Meeting time and location:
Thursday, 1:45-3:40 pm; Room 1325 Computer Science

Instructor:
Hilary Shager, Ph.D.
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Office hours: by appointment

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:


This text will introduce you to many of the methods used for program evaluation. 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 Shadish, Cook, and Campbell are available online, or will be made available via Learn@UW or directly from me.

All readings listed are required and should be completed before we meet each week.

**Course Assignments and Evaluation:**
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 skills and provide experience that will be useful on the job market.

*Course grades will be based on the following:*
- Class participation: 15%
- Evaluation presentations (with partner): 15%
- Impact evaluation critique and prospective study paper (completed individually): 30%
- Program evaluation design/plan and presentation (group project, up to 3 persons per group): 40%

*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 in-class activities such as case studies or role plays will also be considered. 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. Regular class attendance is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for class participation.

*Evaluation Presentations.* 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 background. Once during the course of the semester, students will work in pairs to present an applied reading to the class. Students will take on the role of the authors of the reading and produce a 5-slide PowerPoint to be distributed prior to and presented during class. The slides must include 1) information about the program’s theory of change; 2) evaluation questions and motivation for study, 3) clear, brief explanation of methods or concepts, including strengths and limitations; 4) results, including an effective example of data visualization, and 5)
policy implications. Classmates in the audience will take on the role of interested policymakers and are expected to ask challenging questions of the evaluators. Each presentation will last a maximum of 15 minutes, with the potential for additional discussion afterwards. Students will sign up for their topics the first week of class. PowerPoint presentations will be due by noon the Tuesday prior to the assigned class and should be distributed using the class list serve: pubaffr871-1-f14@lists.wisc.edu. See “Evaluation Presentations” handout for more detail.

Individual impact evaluation critique and prospective study paper. Early in the semester, each student will select a policy area and evaluation question of interest, then will write a critique of the current program evaluation research in this area, plus a prospective plan for moving the field forward, including application of evaluation methods learned in class. A short prospectus will be due in class Oct. 9. Final papers should be approximately 10 pages in length and will be due in class on November 13.

Program evaluation design/plan and presentation. The program evaluation design/plan will be a group project (up to 3 persons per project) in which you work with an actual client. You will prepare an evaluation design/plan for an impact evaluation in response to the client needs. 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 give feedback, but not grades for these assignments (failure to complete interim assignments on time will result in a lowered final project grade). You will give a brief PowerPoint presentation about your project and receive audience feedback during one of our two final classes. The final written program evaluation designs/plans will be due on Tuesday, December 16th (hard copy in Hilary’s mailbox by 4:30 pm). You will also provide your client with a copy of your plan, upon approval by Hilary.

More detailed instructions for the individual paper and final project will be provided. 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 not accepted, except under extenuating circumstances.

Disabilities
People with disabilities will be fully included in this course. Please inform me if you need any special accommodations in 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/.

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 to communicate additional course information as needed.
Course Schedule
Please note that the following outline and listed readings may be adjusted to accommodate additional guest speakers and class interests. I will also weave in newspaper articles, etc. 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.

Week 1: September 4, “Introduction”
- Course overview
- Introduction to program evaluation
- Standards of evidence

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

Readings:

Week 2: September 11, “Evaluation Ethics & Working with Stakeholders”
- Ethical issues in evaluation
- Guiding principles for evaluation
- Working with stakeholders
- Deep dive into final project

DUE: Complete the UW CITI Human Subjects Research Training most applicable to your policy area of interest (either Social Behavioral or Biomedical). Print out completion report to hand in (part of participation grade). [https://kb.wisc.edu/gsadminkb/page.php?id=32559](https://kb.wisc.edu/gsadminkb/page.php?id=32559)

Readings:
- Shadish, Cook & Campbell, Ch. 9, pgs. 279-291

Evaluation Presentation--Hilary presents example:
Note: Final project groups will be assigned between week 2 & 3.

**Week 3: September 18, “Logic Models & Outcome Measurement”**
- Logic models: Why should a program work, and what should you measure?
- How do you develop good research questions?
- Outcome measurement: data, measurement tools, and SMART goals
- Data sharing agreements

**Readings:**

**Evaluation Presentation:**

**Week 4: September 25, “Causal Inference and Validity”**
- Causal inference
- Statistical conclusion, internal, construct, external, and other kinds of validity

**Readings:**
- Shadish, Cook & Campbell, Ch. 1, 2 & 3

**Evaluation Presentations:**

**Week 5: October 2, “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?
DUE: Final Project Assignment #1 (theory of change, research questions, logic model, resource list)

Readings:

- Shadish, Cook & Campbell, Ch. 8 & Ch. 9, pgs.292-311

Evaluation Presentation:


Week 6: October 9, “Implementation and Process in Impact Evaluations”

- Getting inside “the black box” of impact evaluations
- Qualitative methods

DUE: Prospectus for individual paper

Readings:

- Shadish, Cook and Campbell, Ch. 10

Evaluation Presentation:

- Additional reading TBD (qualitative methods)

Week 7: October 16, “Quasi-Experimental Design I”

- Using control groups and pre-tests
- Using observational data to estimate causal effects
- Regression and matching (including multi-level modeling)

DUE: Final Project Assignment #2 (data and outcome measures)
Readings:

- Shadish, Cook & Campbell, Ch. 4 & 5
- Read one of the following HLM articles, based on your interest/learning style:

Evaluation Presentations:


- Additional reading TBD (pre-/post-testing)

Week 8: October 23, “Quasi-Experimental Design II”

- Regression discontinuity design
- Interrupted time series
- *Guest Speaker, Jared Knowles, Research Analyst-Advanced, WI Department of Public Instruction*
Readings:
- Shadish, Cook & Campbell, Ch. 6 & 7
- May include viewing of “flipped” video lecture as needed

Evaluation Presentations:
- Additional reading TBD (regression discontinuity design)

Week 9: October 30 “Quasi-Experimental Design III”
- Difference in difference
- Instrumental Variables
- Fixed effects
- *Guest Speaker, Joe Chrisman, State Auditor, Legislative Audit Bureau*

DUE: Final Project Assignment #3: Evaluation Design

Readings
- Additional readings TBD
- May include viewing of “flipped” video lecture as needed

Evaluation Presentations:
- Additional reading TBD (instrumental variables)

**November 6-No Class (La Follette in Chicago event)**
- Work on individual papers and final projects

Week 10: November 13, “Power, Effect Sizes, and Meta-analysis”
- Effect sizes
- Statistical power
- Meta-analysis

DUE: Individual evaluation critique and prospective study paper
Readings:
  - Read Section 1: Introduction (pp. 3-18)
  - Read whatever other section(s) is most applicable to your final project and will help you play around with the software. You will need to use the software to conduct a power analysis for your final project.
  - Explore Optimal Design Software Site: [http://sitemaker.umich.edu/group-based/optimal_design_software](http://sitemaker.umich.edu/group-based/optimal_design_software)
- Shadish, Cook & Campbell, Ch. 13

Evaluation Presentations:
- Additional reading TBD (meta-analysis)

**Week 11: November 20, “Program Evaluation in Practice & Communicating Results”**
- Evaluation in the policy world
- Communicating results
- Performance based management

Readings:

**November 27—No class: Thanksgiving**

**Week 12: December 4, “Final Presentations”**

**DUE:** Full draft of evaluation plan (handed back with comments from Hilary next week)

**Week 13: December 11, “Final Presentations”** (Please note that we may have to run a bit long on the last day to accommodate all student presentations.)

**REVISED FINAL PROJECTS DUE TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16TH, 4:30 PM** (hard copy in Hilary’s LaFollette mailbox); final copy of report emailed to client upon approval by Hilary.
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/

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)