

Eco 499 policy brief

This assignment constitutes 20% of your course grade.

Assignment: You are to write a policy brief on a topic of your choice. Your brief should introduce an issue related to the economics of crime, describe what the relevant policy choices are, and then argue why one of those choices is superior to the others. Your brief should make use of published articles in economics, law, and criminology journals, as well as government reports, other policy briefs, or news articles. However, since the goal of your brief is to inform and influence policy decisions, it is very important that your paper be understandable to a broad audience. How credible your brief is hinges on both how thorough your understanding of the relevant academic literature is and how careful you are in making your subject accessible to a general audience.

You are to choose your own topic, subject to three constraints. One, while you may choose a topic that we discuss in class, I will grade your brief primarily on its discussion of material beyond that which was discussed in class. Two, the topic must have some relevance to crime, and economic research must have some bearing on the topic, though I take a broad view of each of these. Three, your policy brief topic may not coincide with your assigned topic from the debate assignment.

You are not expected to develop original theories or perform original empirical estimation (although feel free to do so if you feel it would be helpful). Some things to keep in mind:

1. When in doubt, narrow your topic. It is far easier to extend a seemingly small subject than to adequately summarize a vast subject.
2. The number of academic papers you will cite depends on how large the literature is and how much information you are putting in your brief about each paper. A brief that cites only a couple of papers will not be credible.
3. Although this is not a writing class, expect that the quality of your writing may affect your paper grade. Keep in mind that this assignment is due during a very busy time of the year. I make no apologies for the fact that a clearly presented paper is likely to score better than a poorly written paper, even if the underlying quality of the economic analysis is the same.

Deadlines and submission: There are 6 deadlines associated with the paper:

- Monday, February 17 (in class): A short (1-2 page) description of 1-3 potential topics, what the relevant policy tradeoff is for each topic, and a bibliography-style cite of 1-2 papers published in economics journals related to each topic. The advantage of including more than one topic is that I will give you feedback on which is likely to be the most fruitful to examine.
- Friday, March 28 (noon): A longer (5-7 pages) summary of your topic. The summary should include 1- a description of what the relevant policy tradeoff is, 2- citation information for at least 8 academic papers that you plan to cite in your brief, and 3- a discussion of your preliminary findings, such as a statement about which policy you will be recommending.
- Monday, March 31 (in class): I will hold (mandatory) office hours during the normal class time, scheduling students in 5 minute increments. During your time, we will discuss your summary, and the direction forward.

- Monday, April 14 (in class): The first draft of your policy brief is due.
- Monday, April 28, and Wednesday, April 30 (in class): students will give short (5 minute) presentations to the class on their policy briefs.
- Friday, May 2 (noon): The final draft of your policy brief is due. The paper must be turned in to me in electronic form.

At all stages, you are expected to incorporate my comments into your future work, as well as to look for ways to improve the quality of your paper on your own.

Your completed paper must meet the following requirements or I will not accept it:

1. 12pt font, 1 inch margins, 1.5 or double spaced.
2. Between 15 and 25 pages, which does not include references, figures, or a title page.

Academic dishonesty: Any paper may be electronically analyzed to verify that they constitute original work. You are required to properly cite others' work. This includes giving credit whenever you quote or paraphrase another person's work, or when you borrow their ideas. Restating a sentence does not absolve you of your obligation to give credit, and copying and pasting from existing work is never acceptable, even with a citation. Although all cases are judged individually, previous penalties for intentional plagiarism in this course have included a failing grade for the entire class. In one egregious case, this failure was listed on the student's transcript as and XE, or failure due to academic misconduct.

Grading: Your grade for this portion of the class will include my assessment of your work and effort at all deadlines listed above. I will use the following grading scale:

A: A student's effort in meeting deadlines and final policy brief are both exemplary. The brief makes a clear and convincing case for the recommended policy.

B: A student's effort in meeting deadlines and final policy brief are reasonable, but leave room for improvement. The brief clearly recommends a policy, but more work is necessary to determine if it is the correct one.

C: A student's effort in meeting deadlines and final paper leave a lot to be desired. The brief fails to make a coherent case for a policy.

D/E: A student put forth the minimum effort and the result is inadequate. The brief is not useful, even as a jumping off point, for policy analysis.