



MPA in Data Science for Public Policy

Optional Summer Reading

Leading up to the start of the MPA in DSPP programme, you may be thinking about taking on some preparatory reading. If so, that's great, but it's also fine if you decide not to review the below. I would rather you arrived rested and full of energy from the summer than not!

If you do want some suggestions, we've put together a short list. The first batch is keyed to your first-year core courses. A second batch is a little broader, spanning everything from philosophy and ethics to why a pivot to an entirely new career path (within public policy, of course) may be better than sticking with your existing path. For each category, we recommend just a few books—some are **lighter 'holiday' selections** while others are **somewhat more technical (but still accessible) selections**.

We've inserted Amazon hyperlinks for all readings, only because the Amazon listings often provide longer/better excerpts to give you the flavour of the texts. There is no obligation to purchase these books. You can also explore less expensive used copies at <https://www.abebooks.co.uk/> or a similar distributor in your home country. Or better still, cut out the intermediary and head straight to your local (used) bookstore.

In addition to these reading suggestions, scroll down and you'll find a short list of recommended podcasts.

One last suggestion before you join us: try to get in the habit of reading actively, as opposed to passively or 'just' recreationally. To help with this, we've included a few active reading tips. These should make it easier for you to translate your reading over the next two years into more effective argumentation and a strong, authorial voice.

Again, there's absolutely no pressure to read any of our suggestions (not even passively!) before you arrive!

Best wishes,

Alexander Evans

School of Public Policy

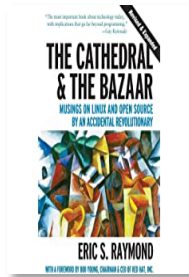
Some Tips on Practicing 'Active Reading'

This programme is intensive, and throughout the programme we'll be asking you to get to grips with a large body of literature—with several different literatures, actually. It might seem overwhelming at first, but there are some simple techniques you can use to help you to get more out of whatever it is you're reading, and to get through it faster. Here are five tips:

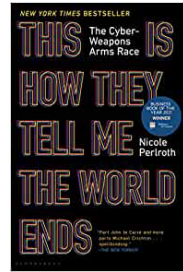
Here are five tips:

- 1. Try to have a good idea about why you are reading something and what you hope to find out.** Ask yourself what it is you think you know about the subject, and what you don't know and are looking to find out from the text. If you can establish a set of rational and emotional expectations right off the bat, you are more likely to engage with whatever it is you're reading.
- 2. Get an overview of the 'big picture' before you begin your reading in depth.** Give yourself a few minutes to find the essential argument in the first or last pages of a book ... or the back cover! The contents page may also help you decipher the narrative flow.
- 3. Think creatively about how to record, and remember, what you've just read.** After you finish a book chapter or article, see if you can write down a 'strapline' for it—a summary that captures the essence of what the chapter or article was saying—using no more than 140 characters. Can you encapsulate the argument in a 2x2 matrix? Can you render it graphically?
- 4. Write or speak your notes in your own words.** After you read a text, put it aside and try to compose your notes independently, without looking back at what you had jotted down while you were reading. You may occasionally want to write out a quotation verbatim, but copying large amounts of text is passive behaviour. Try to avoid this.
- 5. The 20:1 rule: For every 20 minutes you spend internalising a text, try to spend at least 1 minute externalising it.** If you spend a couple of hours reading two chapters of a book, find a way to spend at least 6 minutes talking to yourself (or someone else) about what you have read.

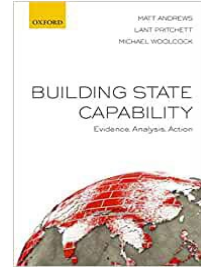
Programme Director Recommendations



Eric S. Raymond, *The Cathedral and the Bazaar* (2001)



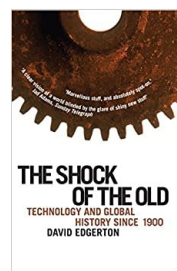
Nicole Perleth, *This is how they tell me the world ends* (2021)



Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett and Michael Woolcock, *Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action* (2017)



David McCandless, *Beautiful News* (2022)

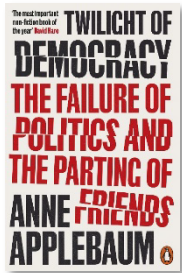


David Egerton, *Shock of the Old* (2011)



Harvard Business Review article by Jennifer Petriglieri - [How Dual-Career Couples Make It Work](#) (2019)

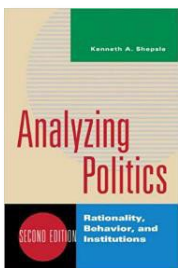
PP478 - Political Science for Public Policy



Anne Applebaum (2021) *Twilight of Democracy: The Failure of Politics and the Parting of Friends*, (Penguin) [HOLIDAY READ]

- A terrific historian's insider-account of the rise of right-wing authoritarianism. She is a seriously smart thinker, and a wonderful prose stylist as well.

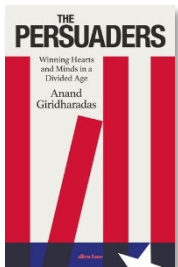
Watch [Anne Applebaum](#) reflect on how the war in Ukraine has been going and what we can expect in the future.



Ken Shepsle (2010) *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*, (Norton & Company) [TECHNICAL READ]

- Explains how 'rational choice' methods can help structure our thinking about political institutions.
- Shepsle provides us with a set of critical tools for analysing any political problem. We'll be applying—and adapting—these tools together in PP478. But be warned: these are not the only set of critical tools out there. Let the debate(s) begin!

Watch [Ken Shepsle](#) explain what it takes to be a great leader.

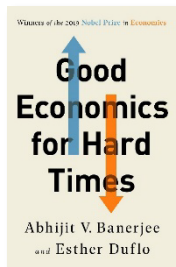


Anand Giridharadas (2023) *The Persuaders: Winning Hearts and Minds in a Divided Age*, (Vintage Books) [HOLIDAY READ]

- The author takes us inside today's culture wars and explains how our societies have lost the ability to resolve the disagreements that divide us.

Watch [Anand Giridharadas](#) try to persuade us to buy his new book.

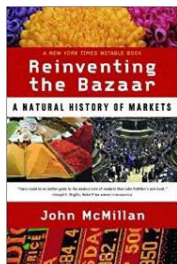
PP440 - Micro & Macro Economics for Public Policy



Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo (2021) *Good Economics for Hard Times*, (PublicAffairs) [HOLIDAY READ]

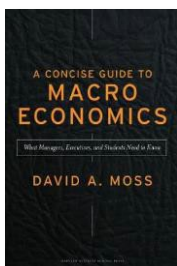
- Learn why Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee believe the world already has the resources it needs to tackle our biggest economic problems. And – but! – why we won't solve any of them until we first reorient (and improve) the discipline of economics. Coming from two recent recipients of the Nobel Prize in, uh, Economics, those are fighting words. This short, well-written book will introduce you to the debate – to both sides, not just the authors'.
- Substantive topics overlap with many of the issues you'll be debating yourselves in PP440, from the impact of trade liberalization to the causes of economic growth. They're also very good on international migration and climate change, and on why global development may not 'take a village' after all, not when the villagers hate each other!

Watch [Esther Duflo](#) discuss her research in a talk at the LSE hosted by Robin Burgess.



John McMillan (2003) *Reinventing the Bazaar: A Natural History of Markets*, (Norton & Company) [HOLIDAY READ]

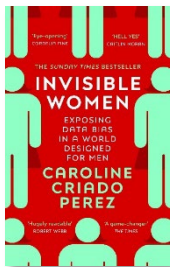
- Brings economics to life with stories of the evolution of markets around the globe.
- Will get you thinking about market dynamics and how—for better or worse—they move the world.



David Moss (2014) *A Concise Guide to Macroeconomics: What Managers, Executives and Students Need to Know*, (Harvard Business Review Press) [TECHNICAL READ]

- A highly accessible guide to macro nuts-and-bolts loaded with practical applications.
- The book's chapters are arranged by key 'macro-things' all managers should understand.

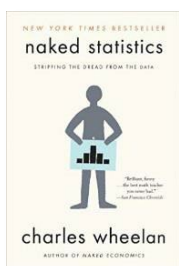
PP455 - Quantitative Approaches & Policy Analysis



Caroline Criado Perez (2019) *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, (Vintage) [HOLIDAY READ]

- Before you start (or re-start) running regressions, it's worth taking a harder look—an uncomfortable look—at the data you'll be crunching. Where does your numbers come from? Might they be biased in some funda-*men*-tal way?

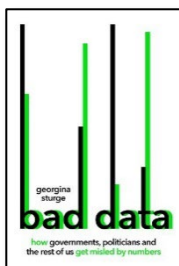
Watch [Caroline Criado Perez](#) expose the gender data gap.



Charles Wheelan (2013) *Naked Statistics*, (Norton & Company) [HOLIDAY READ]

- Grounded in theory, but eminently readable. Take it to the beach!
- If you like the way Wheelan undresses statistics, you should [see him strip down economics](#).

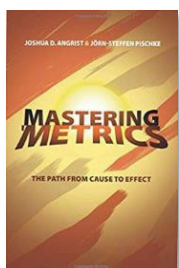
Watch [Charlie Wheelan](#) tell the story of how he came to write this book.



Georgina Sturge (2022) *Bad Data: How Governments, Politicians and the Rest of Us Get Misled by Numbers*, (Little Brown) [HOLIDAY READ]

- Back to the data: Another cautionary tale, beautifully illustrated with—big surprise—lots of data

Check out [Georgina Sturge's](#) gorgeous graphic using data to illustrate where refugees to the UK have been coming from since the early '90s.

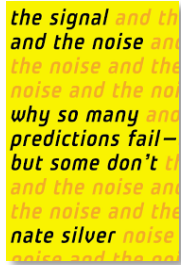


Joshua B. Angrist & Jörn-Steffen Pischke (2014) *Mastering Metrics: The Path from Cause to Effect*, (Princeton University Press) [TECHNICAL READ]

- This book's chapters cover the key elements of econometrics. It's a bit more technical than the previous selections. Don't worry if some of the material is too challenging. You'll get there!

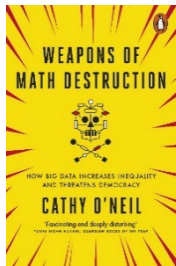
Watch [Joshua Angrist](#) defending econometrics, and here's his [instructive cartoon](#) explaining how to master it.

PP422 – Data Science for Public Policy



Nate Silver (2012) [The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail - But Some Don't](#)

- Nate Silver, the founder of 538, the website best known for predicting US electoral outcomes. The book provides a readable, non-technical introduction to key concepts in data science and the challenges of making accurate predictions (with examples from fields like politics, economics and sport). It stresses the importance model limitations and the need for good judgment when working with data.



Cathy O'Neil (2016) [Weapons of Math Destruction](#)

- Cathy is a Bloomberg columnist, mathematician and data scientist.
- This is a nontechnical, readable and provocative (perhaps even political) book that highlights the ethical and social implications of data science. It highlights how algorithms and machine learning can perpetuate and amplify existing biases and discrimination in areas like criminal justice, education, and employment. The book also offers some policy recommendations.