

Evaluation and the causal revolution

Session 1

PMAP 8521: Program evaluation
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies

Plan for today

Data science and public service

Evidence, evaluation, and causation

Class details

Data science and public service

Data and government



THE U.S. DIGITAL SERVICE



DJ Patil

**"To responsibly
unleash the
power of data to
benefit all
Americans"**

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

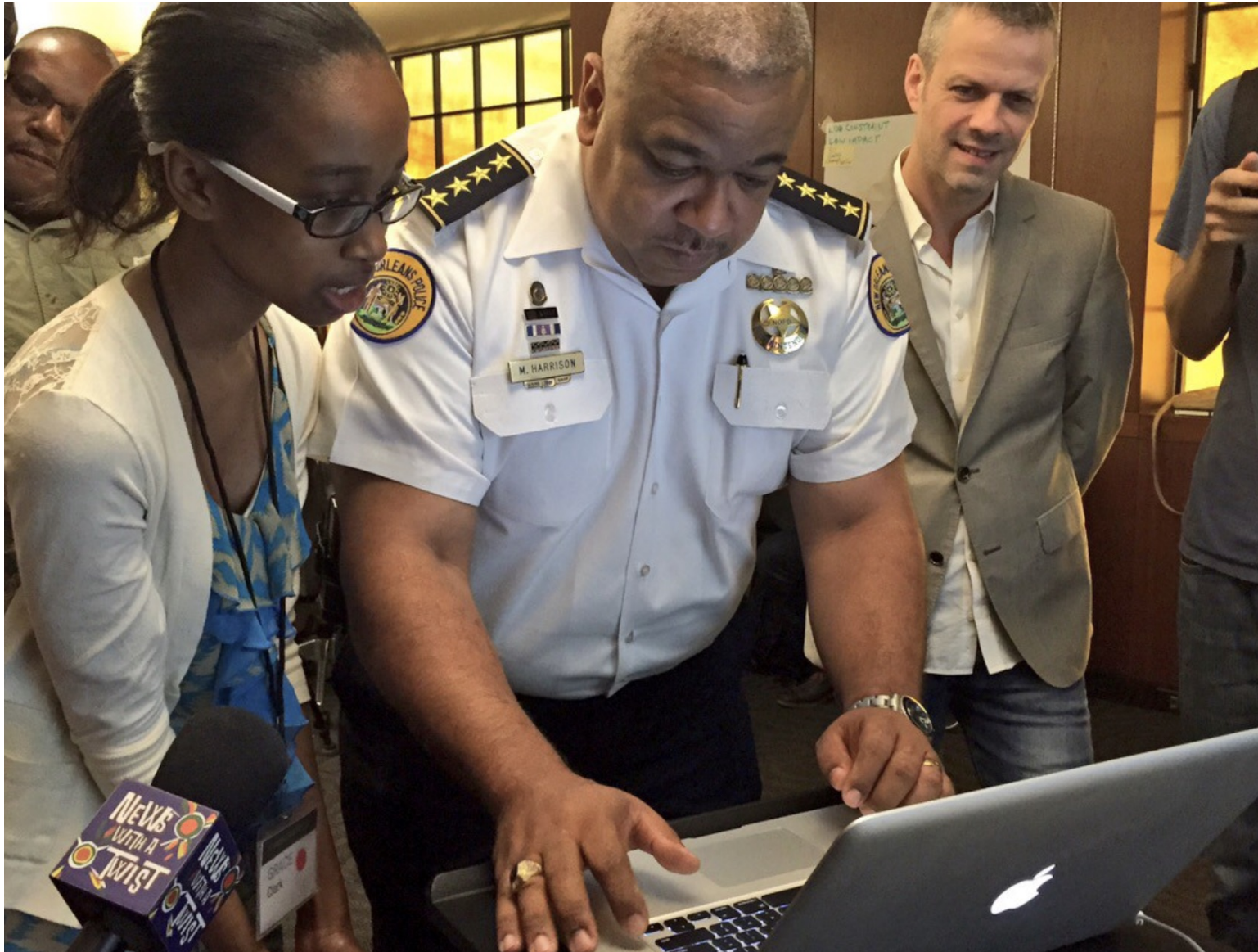
June 30, 2016

FACT SHEET: Launching the Data-Driven Justice Initiative: Disrupting the Cycle of Incarceration

“[O]ur criminal justice system isn’t as smart as it should be. It’s not keeping us as safe as it should be. It is not as fair as it should be.

Mass incarceration makes our country worse off, and we need to do something about it.” –

President Barack Obama, July 14, 2015



U.S. CITY OPEN DATA CENSUS
























































































































POWERED BY OPEN DATA CENSUS

| Rank | Place | Budget | Crime Reports | Parcels | Construction Permits | Zoning | Service Requests | Code Violations | Employee Salaries | Business Listings | Spending | Restaurant Inspections | Public Facilities | Traffic Crashes | Property Assessment | Procurement Contracts | Emergency Calls | Lobbyist Activity | Police Use-of-Force | Website Analytics | Property Transfers | Score | |
|------|-------------------------------|--------|---------------|----------------|----------------------|--------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------|-----|
| 1 | Cincinnati, OH | █ | █ | █ ¹ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | + Add | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | 94% | |
| 2 | Las Vegas, NV | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | + Add | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | + Add | █ | █ | 89% | |
| 3 | San Francisco, CA | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ ¹ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | + Add | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | 85% | |
| 4 | Virginia Beach, VA | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | + Add | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | + Add | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | 79% | |
| 5 | Baton Rouge/E.B.R. Parish, LA | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | + Add | █ | █ | + Add | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | + Add | █ | 78% |

0%
Open

0%
Score

Breakdown

| Dataset | Breakdown | Year | Score | |
|------------------------|--|------|-------|---|
| Budget |       | | |  |
| Business Listings |       | | |  |
| Code Violations |       | | |  |
| Construction Permits |       | | |  |
| Crime Reports |       | | |  |
| Emergency Calls |       | | |  |
| Employee Salaries |       | | |  |
| Lobbyist Activity |       | | |  |
| Parcels |       | | |  |
| Police Use-of-Force |       | | |  |
| Procurement Contracts |       | | |  |
| Property Assessment |       | | |  |
| Property Transfers |       | | |  |
| Public Facilities |       | | |  |
| Restaurant Inspections |       | | |  |
| Service Requests |       | | |  |
| Spending |       | | |  |

Google Dataset Search Beta

Search for Datasets



Try [boston education data](#) or [weather site:noaa.gov](#)

Google Dataset Search

Q salt lake city



Salt Lake City Police Department
moto.data.socrata.com
Updated Aug 26, 2018

Salt Lake City Police Department

[moto.data.socrata.com](#)

254 scholarly articles cite this dataset ([View in Google Scholar](#))



Precipitation Depth Table from Salt Lake City Zoo Station
www.hydroshare.org

Dataset created Dec 2, 2015
Dataset updated Aug 26, 2018
Dataset published Dec 2, 2015



Data from: Case Outcomes Following Investigative Interviews of Suspected...
www.icpsr.umich.edu
datamed.org

Available download formats from providers
CSV , RSSXML , RDFXML , XML

Description

Salt Lake City Police Department incident dataset

**How do you use all this data
to make the world better?**

**Analyze it and
uncover insights!**

(and take this class!)

What is "statistics"?

Collecting and analyzing data from a representative sample in order to make inferences about a whole population

What is "data science"?

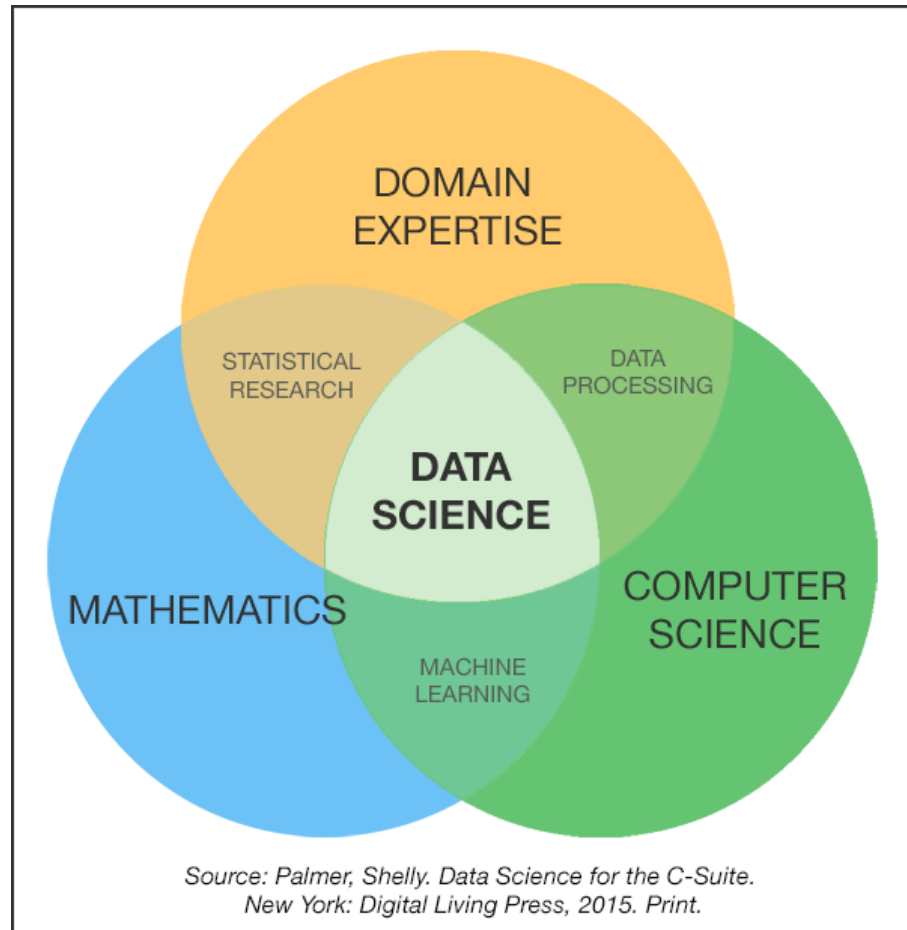
Turning raw data into
understanding, insight,
and knowledge

Collect

Analyze

Communicate

What's the difference?



Collect

Analyze

Communicate

What is "program evaluation"?

Measuring the effect of
social programs on society

Data science
(data + statistics +
communication)

Causal inference
(DAGs + econometrics)

Evidence, evaluation, and causation

Evidence-based medicine



Modern evidence-based medicine

**Apply evidence to clinical
treatment decisions**

**Move away from clinical judgment
and "craft knowledge"**

Is this good?

Evidence-based policy

RAND health insurance study

Oregon Medicaid expansion

HUD's Moving to Opportunity

Tennessee STAR

Policy evidence industry

Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL)

Campbell Collaboration

Should we have evidence for every policy or program?

No!

Science vs. art/craft/intuition



Ellie Murray

@EpiEllie

Follow



IF U DONT SMOKE,
 U ALREADY
 BELIEVE IN
 CAUSAL INFERENCE
 WITHOUT
 RANDOMIZED TRIALS



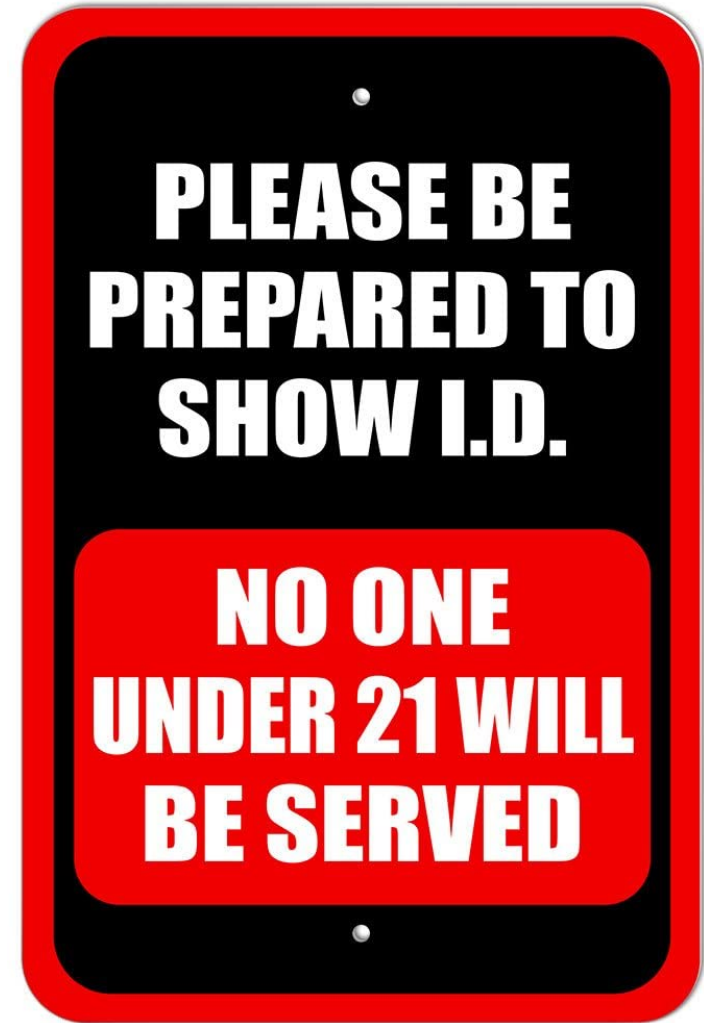
#HistorianSignBunny #Epidemiology

10:13 PM - 12 Jul 2018

200 Retweets 612 Likes



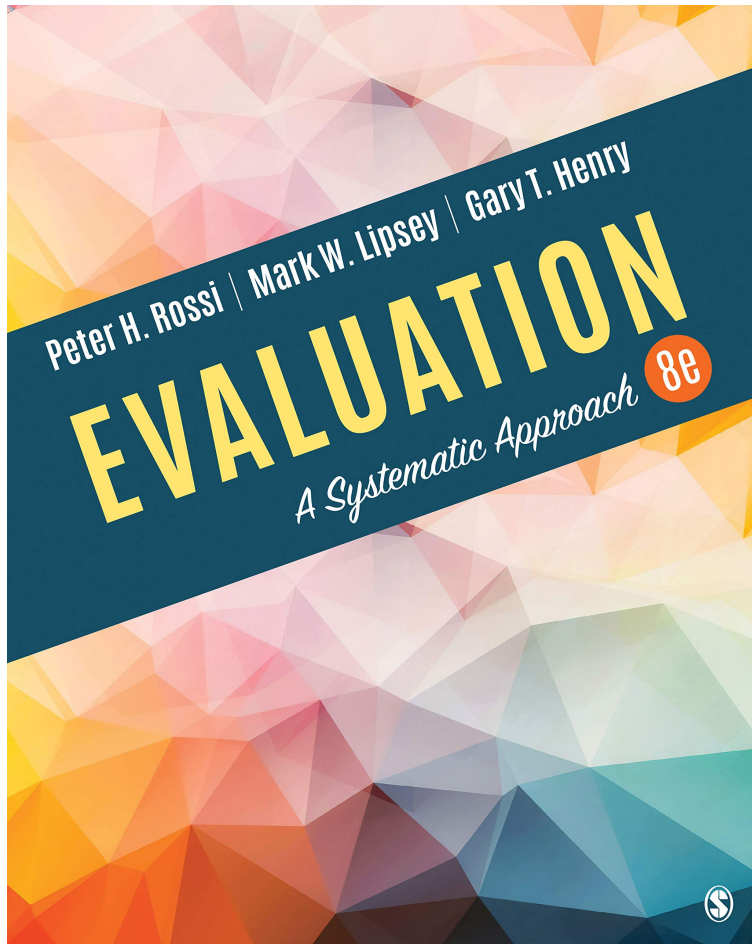
29 200 612



Where does program evaluation fit with all this?

**It's a method for collecting evidence
for policies and programs**

Types of evaluation



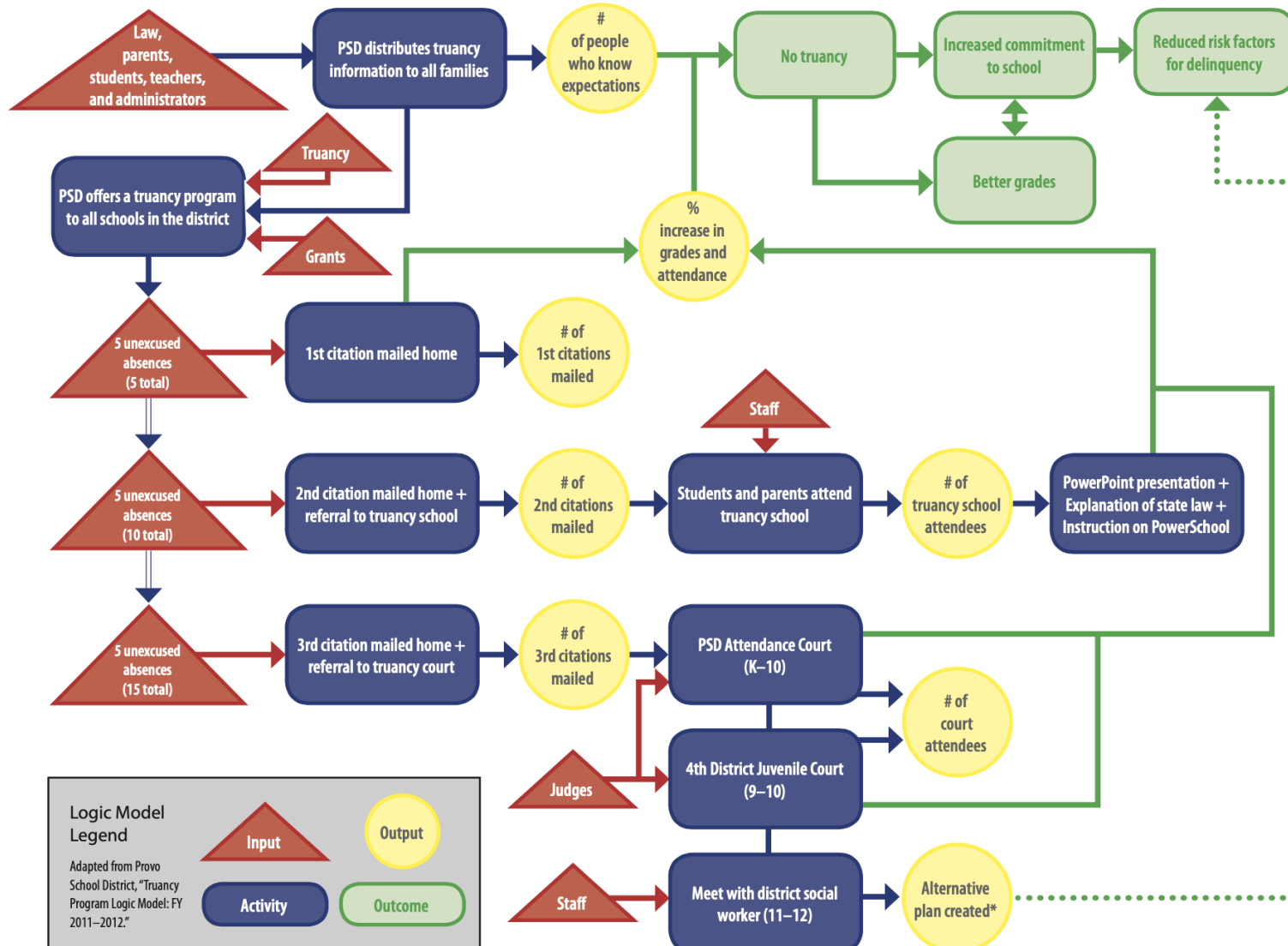
Needs assessment

Design and
theory assessment

Process evaluation
and monitoring

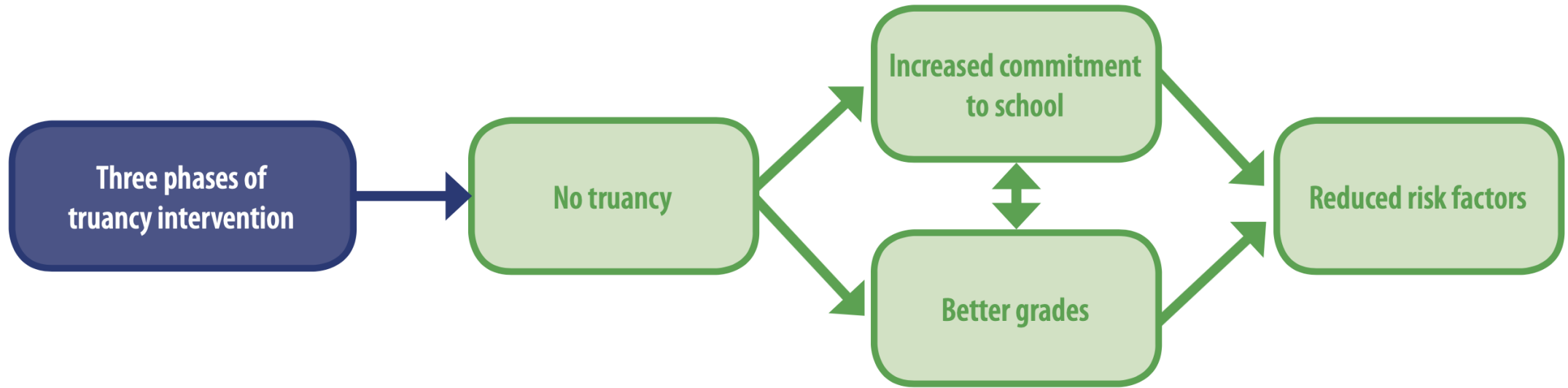
Impact evaluation

Efficiency evaluation (CBA)



* Because 11th and 12th graders who receive 3rd citations are generally unable to graduate from high school, district social workers no longer attempt to increase their commitment to school. As such, any outcomes that occur as a result of the alternative plans made for these students (work study programs, career development assistance, etc.) are only tangentially related to the outcomes of the truancy program itself. The system for creating alternative plans is an entirely separate program with its own logic model, goals, and outcomes.

Theories of change



Impact evaluation!

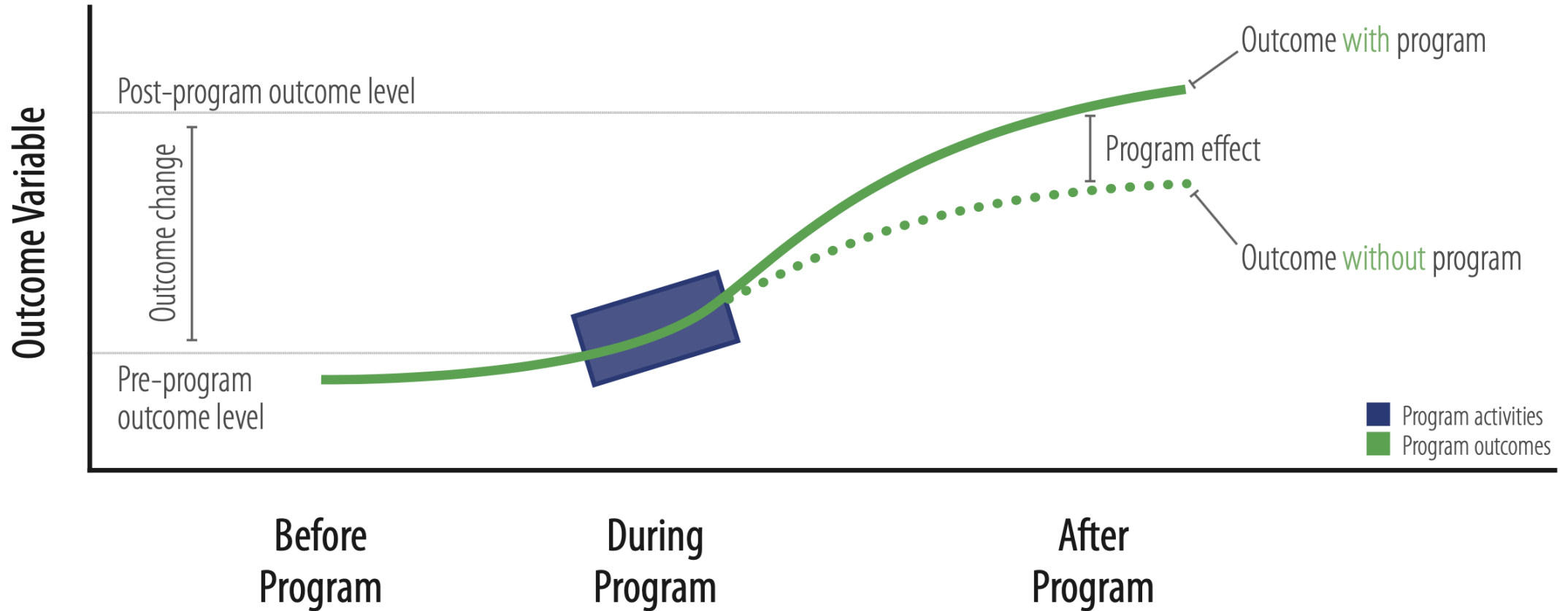
Impact Evaluation in Practice

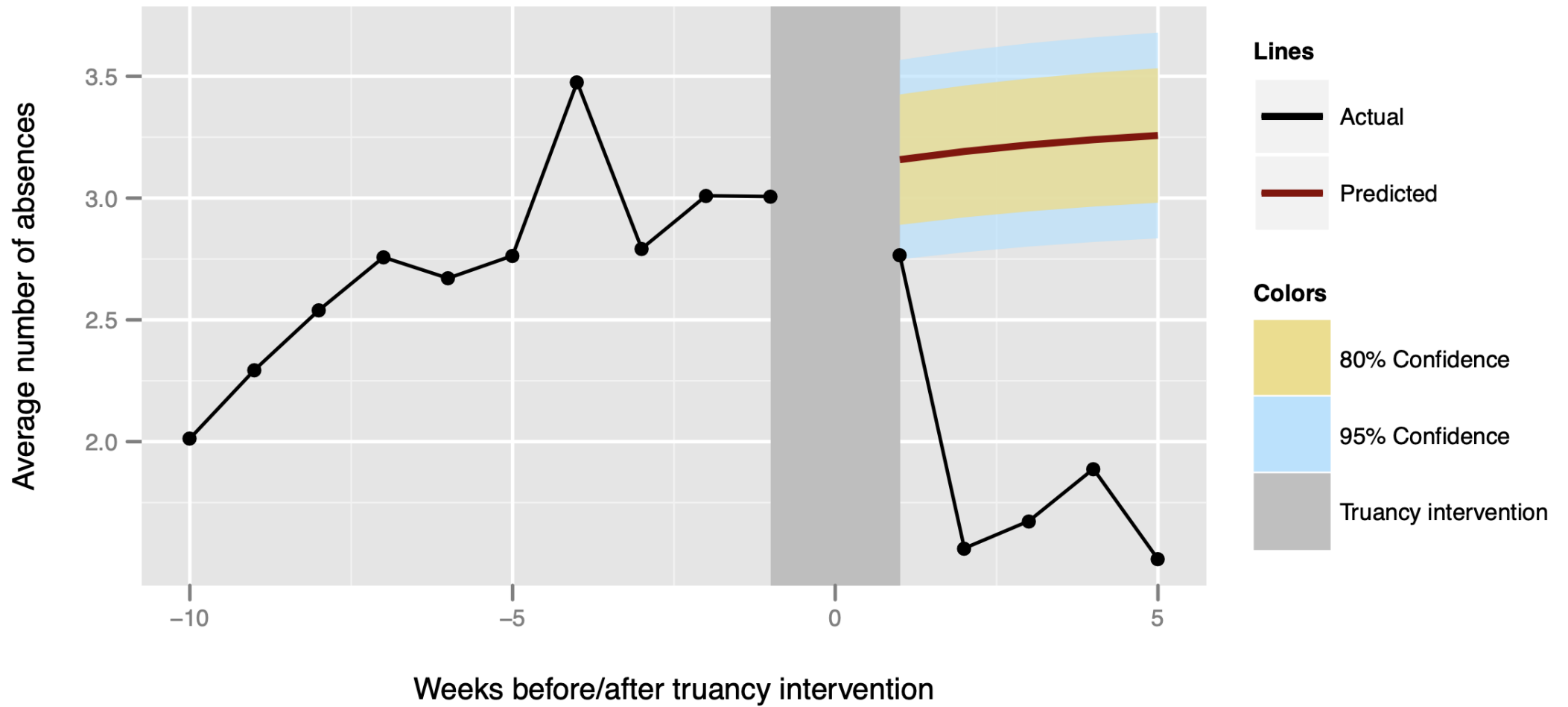
SECOND EDITION

Paul J. Gertler, Sebastian Martinez,
Patrick Premand, Laura B. Rawlings,
and Christel M. J. Vermeersch



Theory → impact





Godwin's law

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Godwin's law (or **Godwin's rule of Hitler analogies**)^{[1][2]} is an Internet **adage** asserting that "as an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a **comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches 1**".^{[2][3]} That is, if an online discussion (regardless of topic or scope) goes on long enough, sooner or later someone will compare someone or something to **Adolf Hitler** or his deeds, the point at which effectively the discussion or thread often ends.

Promulgated by the American attorney and author **Mike Godwin** in 1990,^[2] Godwin's law originally

Godwin's Law for statistics

**Correlation does not
imply causation**

Except when it does

**Even if it doesn't,
this phrase is useless
and kills discussion**



SCIENCE

The Internet Blowhard's Favorite Phrase

Why do people love to say that correlation does not imply causation?

By DANIEL ENGBER

OCT 02, 2012 • 8:33 AM

Not everyone found the news believable. “Facepalm. Correlation doesn’t imply causation,” wrote one unhappy Internet user. “That’s pretty much how I read this too... correlation is NOT causation,” agreed a Huffington Post superuser, seemingly distraught. “I was surprised not to find a discussion of correlation vs. causation,” cried someone at Hacker News. “Correlation does not mean causation,” a reader moaned at Slashdot. “There are so many variables here that it isn’t funny.”

Correlation vs. causation

How do we figure out correlation?

How do we figure out causation?

Correlation vs. causation

How do we figure out correlation?

Math and statistics

How do we figure out causation?

Correlation vs. causation

How do we figure out correlation?

Math and statistics

How do we figure out causation?

Philosophy. No math.



John B. Holbein @JohnHolbein1 · Apr 7
Causality isn't achieved; it's approached.



Show this thread



John B. Holbein @JohnHolbein1 · Apr 7
Causality isn't binary; it's a continuum.



Show this thread

How do we know if X causes Y?

X causes Y if...

**...we intervene and change X
without changing anything else...**

...and Y changes

Y "listens to" X

"A variable **X** is a cause of a variable **Y** if **Y** in any way relies on **X** for its value.... **X** is a cause of **Y** if **Y** listens to **X** and decides its value in response to what it hears"
(Pearl, Glymour, and Jewell 2016, 5–6)

Y doesn't necessarily listen only to **X**

A light switch causes a light to go on, but not if the bulb is burned out (no **Y** despite **X**), or if the light was already on (**Y** without **X**)

Causal relationships?

Lighting fireworks causes noise

Rooster crows cause the sunrise

Getting an MPA/MPP increases your earnings

**Colds go away a few days
after you take vitamin C**

Causation

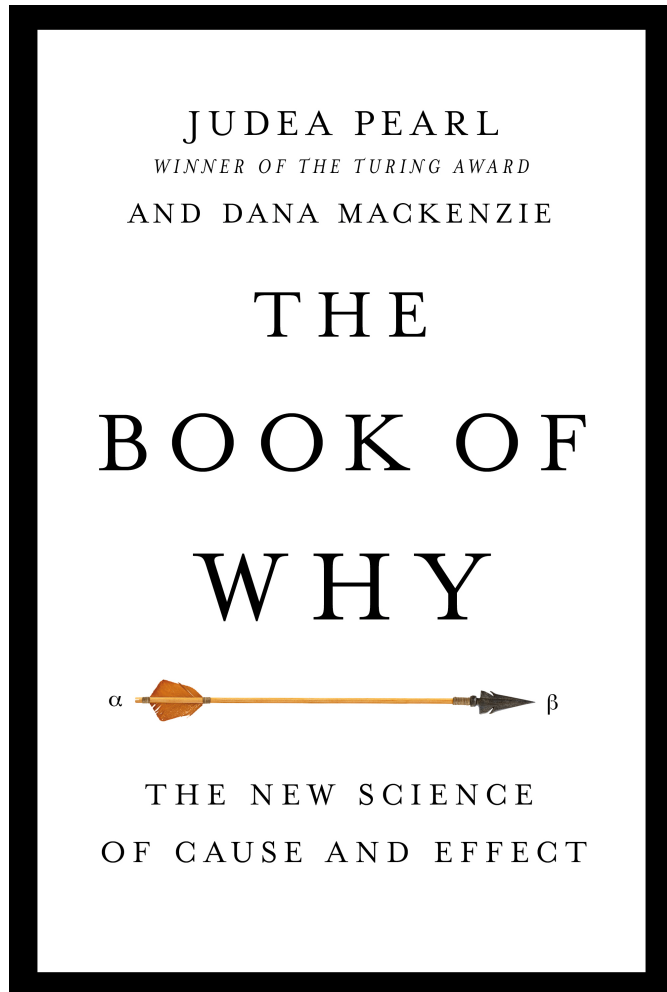
**Causation =
Correlation + time order +
nonspuriousness**

How do you know if you have it right?

You need a philosophical model

That's what this class is for!

The causal revolution



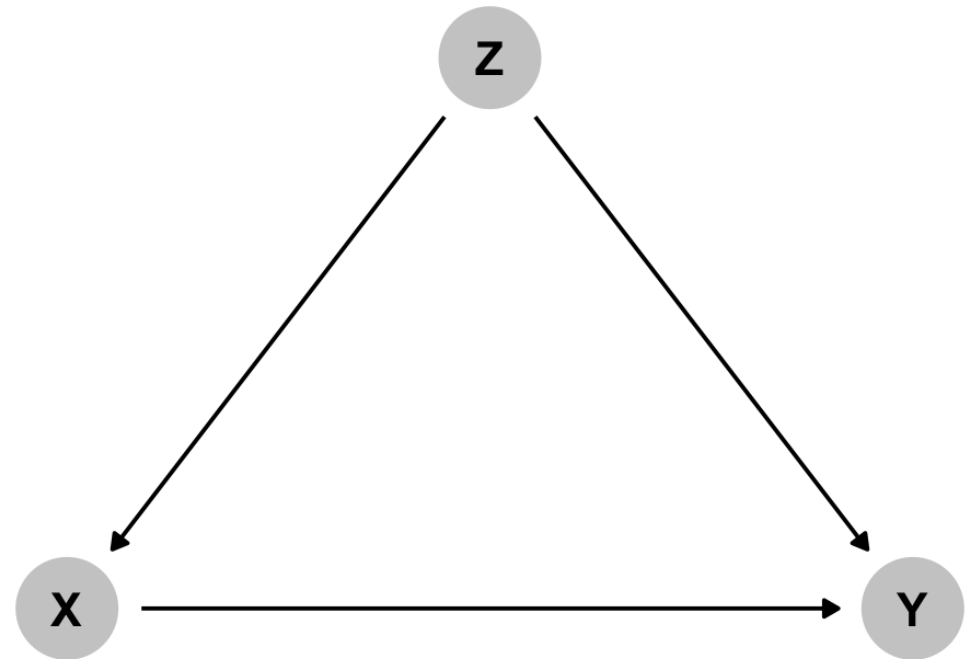
Causal diagrams

Directed acyclic graphs (DAGs)

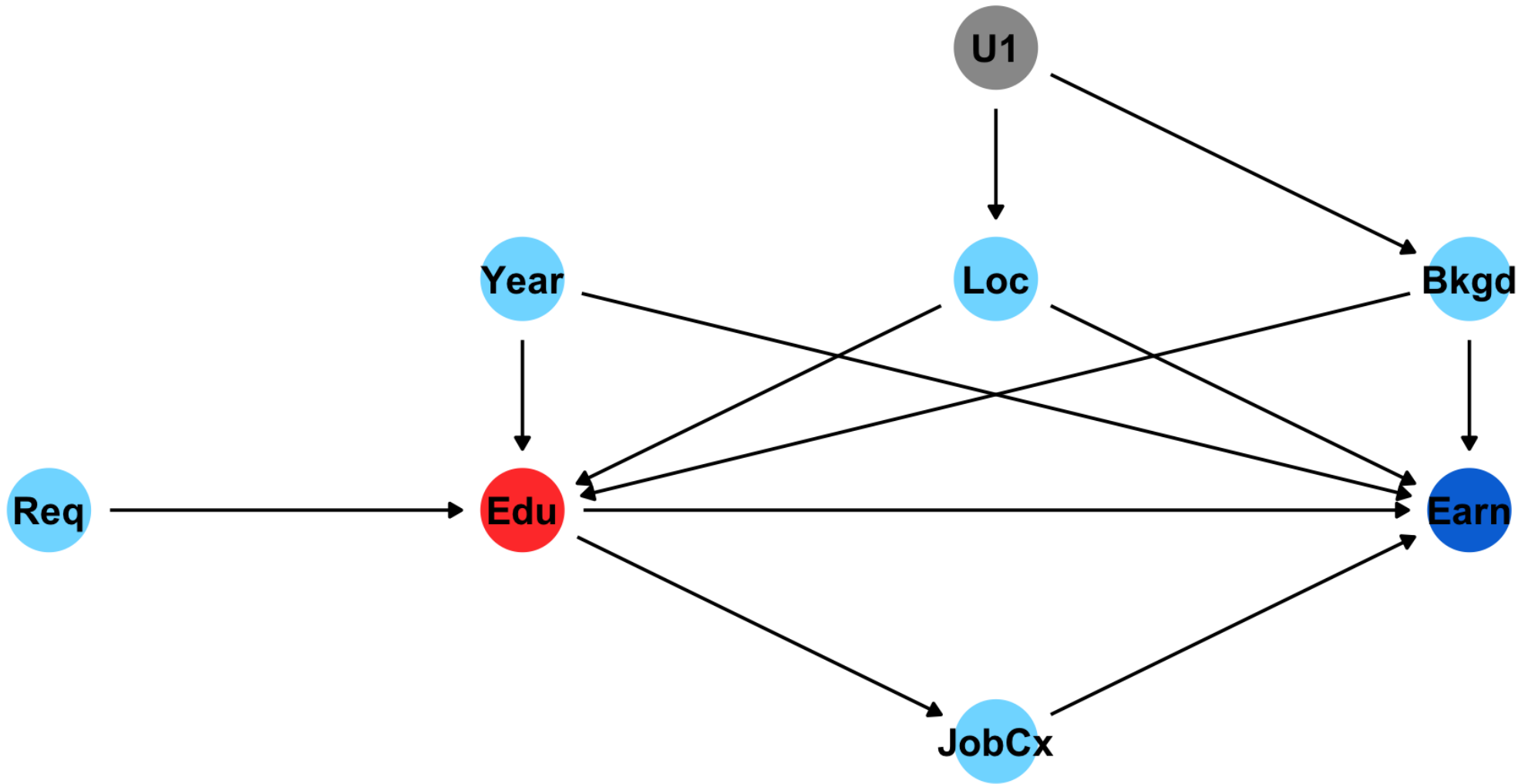
Graphical model of the process that generates the data

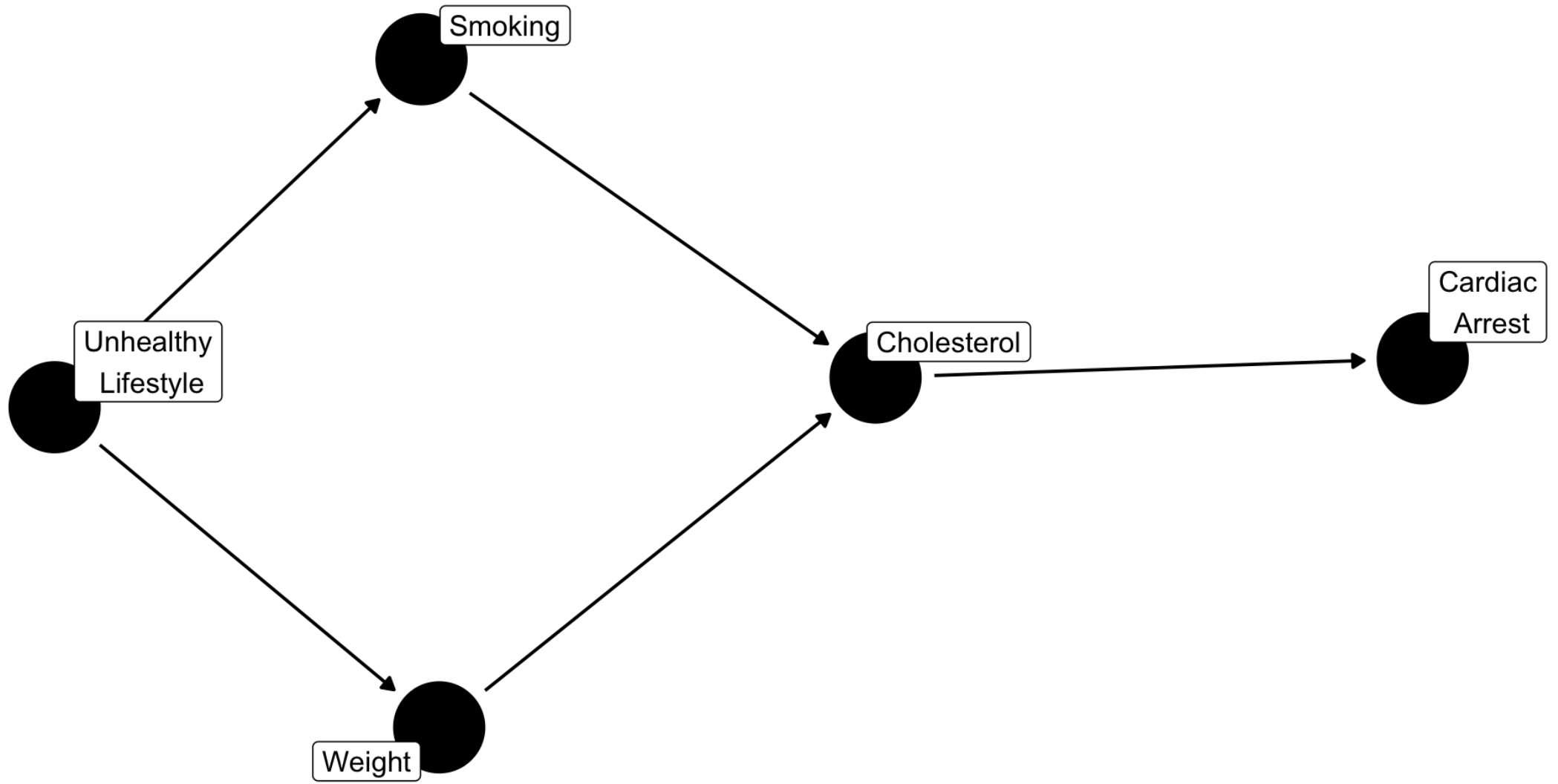
Maps your philosophical model

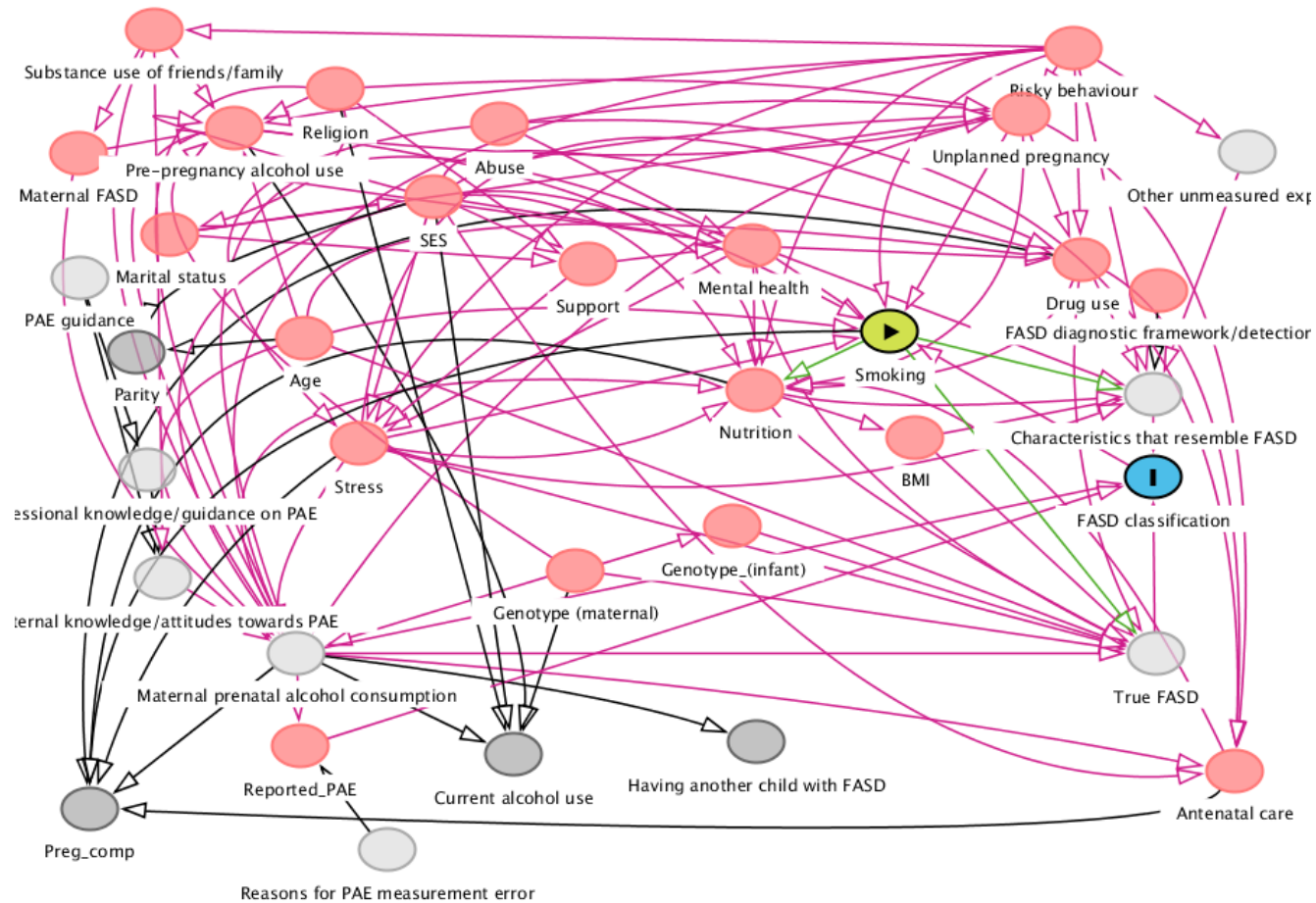
Fancy math ("*do*-calculus") tells you what to control for to isolate and identify causation











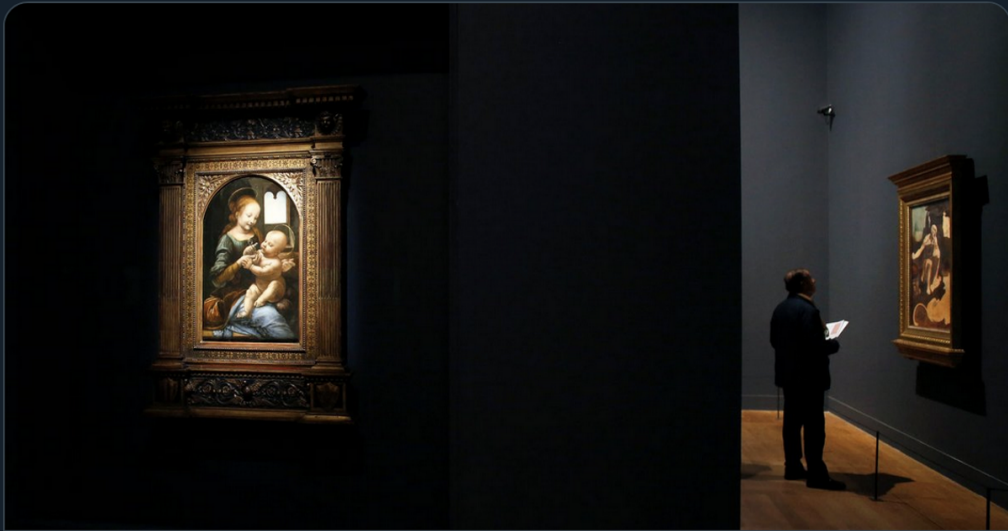
Effect of smoking on fetal alcohol syndrome



NYT Health
@NYTHealth



Want to live longer? Try going to the opera. Researchers in Britain have found that people who reported going to a museum or concert even once a year lived longer than those who didn't.



Another Benefit to Going to Museums? You May Live Longer

Researchers in Britain found that people who go to museums, the theater and the opera were less likely to die in the study period than those who didn't.

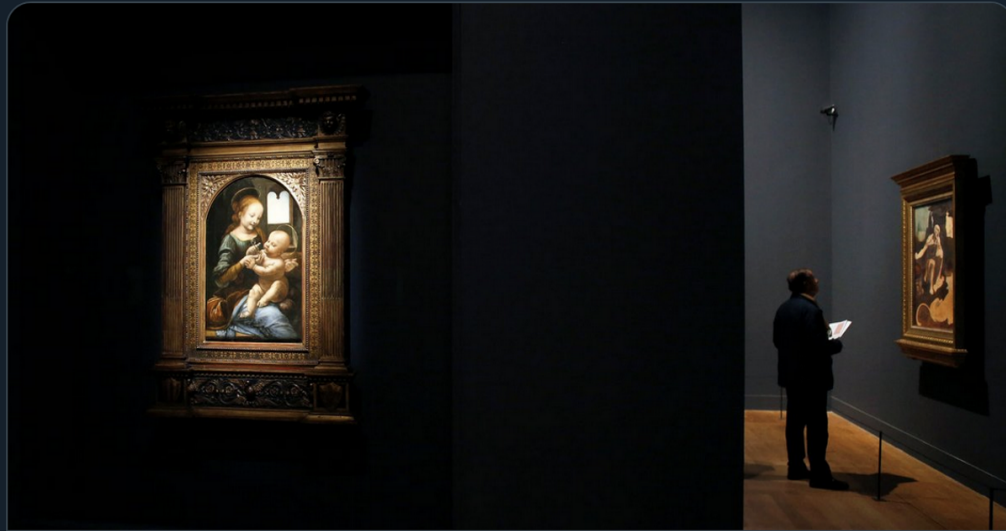
nytimes.com

9:19 AM · Dec 22, 2019 · [SocialFlow](#)

336 Retweets **1.3K** Likes



Want to live longer? Try going to the opera. Researchers in Britain have found that people who reported going to a museum or concert even once a year lived longer than those who didn't.



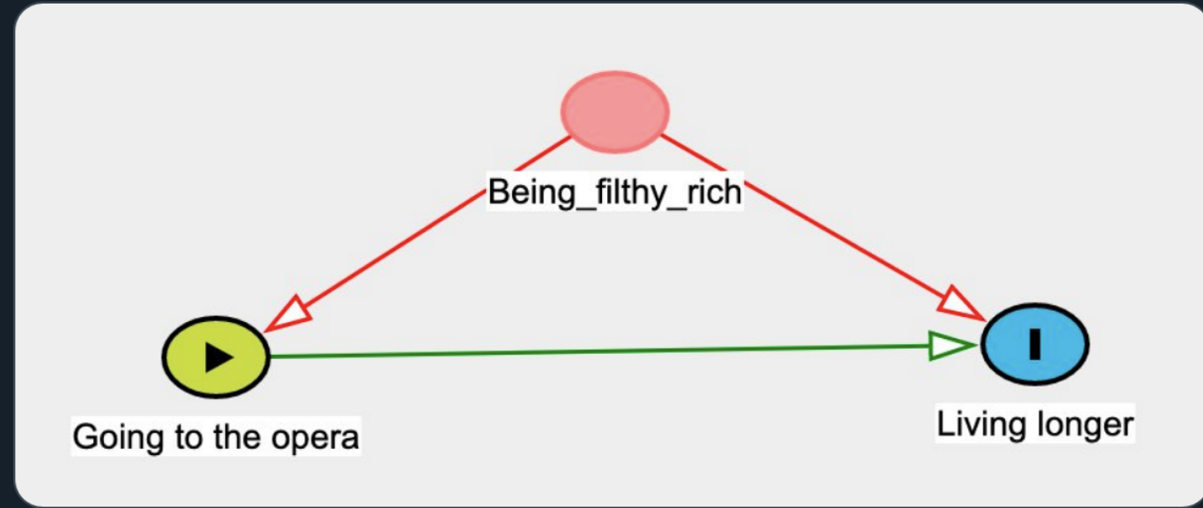
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[nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com)


9:19 AM · Dec 22, 2019 · [SocialFlow](#)

336 Retweets **1.3K** Likes



ooh ooh i can draw the dag for this one!



 **NYT Health** @NYTHealth · Dec 22, 2019
Want to live longer? Try going to the opera. Researchers in Britain have found that people who reported going to a museum or concert even once a year lived longer than those who didn't. nyti.ms/2Q9AmZV

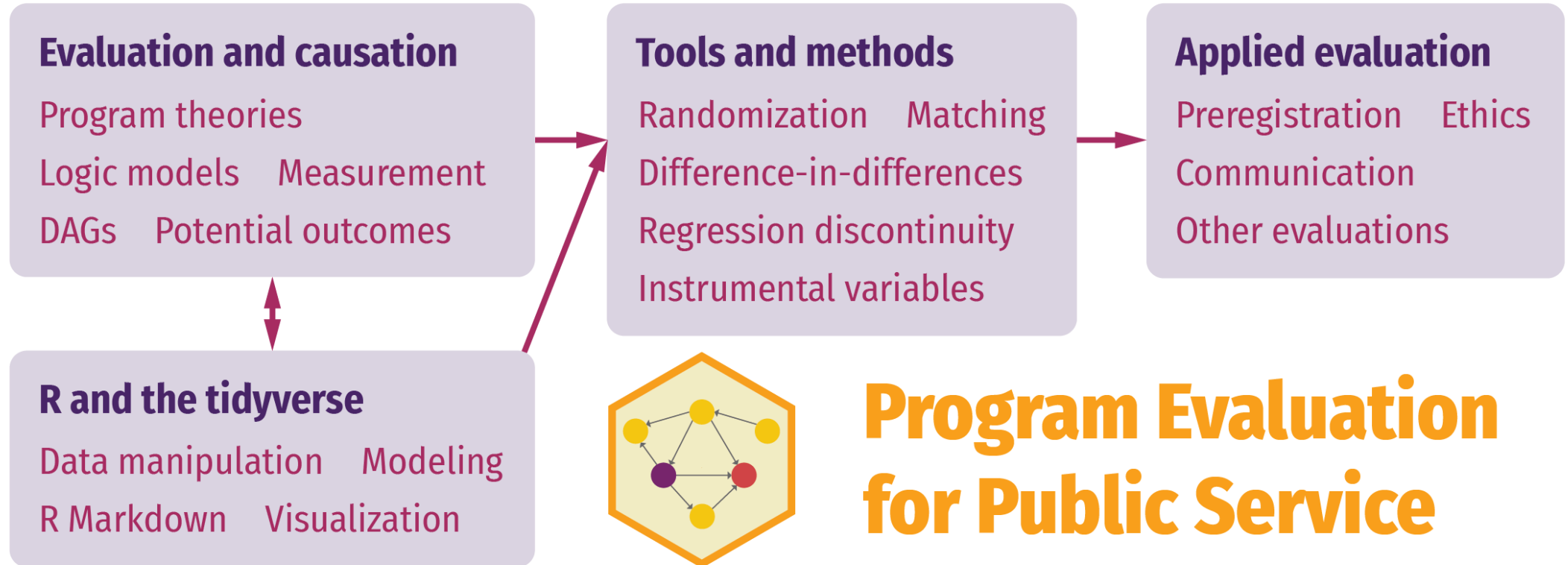
2:47 PM · Dec 22, 2019 · [Twitter Web App](#)

 View Tweet activity

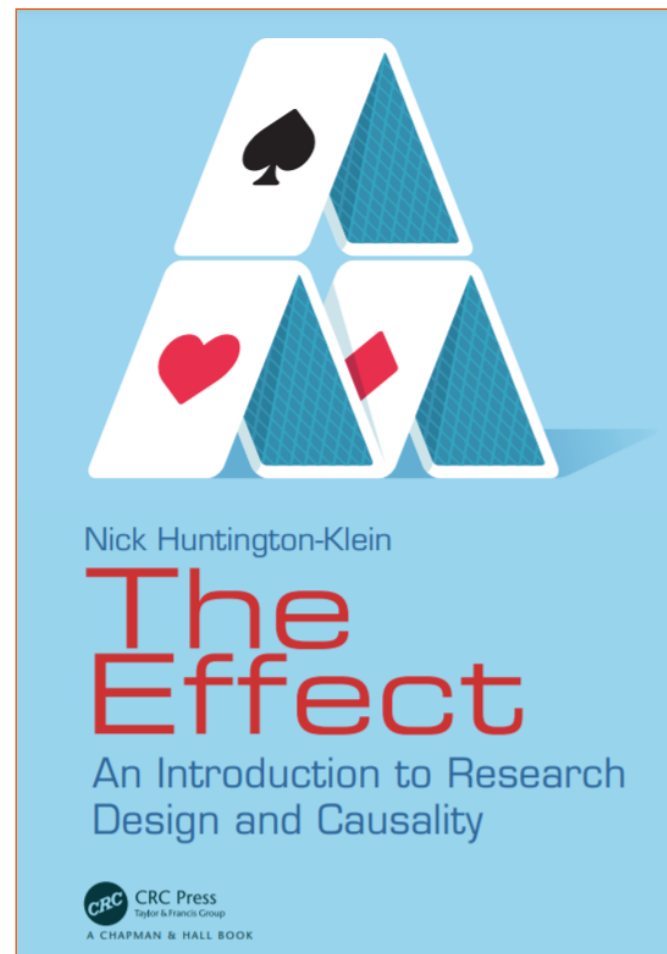
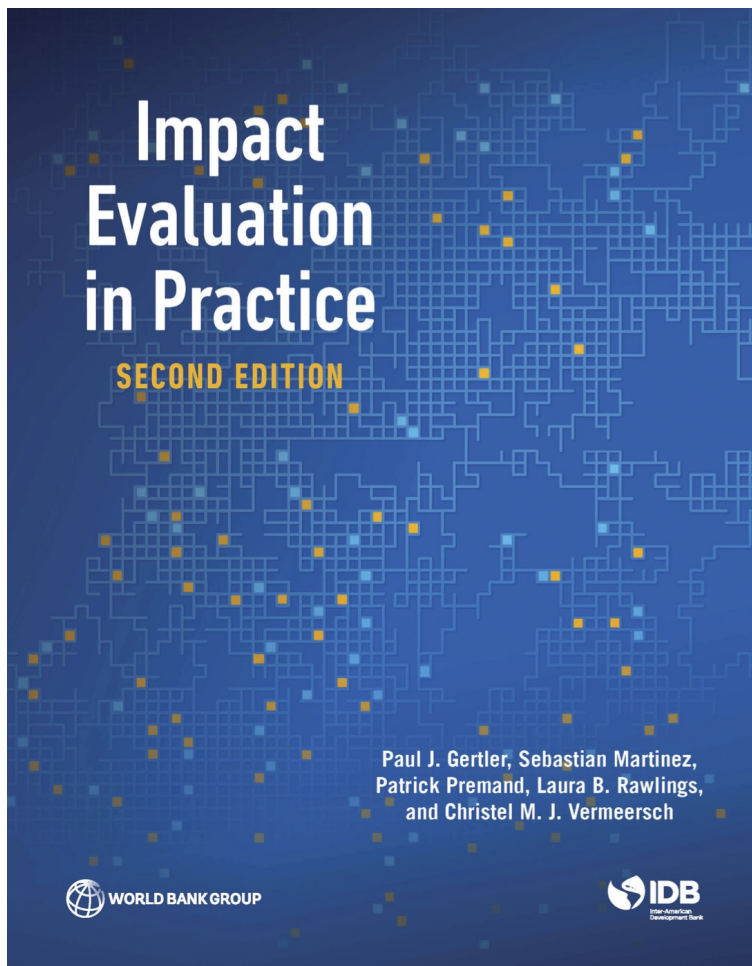
837 Retweets **3.9K** Likes

Class details

Plan for the class



Textbooks





Stage 1: Regress each column of \mathbf{X} on \mathbf{Z} , ($X = Z\delta + \text{errors}$):

$$\hat{\delta} = (Z^T Z)^{-1} Z^T X,$$

and save the predicted values:

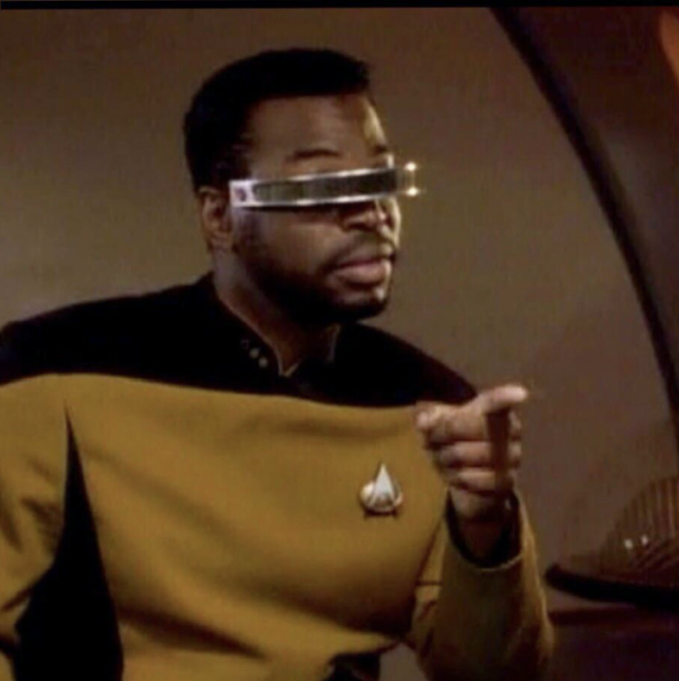
$$\widehat{X} = Z\hat{\delta} = Z(Z^T Z)^{-1} Z^T X = P_Z X.$$

Stage 2: Regress \mathbf{Y} on the predicted values from the first stage:

$$Y = \widehat{X}\beta + \text{noise},$$

which gives

$$\beta_{2SLS} = (X^T P_Z X)^{-1} X^T P_Z Y.$$

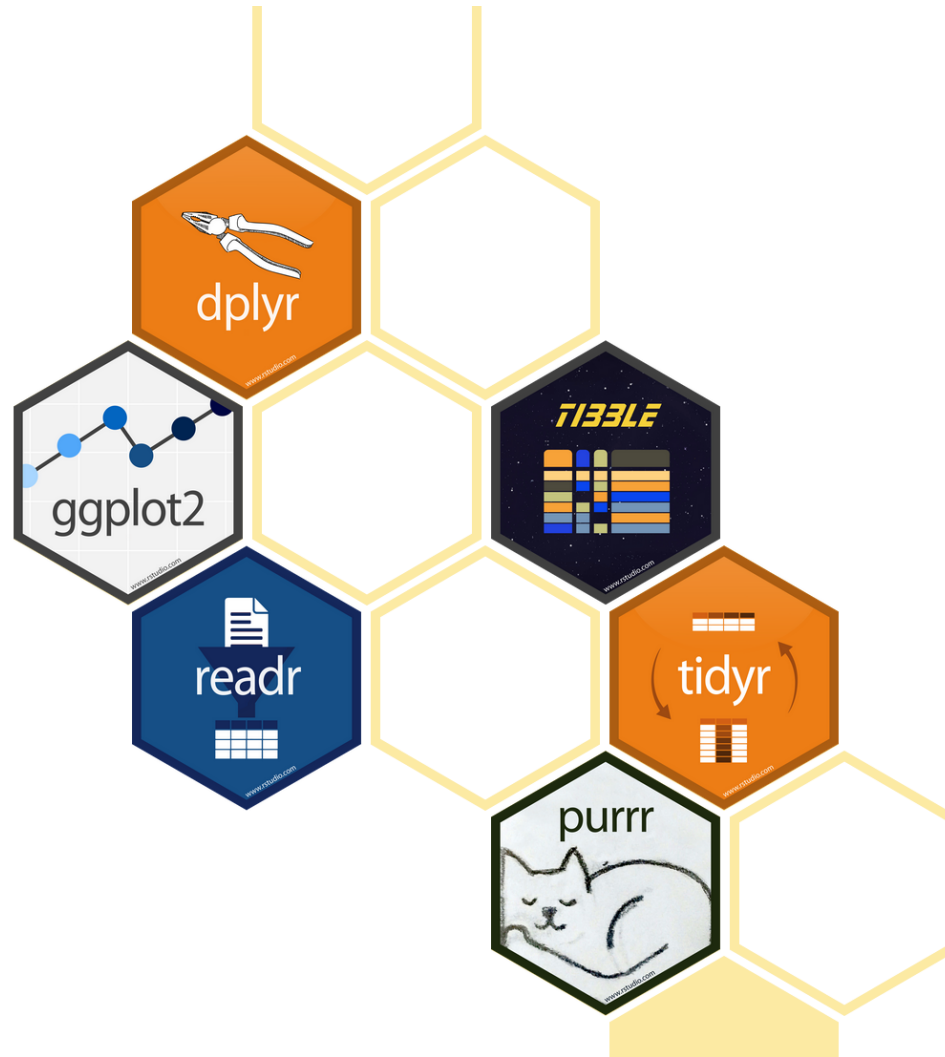


```
model_2sls <- iv_robust(  
  health ~ bed_net | treatment,  
  data = bed_nets)
```

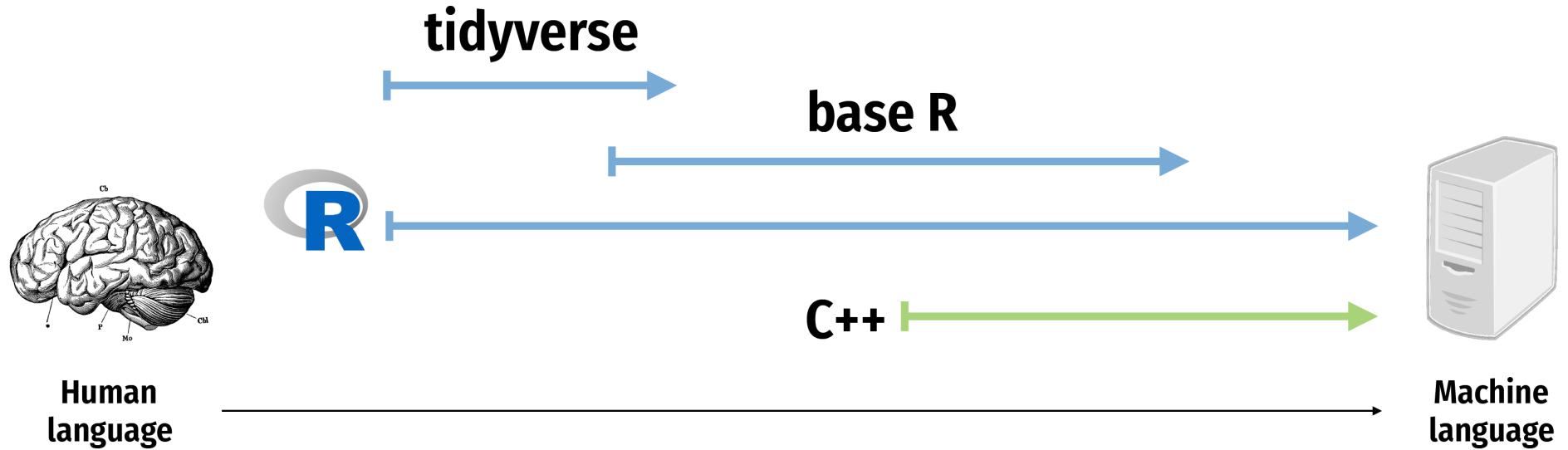
Class technology



The tidyverse



The tidyverse



R code, but reads like English!

```
strike_damages_month <- bird_strikes %>%
  group_by(Month) %>%
  summarize(total_damages = sum(Cost, na.rm = TRUE),
            average_damages = mean(Cost, na.rm = TRUE))

ggplot(data = strike_damages_month,
       mapping = aes(x = Month, y = total_damages)) +
  geom_col() +
  scale_y_continuous(labels = dollar) +
  labs(x = "Month",
       y = "Total damages",
       title = "Really expensive collisions happen in the fall?",
       subtitle = "Don't fly in August or October?",
       caption = "Source: FAA Wildlife Strike Database")
```


Sucking

“There is no way of knowing nothing about a subject to knowing something about a subject without going through a period of much frustration and suckiness.”

“Push through. You’ll suck less.”

Hadley Wickham, author of `ggplot2`

Sucking



The New York Times

Opinion

SPORTING

(It's Great to) Suck at Something

By Karen Rinaldi

April 28, 2017



Karen Rinaldi, "(It's Great to) Suck at Something"

Am I making you computer scientists?

No!

You don't need to be a mechanic to drive a car safely

**You don't need to be a computer scientist
or developer to use R safely**

Learning R



Jesse Maegan

@kierisi

Following



My **#rstats** learning path:

1. Install R
2. Install RStudio
3. Google "How do I [THING I WANT TO DO] in R?"

Repeat step 3 ad infinitum.

7:19 AM - 18 Aug 2017

You can do this.

Goals for the class

~~Become an expert with R~~

Speak and do causation

Design rigorous evaluations

Change the world with data

Prerequisites

Math skills

Basic algebra

Computer science skills

None

Statistical skills

Regression, differences in means, and statistical significance