University of Wisconsin-Madison, La Follette School of Public Affairs  
PA 871: Public Program Evaluation, Fall 2015

Meeting time and location:
Thursday, 2:00-4:30 pm; Room 209 Animal Science

Instructor:
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Course Description
In this graduate seminar, we will study strategies for evaluating the efficacy of public programs, as well as strategies for addressing the challenges of applying program evaluation methods in “real world” policy settings.

The estimation of a policy or program’s impact—based on observation and measurement of the program over time, the careful construction of a counterfactual state (what would have happened in the absence of the program), and hypothesis testing and estimation using experimental or nonexperimental methods—is often a long and involved process if done well. As our capacities for data collection and storage have expanded and our tools for evaluation have advanced, the demands for program evaluation have grown exponentially. At the same time, however, expectations for using information that is readily and regularly collected to inform decision making and to make adjustments to programs as needed to increase their effectiveness have also risen, creating new challenges for the evaluation field. It is a goal of this course to expose you to “state of the art” methods in program evaluation and to provide you with an understanding of when and how they can be most usefully applied to produce knowledge and evidence of program effectiveness to guide program and policy decision making.

This course focuses primarily on quantitative methods of program evaluation, although we will also discuss the role and importance of qualitative research methods in the various stages of program evaluation. We will also address the relationship between program theory and evaluation design, ethical issues in program evaluation, the use of data for performance management and continuous quality improvement, interpretation of research findings, and the role of evaluation results in program and policy development.

In sum, the primary learning objectives for this course are to:
- Introduce students to the field of program evaluation;
- Familiarize students with contemporary program evaluation research methods, including their strengths and weaknesses, and the limits to causal inference; and
- Prepare students to design, implement, utilize, and critique evaluation research, as well as to contextualize, interpret, and present findings.
Texts/Materials

The required textbook for this course is (referred to as Evaluation throughout syllabus):


The text will be supplemented with readings that illustrate “real world” applications of these methods in academic, government, and other contexts. Any readings from sources other than Evaluation are available online, or will be made available via Learn@UW or directly from me. Required readings should be completed before we meet each week.

Course Assignments and Grading:

I encourage you to use this course and the course assignments to deepen your expertise in a policy area of interest and to complement your other course work. All assignments are designed to hone evaluation skills and provide experience that will be useful on the job market.

Course grades will be based on the following:

- Class participation (general participation + some structured activities): 20%
- Individual evaluation memos (3): 30% (10% each)
- Program evaluation plan and presentation (group project): 50%

The maximum score in the course is 100 points:

100-93 = A  87-83 = B  77-70 = C  <60 = F
92-88 = AB  82-78 = BC  69-60 = D

Class participation is an essential component of the course and is critical to your learning and that of your peers. You will be expected to read assigned materials prior to our class meetings and come prepared to discuss them. Participation in structured, in-class activities such as case studies, role plays, and debates will also be considered. Instructions and expectations for these activities will be provided in class. Regular class attendance is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for class participation.

John Bryson offers four “hallmarks of good participation” that I recommend to you: 1) risk-taking (i.e., presenting an opposing view or a different interpretation of readings/information); 2) listening (i.e., trying to understand what others are saying and why they are saying it); 3) bringing in your own work-related and other experiences when relevant to the discussions; and 4) monitoring your own participation in terms of both “airtime” and quality.

Individual Evaluation Memos. One of the most important (and difficult) pieces of practicing program evaluation is being able to convey results and their applications to stakeholders with little statistical training. Three times during the course of the semester (out of four potential opportunities), students will write a one-page (front and back, single-spaced, 12 pt. font) memo based on an applied reading (either a recommended reading or a related reading of your choice). Memos will demonstrate an understanding of the method involved and offer a critique of the particular study at hand. These assignments are designed to provide an opportunity to practice
practical writing and communication skills, as well as the opportunity to explore evaluation within your own policy interests. More detailed directions and expectations will be provided before the first memo writing opportunity.

Program evaluation plan and presentation. For the final project in this course, you (as part of a group of up to four students) will complete a program evaluation plan for a “real-world” client. I will ask for four interim iterations of the project (including a full draft) at various points in the semester (see course schedule). I will provide written feedback, but not grades for these interim assignments; however, failure to complete them on time will result in a lowered final project grade. You will also give a brief (15-minute) PowerPoint presentation about your project and receive audience feedback during our final class.

Final written program evaluation plans will be due on Thursday, December 17th. You will also provide your client with a copy of your plan, upon approval by Hilary. Some clients may request an in-person presentation of your plan; I highly recommend that you take advantage of such opportunities.

Please be consistent in your use of Chicago style for references (See La Follette style guide: http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/publications/resources.html). Late work is generally not accepted, except under extenuating circumstances and will be docked accordingly. Most written assignments are due at the beginning of class, collected via Dropbox on Learn@UW.

Disabilities
People with disabilities will be fully included in this course. Please inform me if you need any accommodations regarding the curriculum, instruction, or assessments of this course to enable you to participate fully. Confidentiality of the shared information will be strictly maintained. Certain accommodations may require the assistance of the UW’s McBurney Disability Resource Center: http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/.

Academic Integrity
I expect full adherence to the UW’s Academic Integrity policies, and any academic misconduct will be dealt with accordingly: https://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/.

Course Communication
The best way to contact me is via email. I will return emails from students within two business days. Please do not email shortly before a class, presentation, or assignment deadline with the expectation that I will be able to respond immediately to your concern. I am happy to meet with or speak by phone to students outside of class as needed. Please email me to make an appointment. You are also welcome to stop by my La Follette office (room 103). I will use the class list serve (pubaffr871-1-f15@lists.wisc.edu) to communicate additional course information as needed.
Course Schedule
Please note that the following outline and listed readings will be adjusted and updated to accommodate new materials, class needs, and student interests and experience. I will also weave in articles and videos reflecting current events and issues related to program evaluation. Changes will be communicated in class and/or by e-mail at least one week in advance, and an updated syllabus will be posted on Learn@UW.

Week 1: September 3, “Introduction to Public Program Evaluation”
- Course overview, including client project
- What is program evaluation and why should we care about it?
- Standards of evidence

DUE (completed in class): PA 871 Background Information Sheet

Required Readings
- Evaluation, Ch. 1, “An Overview of Program Evaluation
- Also, please review summaries of client projects

Week 2: September 10, “Evaluation Ethics & Working with Stakeholders”
- Ethical issues in evaluation
- Guiding principles for evaluation
- Working with stakeholders
- Final project assignments finalized; Assignment #1, getting started

DUE: Complete the UW CITI Human Participants Research Training most applicable to your policy area of interest (either Social Behavioral or Biomedical). Upload copy of your completion report in Week 2 DropBox (part of participation grade).
https://kb.wisc.edu/gsadminkb/page.php?id=32559

Required Readings:
- Evaluation, Ch. 12, “The Social Context of Evaluation”
- Writing Group for the Women's Health Initiative Investigator. 2002. “Risks and Benefits of Estrogen Plus Progestin in Healthy Postmenopausal Women: Principal Results from the Women's Health Initiative Randomized Controlled Trial." Journal of the American Medical Association 288: 321-333. (Be ready to discuss—how is this an article about evaluation ethics?)
- Evaluation, Ch. 2, “Tailoring Evaluations”
Recommended Readings:

**Week 3: September 17, “Program Theory & Logic Models”**
- Why talk about theory—isn’t this a practical course?
- Logic models: Why should a program work, and what should you measure?
- How do you develop good research questions?

Required Readings:
- *Evaluation*, Ch. 5, “Expressing and Assessing Program Theory”

Recommended Readings:
- UW-Extension Logic Model training and tools: [http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html)

***Please note that readings are likely to be added each week from this point on, based on class interests and needs.***

**Week 4: September 24, “Causal Inference and Validity”**
- Causal inference
- Statistical conclusion, internal, construct, external, and other kinds of validity
- Discussion of evaluation memo requirements and expectations

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:

**DUE: Final Project Assignment #1** (theory of change, research questions, logic model, resource list)

**Week 5: October 1, “Randomized Experimental Design”**

• What are randomized controlled trials, and why are they considered the “gold standard” of evaluation?
• What are the limitations and challenges of implementing experimental designs?

**Required Readings:**

• *Evaluation*, Ch. 8, “Assessing Program Impact: Randomized Field Experiments”

**Recommended Readings:**

• Student choice (for memo assignment), program suggestions:
  o Moving to Opportunity (housing/mobility)
  o Nurse Family Partnership (home visiting)
  o Welfare experiments (1990s)
  o Early childhood education (Abecedarian, Perry Preschool)
  o What Works Clearinghouse (education)
  o Campbell Collaborative (health)
  o World Bank (international impact evaluation)

**DUE: Evaluation Memo #1 Opportunity**

**Week 6: October 8, “Implementation and Process in Impact Evaluations”**

• Getting inside “the black box” of impact evaluations (Implementation and Process Evaluation)
• Data Collection
• Qualitative research methods
• *Guest Speaker: Jennifer Noyes, PhD, Associate Director of Programs and Management, Institute for Research on Poverty*

**Required Readings:**
• *Evaluation*, Ch. 6: Assessing and Monitoring Program Process
• *Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration Evaluation (CSPED)*: [http://www.irp.wisc.edu/research/childsup/csped.htm](http://www.irp.wisc.edu/research/childsup/csped.htm). At a minimum, read:
  o “About CSPED”
  o Early Implementation Findings Report, Executive Summary

**Recommended Readings:**
- CSPED Early Implementation Findings Report

**Week 7: October 15, “Outcome Measurement and Survey Design”**
- Outcome measurement
- Survey Design
- Data Sharing Agreements

**Required Readings:**

**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 8: October 22, “Quasi-Experimental Design I”**
- Pre-post tests
Required Readings:
- *Evaluation*, Ch. 9, Assessing Program Impact: Alternative Design (Note: we will talk about regression discontinuity and time-series design in Week 10, so skim those parts)

Recommended Readings:
- Student Choice: evaluation using multivariate regression or propensity score matching

DUE: Evaluation Memo #2 Opportunity, Final Project Assignment #2 (data and outcome measures)

**Week 9: October 29 “Quasi-Experimental Design II”**
- Difference-in-difference
- Fixed Effects
- Instrumental Variables

Required Readings:

**Recommended Readings:**


**DUE: Evaluation Memo #3 Opportunity**

**Week 10: November 5-“Quasi-Experimental Design III”**

- Regression Discontinuity Design
- Time Series Designs
- *Guest Speaker: Jared Knowles, PhD, Research Analyst, WI Dept. of Public Instruction*

**Required Readings:**

- Shadish, Cook & Campbell (2002), Ch. 6, “Interrupted Time-Series Designs” & Ch. 7, “Regression Discontinuity Designs”

**Recommended Readings:**


DUE: Evaluation Memo #4 Opportunity

** November 12, No class—La Follette in DC**

DUE: Final Project Assignment #3: Evaluation Design

Week 11: November 19, “Power, Effect Sizes, and Meta-Analysis”

- Effect sizes
- Statistical power
- Meta-analysis

**Required Readings:**

- *Evaluation, Ch. 10:* Detecting, Interpreting, and Analyzing Program Effects
- Shadish, Cook & Campbell (2002), Ch. 13, “Generalized Causal Inference: Methods for Multiple Studies”
- For discussion, bring in one meta-analysis that you’ve read
- *Optimal Design:* [https://sites.google.com/site/optimaldesignsoftware/](https://sites.google.com/site/optimaldesignsoftware/)
  - Read at least the Introduction to the manual
  - Play with the software

November 26—No class: Thanksgiving

Week 12: December 3, “Program Evaluation in Practice”

- Communicating results
- Performance based management
- *Guest Speaker, Joe Chrisman, State Auditor, Legislative Audit Bureau*

**Required Readings:**

- LAB report, TBD

**Recommended Readings:**

**DUE: Full draft of evaluation plan-hard copy** (handed back w/comments from Hilary next week; you must re-hand in this edited version)

**Week 13: December 10, “Final Presentations”** (Please note that we may have to run a bit long on the last day to accommodate all student presentations.)

**DUE: Final project presentations, self/group evaluations**

**REVISED FINAL PROJECTS DUE THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17TH, 4:30 PM** (Word document via Dropbox + hard copy of edited draft from last week in Hilary’s LFS mailbox); final copy of report must be emailed to client upon approval by Hilary. Groups are also encouraged to present in person if requested by client.
Additional Program and Policy Evaluation Resources

Web Sites
- American Evaluation Association: www.eval.org
- Campbell Collaborative: http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/eval
- Governmental Accounting Standards Board: www.gasb.org
- Kellogg Foundation: www.wkkf.org
- U. S. Office of Management and Budget: www.whitehouse.gov/omb
- United Way of America: www.unitedway.org/outcomes
- World Bank: www.worldbank.org

Policy Research Organizations
- MDRC: http://www.mdrc.org/
- Mathematica: http://mathematica-mpr.com/
- Urban Institute: http://urban.org/
- Abt Associates: http://abtassociates.com/
- RAND: http://www.rand.org/
- James Bell Associates: http://www.jbassoc.com/

Periodicals
- American Journal of Evaluation
- New Directions for Evaluation
- Evaluation and Program Planning
- Evaluation Review
- Journal of Policy Analysis and Management

Selected Books and Reports
- Sage University Papers: Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences. (Useful methods series)