Evidence for Decisions:
From Descriptions to Decisions   **COURSE A OUTLINE**

Descriptive evidence is essential to understanding issues and making informed decisions. This course equips you with methods and skills to help understand the world, from descriptions to decisions. You will learn to leverage descriptive evidence, use analytical methods for complex problem-solving, and weigh net benefits of decisions. The course focuses on systematic methods to analyze choices and trade-offs of policy options.

	Topic	Content	Assignments
Week 1	**Understanding the World**	Primer on the basics of descriptive evidence and basic descriptive statistics Five principles for use of descriptive evidence	**Individual assignments** • Descriptive data assignment • Discussion **Group assignments** • Synchronous hour meeting • Group data comparison
Week 2	**Tradeoffs: Making Decisions Under Scarcity**	Economic models as a way to simplify and understand the world Modeling and reasoning about individual tradeoffs with graphs to visualize production, preferences, indifference, and optimal choice Modeling societal tradeoffs with external effects	**Individual assignments** • Quiz • Discussion **Group assignments** • Synchronous hour meeting • Group exercise
Week 3	**Tradeoffs: Mexico Pensions Case**	Making tradeoffs for a social program under scarce resources Analysis of data and options for social program targeting, and additional considerations of efficiency, feasibility, logistics, and politics Tool: Leakage and undercoverage rate calculations	**Individual assignments** • Case analysis • Quiz **Group assignments** • Synchronous hour meeting • Group case analysis

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Week 4	**Making Decisions as Individuals**	The role of uncertainty in making decisions and how asymmetric information plays a part in uncertainty Decision analysis and factors of options, probabilities, and payoffs Tool: Decision trees	**Individual assignments** • Decision analysis assignment • Discussion **Group assignments** • Synchronous hour meeting • Group decision analysis
Week 5	**Making Decisions for Policy**	Allocation of scarce resources for citizen wellbeing and policy tradeoffs Behavioral uncertainties of target populations Tool: Decision trees	**Individual assignments** • Cumulative test - 3 parts, timed • Case analysis **Group assignments** • Synchronous hour meeting • Group case analysis
Week 6	**Weighing Costs and Benefits of Decisions**	Quantifying the impact of a program or policy Distribution of costs and benefits for a global problem Tool: Cost-benefit analysis	**Individual assignments** • Quiz • Discussion **Group assignments** • Synchronous hour meeting • Group test part 3

Materials

All course materials will be provided each week, including videos, readings, and assignment templates.

This course uses global examples from across sectors to help you develop your capacity for descriptive evidence. Examples include Mexico pensions for the elderly, Oregon Medicaid insurance, global education data, and net benefits of a US energy policy.

Scoring

Course performance is not assigned a letter grade, but instead a designation of Pass or No Pass. Approximately the top 10% of the course (not necessarily those who score above 90%) are recognized with Pass with Distinction.

40%: Individual Assignments & Quizzes
20%: Cumulative Test
20%: Group Assignments
10%: Case Analysis Companions
5%: Discussion Posts
5%: Feedback Surveys

Course Policies

See onlinelearning.hks.harvard.edu for full FAQs.