MPA Optional Summer Reading

In the weeks and months leading up to the start of the MPA programme, you may be thinking about embarking on some preparatory reading. If so, that's great. But it's also okay if you decide not to look at (or listen to) any of the suggestions I've spotlighted here. I really mean this. If you want to spend your free time this summer relaxing with friends and family—and reading just for fun—you have my permission!

Now for those of you who do want some suggestions, we've assembled 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 you may be better off exploring entirely new career paths (within public policy, of course) than sticking with the path you've been on up until now. For each category, we recommend just a few books—some are **lighter 'holiday' selections** while others are **somewhat more technical (but still accessible) selections**.

I've inserted hyperlinks to the Amazon entries for all of these suggested readings, but that was only because the Amazon listings often provide longish excerpts to give you the flavour of what you'd be purchasing. If you do decide to purchase any of these selections—and there is no obligation to do so—it shouldn't be hard to find less expensive used copies at https://www.abebooks.co.uk/ or a similar non-Amazonian distributor in your home country. Or better still, you could cut out the intermediary and head straight to your local (used) bookstore. I'm sure they'd welcome the business.

In addition to these reading suggestions, if you scroll down you'll find a short list of recommended podcasts we've also compiled for you. All touch on themes you'll be covering in the MPA.

And here's one last suggestion for these last weeks before you join us in September: 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 tips on how to practice active reading for academic study. If all goes well, this 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. But if you do get the inclination, I'm sure you'll find them interesting, and possibly even fun.

All best,

Lloyd Gruber

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:

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.

PP478 - Political Science for Public Policy
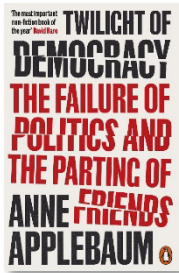
Anne Applebaum (2021) *Twilight of Democracy: The Failure of Politics and the Parting of Friends*, (Penguin) [HOLIDAY READ]

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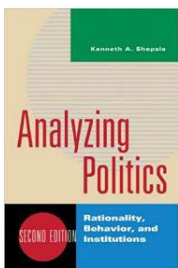
Ken Shepsle (2010) *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*, (Norton & Company) [TECHNICAL READ]

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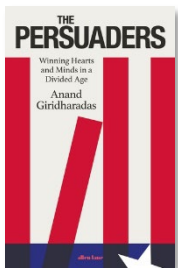
Anand Giridharadas (2023) *The Persuaders: Winning Hearts and Minds in a Divided Age*, (Vintage Books) [HOLIDAY READ]

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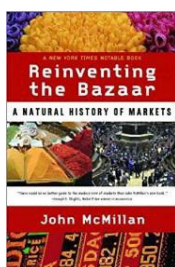
John McMillan (2003) *Reinventing the Bazaar: A Natural History of Markets*, **(Norton & Company)**
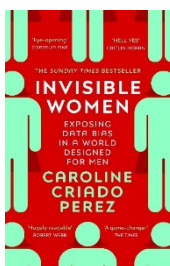**[HOLIDAY READ]**

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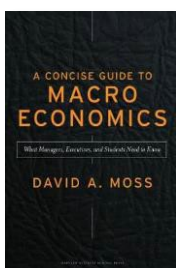
David Moss (2014) *A Concise Guide to Macroeconomics: What Managers, Executives and Students Need to Know*, **(Harvard Business Review Press) [TECHNICAL READ]**

- 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 Ciado 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?
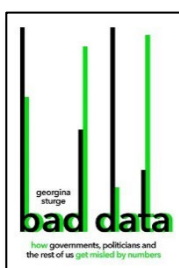
Watch **Caroline Ciado Perez** expose the gender data gap.
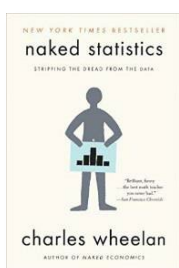
Charles Wheelan (2013) *Naked Statistics*, **(Norton & Company) [HOLIDAY READ]**

- 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.
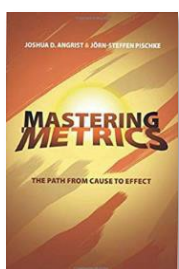

Joshua B. Angrist & Jörn-Steffen Pischke (2014) *Mastering 'Metrics': The Path from Cause to Effect*, **(Princeton University Press) [TECHNICAL READ]**

- 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.

Why do policymakers (almost) always get it wrong?
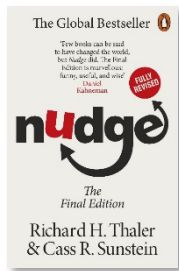
Richard. H. Thaler & Cass Sunstein (2009) *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth and Happiness*, (Penguin) [HOLIDAY READ]

- *Nudge* is about choices—how all of us (not just public officials) make them and how we can make better ones.
- By knowing how politicians think, perhaps we can make it easier for them to choose what's best for themselves and (ideally) for the rest of us, too.
- Drawing on their own research—and dozens of eye-opening examples—Thaler and Sunstein try to nudge us in the right directions without restricting our freedom of choice.
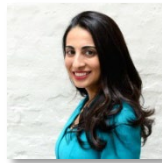
Watch LSE's Nava Ashraf explain how she uses behavioural economics to help people find meaning in their jobs.

And speaking of choices...

Here's why you'd be well advised to spend your first year in the MPA exploring entirely new interests, new career paths, and new, well – everything!
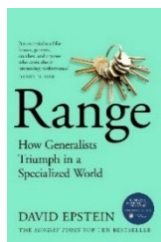
David Epstein (2019) *Range: How Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World*, (Pan Books) [HOLIDAY READ]

- Epstein's book will expand your horizons, but if your time is limited—even more circumscribed than your horizons—here is **a TED talk version of his argument**. It's well-delivered, too.
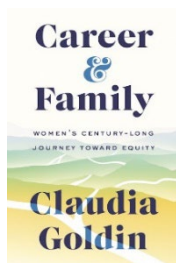
Claudia Goldin (2021) *Career and Family: Women's Century-Long Journey toward Equity*, (Princeton University Press) [HOLIDAY READ]

Justice & Morality: The Philosophy of Public Policy
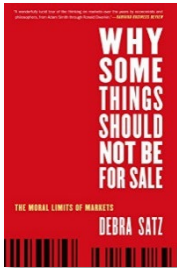
Debra Satz (2010) *Why Some Things Should Not Be for Sale: The Moral Limits of Markets,* **(Oxford University Press) [TECHNICAL READ]**

- Some of the chapters get quite technical, but they're worth the effort.
- Debra Satz shows us why making public policy is ultimately, and inescapably, a philosophical enterprise.

Watch **Debra Satz** apply moral philosophy to a smorgasbord of pressing (but often neglected) policy issues, everything from prostitution to selling your kidneys!
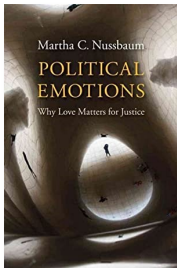
Martha C. Nussbaum (2013) *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice,* **(Oxford University Press) [TECHNICAL READ]**

- Like Satz's book, this one is also beautifully written. So technical, yes – but still a page-turner. Just don't be fooled by the title. There is nothing touchy-feely about the analysis here, just the razor-sharp, wide-ranging philosophical thinking for which Martha Nussbaum is deservedly famous.
- Tackles the issues Nussbaum raises (justice, equality, fairness) through this lens. She's as creative a thinker as you'll find in philosophy today. And in her spare time, she helped lay the theoretical foundation for the UN's widely used Human Development Indicators.

Watch **Martha Nussbaum** explain why GDP is not a good proxy for quality of life, and why we should be trying to maximise 'human capabilities' instead

A few podcasts we think you'll enjoy

While these three selections aren't keyed to any particular core course, all of them cover policy topics, issues and debates you'll be encountering repeatedly over the next two years. There are plenty of other podcasts out there, of course. The three we're highlighting here are podcasts we thought you may not already be familiar with—and should be!

The Rest is Politics'

A hard-hitting podcast presented by two political heavyweights over here, Alastair Campbell and Rory Stewart. Their conversations span everything from electoral politics (both in the UK and around the world) to international development to the climate crisis to Brexit to – well, you get the picture.

Planet Money

A wide-ranging podcast produced by National Public Radio that focuses on economics.

Oldies-but-Goodies: A few particularly compelling episodes

- **553: The Dollar At The Center Of The World** - This episode looks at the Bretton Woods Conference, telling the story of how the negotiations happened and why the dollar became the global reserve.
- **842: Showdown at the WTO** - A fun examination of the World Trade Organisation - what it is and how it works.
- **873: The Seattle Experiment** - This one explores Seattle's attempt to fight the influence of money in politics… by injecting more money into politics.

Small Potatoes

This is a great listen for anyone interested in behavioural psychology and its offshoot, behavioural economics. How does our internal wiring shape our choices, direct our relationships, and influence our politics?

- If you like this, check out Paul Bloom talking with Professor David Pizarro on Paul's book '*Psych*'. Chapters 8 and 15 are particularly relevant. You can listen here or on Spotify.