MPP Capstone Projects

Some great examples from recent years

Stephen Hershey Kroes
PUBPL 6950
Xeric-City USA:
Overcoming Barriers to Xeriscape™ Landscape Adoption

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University of Utah

In partial fulfillment for the requirements for PUBPL 6950
and the degree of Master of Public Policy

Stephen Kroes
Committee Chair: Dennis Wei
April 17, 2012
Another strong visual first page

The Export of E-Waste: Preventing Harm to Developing Nations

This image, followed by more images later in the paper, helped to drive home the gravity of the problem.
An informative first page

Associations between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Depression for Women Enrolled in Utah's Family Employment Program
Chris Cambron, MSW
April 17, 2012

Background: Recent research examining the relationship of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and depressive disorders has determined that strength of associations between ACEs and both recent and lifetime depression increase as an individual reports more ACEs. Therefore, ACEs can be said to increase the risk for depression (Chapman et al., 2004). The current study examined the relationship of three types of self-reported adverse childhood experience (emotional, physical and sexual abuse) to depression. Current research connecting childhood abuse to poorer adult economic outcomes prompted an investigation into the relationship between ACEs and mental health barriers to employment.

Methods: Data were gathered from a retrospective study of 1,444 men and women enrolled in Utah's Family Employment Program (FEP) being surveyed as part of a study by the Social Research Institute (SRI) at the University of Utah and the Department of Workforce Services (DWS). Males, individuals without complete demographic information and individuals under 18 were excluded from analyses. ACEs, lifetime depression and mental health barriers to employment were assessed by responses to a self-report questionnaire. Current depression was assessed by a standardized instrument. Education, age and race were controlled for in all models.

Results: 50% of women indicate lifetime depression and 54% indicated current depression. 65% indicated some form of abuse (emotional, physical or sexual) before the age of 18 with 21% reporting two types of abuse and 26% reporting three types of abuse. Logistic regression was used to estimate odds ratios for increased risk of depression by number of experiences and type of abuse. Reporting emotional abuse increased the risk of depression by 2.2 times for current depression and 2.4 times for lifetime depression after controlling for physical and sexual abuse. Reporting any one form of abuse increased the risk for current depression by 2.0 times and lifetime depression by 2.3 times. Reporting any two forms of abuse increased risk for current depression by 2.5 times and lifetime depression by 2.3 times. Reporting three types of abuse increased risk of current depression by 3.5 times and lifetime depression by 4.0 times. Secondary analyses indicated that 20% of the sample report mental health as their biggest barrier to finding employment. Logistic regression was used to estimate the odds of reporting mental health as the biggest barrier to employment by number and type of abuse experiences. Reporting emotional abuse increased odds of mental health barriers by 2.0 times; reporting sexual abuse increased odds of mental health barriers by 1.4 times. Reporting any one form of abuse increased the odds of mental health barriers by 1.7 times. Reporting any two forms of abuse increased odds of mental health barriers by 2.3 times. Reporting three types of abuse increased risk odds of mental health barriers by 4.1 times. Summaries of all regression models are presented in the appendix.

Conclusions: Results indicate an individual and cumulative relationship between experiences of childhood abuse and increased risk of both current and lifetime depression for women enrolled in FEP in Utah. Section I provides a literature review of abuse and depression, primary regression model results and a comparison
Executive summaries are useful

This was a unique, appealing summary format. An executive summary focuses busy people on the most important findings, then they can decide if they want to read the details. Reality is that policymakers won’t likely read long reports, so this becomes necessary.
Another executive summary

This was an unusual style of executive summary, and it was quite helpful to have the main findings highlighted alongside a description of the paper’s sections.
Organization: a table of contents is helpful, although not required.

Table of Contents

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Performance Pay in America
- Performance Pay in Utah
- Performance Pay Models
- Does Performance Pay Work?
- Opinions on Performance Pay – Teachers, Administrators, and School Personnel
- What are other states doing?
- Crucial Design Components for Performance Pay
- Is Performance Pay Right for Utah?
- Conclusion
- References

Background - provide some history, context

Evaluation of potential policies and whether they have a record of success

Examples from other jurisdictions

Extrapolate from earlier analysis to design recommendations

Make recommendations and conclude
Summarize background detail with graphs and tables

Non-Motorist Commuters

Non-motorists are defined as persons not in or upon a motor vehicle and consist of walking pedestrians, bicyclists, individuals in wheel chairs or motorized personal conveyances, skateboarders and others. Non-motorists represent a significant proportion of the traveling public. In 2005, the Federal Highway Administration estimated that 107.4 million (31%) individuals living in the United States used walking as a regular mode of travel on an average of three days per week, and 62 million (20%) used bicycling as a regular mode of travel on an average of 13 days per week. The United States Census Bureau reported that from 2006-2010, an estimated 2.8% of workers age 16 and older walked to work, and that 2.4% (2,443,307) of male commuters and 3.1% (2,022,618) of female commuters walked or bicycled to work. Figure 1 shows age group percentages of those walking to work from 2006-2010. Among those who walked to work during this period, the largest age group is those age 25-44 (36%).

Table 1. Percentage of Bicyclist Fatalities in Relation to Land Use, Non-Motorist Location and Time of Day, 2009-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Bicyclists Killed</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Land Use</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Motorist Location</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersection</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Intersection</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time of Day</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midnight–3:59am</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4am–7:59am</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8am–11:59am</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noon–3:59pm</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4pm–7:59pm</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8pm–11:59pm</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recent investigations have also begun to assess the impact of individual distraction on non-motorist safety. In particular, these assessments explore how non-motorist distraction from portable electronic device use (including cell phones and mp3 players) contributes to accidents.
Matrices can help illustrate analysis

A matrix can be a tremendous tool to summarize analysis that you’ve already written in longer form. It draws attention back to the most important elements of your written analysis and provides a framework for comparing and relating policy components to one another.

### Table 4- Crucial Performance Pay Design Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design Component</th>
<th>Optimal Outcome</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual or Group Bonuses?</td>
<td>There are sound arguments for both individual and group bonuses and experts remain undecided. In addition, both structures have produced positive results.</td>
<td>In light of this, policy makers should remain flexible on the issue and allow stakeholders to decide the incentive structure they prefer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentive Size</td>
<td>Here again there are mixed results. Small, widely dispersed bonuses and large, minimally dispersed bonuses have both proven to be effective and have strong theoretical underpinnings.</td>
<td>Again, in light of this, policy makers should remain flexible on the issue and allow stakeholders to decide the incentive structure they prefer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base Pay</td>
<td>The teacher base pay must remain fair and sustainable. For most teachers, base pay will remain the extent of their yearly salary.</td>
<td>Performance pay is not designed as a cost saving measure. Policy makers should not withdraw funds from the base pay in order to provide bonuses to high performing teachers. Bonuses must come from an additional, sustainable fund.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design process</td>
<td>Involve ALL stakeholders in design. This includes teachers, administrators, school board members, school personnel, and community members.</td>
<td>Effective communication during the design process is paramount. It is highly recommended that all stakeholders be given a “best practices” presentation to begin the design with the same information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Measuring teacher performance | - Both teachers and policy makers must recognize that standardized tests are pervasive and will likely be a part of any performance pay plan  
- Using value-added measurement of test scores is advisable as it provides an equitable base-line for student achievement improvement | The primary concern among teachers and administrators is how their performance will be measured. With this in mind, it is crucial that policy makers use sound measurement strategies as well as transparent mechanisms. This is the most important aspect of creating a successful program. |
Another great example of a matrix. In this case, the student was using a type of matrix for evaluating potential outcomes of several policy choices. This method is highly recommended and works surprisingly well in reinforcing your analysis.

A great example can be found in: *A Policy Analysis of the BC Salmon Fishery* by Schwindt, Vining, and Weimer. I’ve placed a copy of that paper on Canvas.
This matrix worked well for PowerPoint

If you have a complicated matrix in your print document, don’t try to reproduce it for PowerPoint. Either find a way to break it into smaller pieces or summarize it in some way that is digestible on screen.
An interesting format with pullout quotes

According to the above Figure 3, about 2.3 million short tons of e-waste were ready for end-of-life management in 2009. While about 75 percent of e-waste is disposed of in U.S. landfills or stored by households to be handled at a later date, the EPA estimates that about 25 percent of these tons were collected for recycling. The 2009 figures are in addition to an estimated 5 million tons of e-waste stockpiled in American homes still awaiting end-of-life management.\(^n\)

The pullout quotes are a useful tool for busy readers like policymakers. This format was actually borrowed from the Legislative Auditor’s Office, where this student worked.
Sometimes images can bring power to your words, making your analysis much more tangible to the reader. In this case, the student took a little road trip to some of the worst old schools in Utah and included photos in her paper and final presentation.
And now... the nice schools in the more wealthy communities. The contrasts in these photos made this paper’s analysis really come to life.
A case study can help illustrate the need for policy solutions

Case study: A Utah community active in wildfire prevention programs and planning

A series of questions were discussed with the homeowners that were based on current literature studies focusing on resident’s attitudes towards the aesthetics, neighborhood attachment, cost, educational programs, personal responsibility and trust in management agencies. These questions are part of a larger survey being developed for all residents in communities at-risk to develop a survey response database that is similar to what has been conducted in various research studies.

**Big Cottonwood Canyon (BCC): 250 cabins, 230 condominiums**

Prior to the development of the CWPP, there was very little in the form of an organized plan that addressed wildfire prevention or evacuation in the event of a fire. Presently, the plan consists of more than just fuels reduction projects, it addresses all aspects that wildfire may impact. Most people seem to mainly think of defensible space as the purpose of CWPPs, but the plan also discusses topics such as address signs, road signs, fire hydrants, evacuation routes, etc.

**Aesthetics**

Similar to what other studies have shown, community members originally did not want to...
Video can be a nice touch in final presentation

Be careful to keep it short, relevant, and practice with it to avoid technical hiccups. It may be easier to not embed it in the slideshow and just switch to it when needed.
Surveys can be great to define problems or seek solutions.

This student sought out officials in state agencies and large cities and phoned them, asking if they’d take a short online survey using Survey Monkey. 49 officials completed it.
Maps often show regional patterns

A map can be a great visual tool in your paper or your slideshow presentation. More than a list of states with similar policies, it can help illustrate geographic trends/likenesses/differences that may be uniquely relevant to the policy decisions you are analyzing.
Maps can be particularly useful when the subject state stands out as an outlier, either within its region or compared to the entire nation.
Find clear ways to display complicated data

Comparison of Odds Ratios

- 3 ACEs
  - Lifetime
  - Current

- 2 ACEs
  - Lifetime
  - Current

- 1 ACE
  - Lifetime
  - Current

Adjusted Odds Ratios & Confidence Intervals
If you choose to do a project with complicated statistical methods, work very closely with your faculty advisor(s) to ensure you fully understand the methods and the conclusions you can legitimately make from such methods. And know that it’s OK if you run your analysis and find that your hypothesis isn’t clearly justified.
Try out some creative graphics

- Maybe you can make some infographics with your data.
- Maybe, like this, you can create an illustration that shows how a process works.
- Elements of this graphic were used to identify main sections of the report.
Simple but useful graphics for screen presentation

In your final presentation, simple formats are often best. Avoid crowding the slides with too much information. This student did an exceptional job of finding ways to illustrate her points with simple, appealing design.
# Grading the final paper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Criteria</th>
<th>Points Possible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantial policy content</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong methodology and analysis</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual appeal and writing style</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall score (40% of course grade)</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other guidelines

• Final paper length: around 15-25 pages, single-spaced, but not a hard rule

• Definitely document sources well
  • Choose APA, MLA, or Chicago Style references. Any convention is acceptable, although I think APA and MLA are more academic and less appealing to policymakers.

• If doing policy analysis, it’s helpful to use the Bardach method (borrow the book, A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving, if you don’t have it):
  • Definition of a public policy problem
  • Evidence of the problem (data to back up your definition)
  • Alternative ideas for addressing the problem
  • Criteria for judging the alternatives
  • Projection of outcomes from the various alternatives and description of trade-offs among them
  • A recommendation of a preferred solution or set of solutions
Other guidelines...

- Even if not doing classic policy analysis, conclude with specific policy recommendations if at all possible
- Final presentation: about 15 minutes, presented with PowerPoint, Prezi, or a similar medium.
  - If using something other than PowerPoint, make a PDF of the presentation to turn in
- Avoid making your presentation too cluttered
- Don’t put every word on the screen that you plan to speak (I can’t emphasize this enough! The slideshow is to aid us in focusing on your concepts, not to be your teleprompter.)
- Face and engage the audience - resist turning and looking at your slides. Place your computer in front of you to aid this.
- Roughly one to one-and-a-half slide(s) per minute - that would mean 15-22 slides for 15 minutes