course bibliography or chat with me during office hours.

## **2. Explainer (worth 20% of your grade)**

Explainers are an excellent way to give broad audiences the knowledge they need to understand complex political and policy issues. Particularly when numbers are involved – and perhaps especially when there are *controversies* over numbers – explainers can help to improve intelligent public consumption of policy information. Writing an effective explainer requires wise judgment about the issue at hand, strong research skills, and an ability to translate complex information into digestible prose. In class, we will analyze several example explainers of the sort I am expecting you to produce so that you have a strong sense of the genre conventions.

*What to turn in:*

You will craft a 750-word article that explains for a general audience the number, indicator, or metric at the heart of the research topic you have proposed. Your piece should answer the following questions as best you can:

1. What does the indicator / measure / data represent? (E.g. What is the unemployment rate attempting to capture? )
2. Why do policymakers / the public care about this indicator / measure / data? (E.g. How is the unemployment rate used in the implementation of public policy, and how does it feature in political debates? Why do we bother measuring it?)

3. How is the indicator / measure / data produced and who produces it? (E.g. How is the unemployment rate calculated? How is the data used to produce this rate collected? Which agency generates the official unemployment rate?)
4. What controversies, if any, have emerged surrounding this indicator / measure / data? (E.g. Are there any problems with the way we measure unemployment? Are there alternative ways of measuring unemployment? If so, why don't we use them? )

Your explainer should have a title and should be written with clear section headings and supported by at least ten (10) sources, cited in Chicago Manual of Style footnotes. Primary sources can include federal or state legislation; hearing transcripts; executive orders; budget proposals; regulations; comments on regulations and so forth. Secondary sources should include reputable news sources that provide in-depth reporting on government affairs. At the national level, publications such as *Congressional Quarterly*, *CQ Weekly*, *Roll Call* and *National Journal* are an excellent place to start. If you need assistance on sources, please contact Prof. Rocco.

*How to prepare this assignment:*

Continue to learn about your issue, paying careful attention to the parties involved, what is at stake, and the likely outcomes. Assemble a virtual library of books and materials to help you get at the issue. Think like a detective. First, try to learn everything you can about the nature of the issue itself. What numbers are involved and how have they been produced? Begin by consulting research studies published in journals or books or reports and research studies available on the web. What are the technical aspects of the controversy? What aspects of the controversy are political? Second, consider where the issue is being debated. If your issue involves debate in Congress, consult legislation, reports, and debates in the *Congressional Record* (congress.gov). If your issue involves federal regulations, check proposed or finalized rules at regulations.gov, as well as the public comments on those rules. If the issue involves a specific official statistic, try to trace the origins of that statistic. What law or rule brought it into being? Who wanted it to be produced? Have alternatives to the measure been proposed? If the issue involves a controversy over a specific academic study or report, try to read the study itself as well as academic responses to it. What do they say? Third, consider who has power in this controversy, if anyone. Who is participating in the controversy? What motivates them? Do they see themselves technical experts or motivated by more political concerns? Who is excluded? What resources (material or intellectual) must one have to participate? Who seems to be defining the rules or the agenda?

### 3. Issue Brief Rough Draft (worth 15% of your grade)

Your issue brief will be an extension and expansion of the explainer piece you wrote earlier in the semester. In addition to providing background on the measure / indicator / data you have chosen, you will provide a fuller exposition of the controversy surrounding it as well as a projection – based on your research – of how this controversy might play out in the future. Prior to the due date, we will workshop several published Issue Briefs as well as examples of student work done in prior iterations of this class.

#### *What to turn in:*

You will turn in a rough version of a 4000–4500-word article manuscript, which addresses the following points:

- **What’s The Issue?** (1000 words): Give a brief overview of the number / measure/ quantitative analysis you are focusing on and characterize the “stakes” of the debate. Why does the particular measure / quantitative analysis matter for politics / policy? Who is affected and how? What policy choices are available for resolving this debate?
- **What’s the Background?** (1000–1500 words): Give a brief history of the controversy you are discussing. Why did this issue/controversy emerge? Why is measurement / quantification an important part of the controversy? What, if any, past policy decisions have shaped the numbers currently under debate?
- **What’s the Debate?** (1000 words): Discuss all relevant sides and stakeholders in this controversy. Who are they? What are their positions on the quantification / measurement issue in question? What arguments do they make? What interests do they have that might cause them to hold this position? What sources of leverage do they have to advance their agenda? Who seems to have power in this debate/controversy, if anyone? Why?
- **What’s Next?** (1000 words): How, if at all, is this debate likely to be resolved in the near future? What factors might shape how the debate is resolved?

#### *How to prepare this assignment:*

Start by thinking about how you might organize your information. What types of information about the issue is most important for understanding what is at stake, who is involved, and what is likely to happen. After you write a rough outline of each section, put it down for a day and then re-read it while asking yourself the following question: “Would what I have written clarify the issue for a lay audience?” If not, re-organize your evidence and re-write to clarify.

#### **4. Peer-Review Reports (worth 10% of your grade)**

During our writing workshop on 11/10 and 11/12, you will complete structured peer-review reports for two (2) of your classmates. These reports will be short (250–350 word) reviews of your classmates' draft Issue Briefs.

*What to turn in:*

You will complete two D2L survey forms, one for each peer you are reviewing.

*How to prepare this assignment:*

On each day of this workshop, you will exchange Issue Briefs with one colleague. After reading one another's issue briefs, you will share your comments and ratings, based on the provided rubric. After sharing these impressions with your colleague, you will write up these impressions formally and submit them to me via a D2L survey form. Full credit will be awarded only to those who submit both reports.

#### **5. Lightning Talk (worth 5% of your grade)**

The purpose of a seminar is to create and share new knowledge. On the last week of class, this is precisely what we'll do, in two days of lightning talks. These are short, 5-6 minute presentations capturing the main essence of the findings you produced in your Issue Brief.

*What to turn in:*

A lightning talk is designed to be a short, captivating presentation for a general audience on your topic. You will be responsible for giving a well-rehearsed 5-6 minute talk that tells us about the controversy you've been examining, gives us an appropriate amount of background to understand the number / issue / metric in question, characterizes the controversy involved, and provides some sense of where things are going next.

To assist in your presentation, please prepare **1-2 slides** that help to communicate the main findings from your research.

*How to prepare this assignment:*

When writing your talk, make sure to get to the point early. The main finding of interest should be communicated within the first minute of the talk. The purpose is to enable the audience to experience a variety of exciting ideas in a short amount of time. Use large images and a minimum of text. Avoid presenting unnecessary information in your talk or on your slides. Once you have the main points of your talk down, practice it

several times with a timer. Five minutes is not long at all, and you'll want to be sure you keep your presentation in the allotted time.

An example of lightning talks given at Marquette can be found here:

<https://tinyurl.com/y5bzw49>.

## **6. Issue Brief Final Draft (worth 25% of your grade)**

*What to turn in:*

Your Issue Brief should be 4500–5000 words in length, typed in double-spaced 12-point font. It should be organized into bolded, sub-headed sections as follows (see sample policy brief on D2L:

- What's the Issue?
- What's the Background?
- What's the Debate?
- What's Next?

All of your material should at this point have citations in the form of footnotes numbered consecutively using the Chicago Manual of Style.

*How to prepare this assignment:*

Make sure to address my comments on your rough draft. This may mean rethinking or reorganizing your paper to make your argument more effective, or adding additional research to clarify a question or idea. Don't forget citations for all facts and ideas. Finally, be sure to thoroughly proofread and edit your brief.

## Selected Bibliography

- Alonso, William, and Paul Starr, eds. *The Politics of Numbers*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989.
- Andreas, Peter, and Kelly M. Greenhill, eds. *Sex, Drugs, and Body Counts: The Politics of Numbers in Global Crime and Conflict*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.
- Arndt, Christiane. "The politics of governance ratings." *International Public Management Journal* 11, no. 3 (2008): 275-297.
- Bauer, Raymond, ed. *Social Indicators*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962.
- Berman, Elizabeth Popp, and Laura M. Milanes-Reyes. "The Politicization of Knowledge Claims: The "Laffer Curve" in the US Congress." *Qualitative sociology* 36, no. 1 (2013): 53-79.
- Bijker, Wiebe E., Thomas P. Hughes, Trevor Pinch, and Deborah G. Douglas. *The Social Construction of Technical Systems*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012.
- Bowker, Geoffrey, and Susan Leigh Star. *Sorting Things Out*. MIT Press, 1999.
- Brewer, Garry D. *Politicians, Bureaucrats, and the Consultant*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Callon, Michel, and Fabian Muniesa. "Peripheral vision: Economic markets as calculative collective devices." *Organization Studies* 26, no. 8 (2005): 1229-1250.
- Campbell, John L., and Ove K. Pedersen. *The National Origins of Policy Ideas: Knowledge Regimes in the United States, France, Germany, and Denmark*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Cairney, Paul. *The Politics of Evidence-Based Policy Making*. New York: Springer, 2016.
- Carpenter, Daniel. *Reputation and Power*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Cohen, Patricia Cline. *A Calculating People*. London: Routledge, 1982.
- Daston, Lorraine, and Peter Galison. *Objectivity*. New York: Zone Books, 2007.
- Desmarais, Bruce A., and John A. Hird. "Public policy's bibliography: The use of research in US regulatory impact analyses." *Regulation & Governance* 8, no. 4 (2014): 497-510.
- Desrosières, Alain. *The Politics of Large Numbers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Edwards, Paul N. *A Vast Machine*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.
- Elliott, Rebecca F. "Who pays for the next wave? The American welfare state and responsibility for flood risk." *Politics & Society* (2017).
- Ensmenger, Nathan L. *The Computer Boys Take Over*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012.
- Espeland, Wendy Nelson, and Mitchell L. Stevens. "A sociology of quantification." *European Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 03 (2008): 401-436.
- Espeland, Wendy Nelson, and Michael Sauder. *Engines of Anxiety*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2016.
- Eubanks, Virginia. *Automating Inequality*. St. Martin's Press, 2018.
- Fourcade, Marion. *Economists and Societies: Discipline and Profession in the United States, Britain, and France, 1890s to 1990s*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Fried, Amy. *A Crisis in Public Opinion Polling: Crisis, Cooperation and the Making of*

- Public Opinion Professions*. Routledge, 2013.
- Geary, Daniel. *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and its Legacy*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.
- Gerber, Alan S., and Eric M. Patashnik. "Problem solving in a polarized age: comparative effectiveness research and the politicization of evidence-based medicine." *The Forum*, vol. 8, no. 1. (2010).
- Gitelman, Lisa, ed. *Raw Data is an Oxymoron*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013.
- Hansen, Hans Krause, and Arthur Mühlen-Schulte. "The power of numbers in global governance." *Journal of International Relations and Development* 15, no. 4 (2012): 455-465.
- Henig, Jeffrey R. *Spin Cycle: How Research Gets Used in Policy Debates--The Case of Charter Schools*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008.
- Herbst, Susan. *Numbered Voices*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Hird, John A. "Policy analysis for what? The effectiveness of nonpartisan policy research organizations." *Policy Studies Journal* 33, no. 1 (2005): 83-105.
- Hirschman, Daniel, and Elizabeth Popp Berman. "Do economists make policies? On the political effects of economics." *Socio-Economic Review* 12, no. 4 (2014): 779-811.
- Igo, Sarah. *The Averaged American*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Innes, Judith Eleanor. *Knowledge and Public Policy: The Search for Meaningful Indicators*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990.
- Joyce, Philip G. *The Congressional Budget Office: Honest Numbers, Power, and Policymaking*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011.
- Keller, Ann Campbell. *Science in Environmental Policy: The Politics of Objective Advice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
- Latour, Bruno, and Steve Woolgar. *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*. Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Lepenes, Philipp. *The Power of a Single Number: A Political History of GDP*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.
- Light, Jennifer S. *From Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban Problems in Cold War America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Lindblom, Charles Edward, and David K. Cohen. *Usable Knowledge: Social Science and Social Problem Solving*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Masood, Ehsan. *The Great Invention: The Story of GDP and the Making and Unmaking of the Modern World*. London: Pegasus Books, 2016.
- Medvetz, Thomas. *Think Tanks in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Mehta, Jal. *The Allure of Order*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Mirowski, Philip. *Science-mart*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Mitchell, Timothy. *Rule of Experts*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.
- Muhammad, Khalil Gibran. *The Condemnation of Blackness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- O'Connor, Alice. *Poverty Knowledge*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Pasquale, Frank. *The Black Box Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Reisine, Susan, and Judith Fifield. "Expanding the definition of disability: Implications for planning, policy, and research." *The Milbank Quarterly* (1992): 491-508.
- Rocco, Philip, Andrew S. Kelly, Daniel Béland, and Michael Kinane. "The New Politics of US Health Care Prices: Institutional Reconfiguration and the Emergence of All-Payer Claims Databases." *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 42, no. 1 (2017): 5-52.

Rosenthal, Caitlin. *Accounting for Slavery*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018.

## Potential Research Topics

- Issues of “algorithmic justice” / “algorithmic inequality”
- Credit Ratings (US) / Social Credit System (China)
- Deployment of self-tracking in health- and life-insurance plans
- Data privacy controversies
- Bias in testing instruments (e.g. SAT)
- Detecting and addressing gender pay gaps
- Controversy over management of 2020 Census (there are multiple possible dimensions here, from the undercount itself to the question of differential privacy)
- Conflict over measurement of prices (CPI)
- Continuing controversy over efficiency gap as measure of partisan gerrymandering
- Implementation of expert-led anti-gerrymandering reforms in MO, MI
- Standards of scientific evidence in court [recent cases include *Biestek v. Berryhill*; *Gill v. Whitford*; *Whole Women’s Health v. Hellerstedt*]
- Measuring effects of natural disasters (e.g. Hurricane Maria)
- Controversy over metrics-based reforms (e.g. pay-for-performance)
- Efforts to establish alternatives to Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
- Use of social indicators in global governance (e.g. tracking human rights violations, rating/ranking democracies)
- Projecting costs / benefits of major policy reforms (e.g. tax cuts, health reform)
- Calculating the social cost of carbon
- Evaluating effects of policy ‘experiments’ (e.g. minimum-wage increase, UBI)
- Challenges of property tax assessment
- Declining public trust in official statistics
- Use / misuse of official statistics
- Measuring and reducing segregation in metropolitan areas