Course Description
Public program evaluation is the systematic, data-based assessment of the performance of programs or policies that have been implemented in public sectors. The main purpose of program evaluation is to provide valid findings to determine whether a particular program or policy is achieving its goals, and whether it should be continued, improved, expanded, or curtailed. And program evaluation has been increasingly required by policy makers concerned with accountability and efficient use of public resources.

This course will expose you to a variety of “state of the art” research designs and related methodological tools useful for evaluating the impact of public policies and programs. It will also provide you with an understanding of when and how these tools 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 necessary for you to first become critical consumers and effective users of evaluations and then build higher quality programs and policies.

In this course we will examine evaluation designs that have been applied to various public programs and issues in order to demonstrate key points. Each design relies on different sets of assumptions to construct the counterfactual state (what would have happened in the absence of the program) and to justify the causal claims it produces. We will learn to evaluate what these assumptions are, when these assumptions are likely to be violated, and how such violations lead to misleading conclusions.

In sum, the primary learning objectives for this course are to:

- Introduce students to the field of program evaluation;
- Help students understand the purpose, logic, and process of program evaluation;
- Demonstrate the importance of conducting program evaluations that address key issues in a sound and useful manner;
- 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
All assignments are designed to hone evaluation skills and provide experience that will be useful on the job market. Please use this course and the course assignments to deepen your expertise in a policy area of interest and to complement your other course work. Course grades will be based on the following:

- Class participation (general participation + some structured activities): 30%
- Program evaluation exercises (2): 30% (15% each)
- Program evaluation paper and presentation (group project): 40%

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
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 group discussions, case studies, role plays, and debates will also be considered. Regular class attendance is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for class participation.

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 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 frequently bring in additional materials reflecting current events and issues related to program evaluation. Changes will be communicated in class and/or by e-mail, and an updated syllabus will be posted on Learn@UW.

Part One: Introduction

Week 1: September 9, “Introduction to Program Evaluation”
- What is program evaluation?
- Why should we care about program evaluation?
- Course overview

Required Readings

Week 2: September 16, “Ethics of Program Evaluation”
- Ethical issues in evaluation: early abuses, current oversight, and lingering controversies
- Guiding principles for evaluation
- Asking the right questions

Required Readings

Recommended Readings

Week 3: September 23, “Basic Concepts & Logic Models”
- Basic statistical concepts
- Logic models: Why should a program work, and what should you measure?

Required Readings

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

Part Two: Experiments
Week 4: September 30, “Randomized Experimental Design”
• What are randomized experimental designs?
• 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

Part Three: Quasi-experiment: Selection on Observables
Week 5: October 7, “Propensity Score Matching”
• What is propensity score matching?
• What are the key assumptions?
• What are the limitations and challenges of propensity score matching?

**Required Readings**

• *Evaluation*, Ch. 9, Assessing Program Impact: Alternative Design (Note: please focus on the parts on propensity score matching and skim the other parts on regression discontinuity, time-series design, etc.)


**Recommended Readings**


**Part Three: Quasi-Experiment Design: Selection on Unobservables:**

**Week 6: October 14, “Instrumental Variable”**

• What is IV?
• What are the key assumptions?
• What are the limitations and challenges of IV?

**Required Readings**


Recommended Readings

- Levitt, Steven D. 1997. “Using Electoral Cycles in Police Hiring to Estimate the Effect of Police on Crime.” American Economic Review. 87(3): 270-290. [Read the “easy” parts of this paper and don’t worry about the complicated parts.]

Week 7: October 21, “DD and DDD”

- What is difference-in-differences?
- What are the key assumptions?
- What are the limitations and challenges of DD?

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


Week 8: October 28, “Regression Discontinuity”

- What is RD?
- What are the key assumptions?
- What are the limitations and challenges of RD?
- Guest Speaker: Jennifer Noyes, PhD, Associate Director of Programs and Management, Institute for Research on Poverty

Required Readings

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

Recommended Readings

Week 9: November 11, “Fixed Effects, Quantile Regression”
• Why do we want to use fixed effects?
• Why do we want to do quantile regression?
• What is control function approach?

Required Readings

Recommended Readings

Week 10: November 18, “Methodological Debates: Experimental vs. Non-Experimental Designs”
• What are the pros and cons of experimental and non-experimental designs?
• Which method is better?

Required Readings

Recommended Readings
• Rodrik, Dani. "The new development economics: we shall experiment, but how shall we learn?." (2008).

Week 11: December 2, “Power, Effect Sizes, and Meta-Analysis”
• Statistical power
• Effect sizes
• Meta-analysis
• Guest Speaker, Joe Chrisman, State Auditor, Legislative Audit Bureau

Required Readings
• LAB report, TBD
• Evaluation, Ch. 10: Detecting, Interpreting, and Analyzing Program Effects
• Shadish, Cook & Campbell (2002), Ch. 13, “Generalized Causal Inference: Methods for Multiple Studies”

Readings for Class Discussion

Week 12: December 9, “Final Presentations” (Please note that we may have to run a bit long on the last day to accommodate all student presentations.)