

PUBPOL 526 A: Program Evaluation

Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy & Governance

Spring 2019

Instructor Information:

Emily A. Finchum-Mason

Condon Hall 319

eafinch@uw.edu

(971) 704-2407

Office Hours: 12pm-2pm on Thursdays, by appointment¹ in Condon Hall 313

Teaching Assistant Information:

Yulan Kim

Condon Hall 313

ylkim33@uw.edu

Office Hours: 9:20am-10:20am &

12:30pm-1:30pm on Fridays, by appointment

Introduction & Course Goals

Public and nonprofit organizations spend vast resources implementing policies and programs with diverse sets of goals, but how do we know that these programs are achieving those goals? How can we understand the impact that policies and programs on the beneficiaries? This course is designed to provide you with conceptual frameworks to address these critical questions.

Upon completion of the course, students will have mastered the following learning objectives:

1. Map out the theory of change underlying a program design and use it to generate both process and impact evaluation questions, metrics, and procedures.
2. Identify attributes of program process that explain outcome variation and create plans for evaluating these attributes.
3. Explain, utilize, and critique each of the major impact evaluation designs, including its approach to understanding causality.
4. Describe and critique different data sources with respect to a given evaluation design.
5. Identify and critically examine the ethical implications of various program design and implementation dimensions.
6. Characterize and explain the implications of new trends in policy and program implementation and evaluation.

Textbook(s)

The required text for this course is:

Rossi, P., Lipsey, Mark W, & Freeman, Howard E. (2004). *Evaluation : A systematic approach* (7th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

It is available in the book store, at online marketplaces, and at the UW Library.

¹ To make an appointment, please send three options that will work for you and I will find a time that converges. Additionally, I will be increasing office hours the week prior to each assignment due date; time slots will be available via the UW calendar system.

Optional texts that I will cite often are:

Weiss, C. (1998). *Evaluation : Methods for studying programs and policies (2nd ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Murnane, R., & Willett, John B. (2010). *Methods matter improving causal inference in educational research*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press. [\(this is available in electronic format from the University Library\)](#)

Hay, M. (2016). *Methods that matter : Integrating mixed methods for more effective social science research*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press. [\(Also available in electronic format from the University Library\)](#)

Any readings that are not from the Rossi text will be made available on the Canvas page.

Grades & Assignment Details

Participation (5%)

In order to master the content, you need to be present both physically and intellectually for both lecture and discussion (“quiz”) section. I recognize that all of us signal participation differently and this will be taken into account, but the main point is that you are coming to class prepared to dig deep into the content. If you need to miss class for some reason, please do your best to let me know ahead of time.

Weekly Reading Questions (10%)

In order to process the readings, it is extremely useful to generate questions based on your understandings and interpretations. Weekly reading questions will be due no later than 5pm on the Wednesday before class. There is significant leeway in structuring these questions, but here are some guidelines:

- Must have at least two thoughtfully-constructed questions based on the readings
- Questions might be geared towards unpacking theory, interrogating metrics, and critically assessing case studies
- Questions should be aimed at provoking thought and discussion amongst the class

You need only submit questions for **five** weeks of the quarter.

Memo #1: Evaluation Critique (15%)

In this assignment, you will choose a program or policy evaluation that has been conducted by an evaluating organization (i.e. Mathematica Policy Research, MDRC, Poverty Action Lab, CDC Program Performance and Evaluation Office). Using what we have learned in the first couple of weeks, you will determine the merits of and address any concerns about the evaluation. This assignment should be no longer than **two** single-spaced pages.

All of the above is individual work, what follows is group work. Groups will be assembled in the first three weeks of class based on shared policy area interests. Ideally, groups are composed of 2-3 individuals.

Memo #2: Understanding the Program (15%)

This assignment is actually Part I of your final project. Your group will choose a program that is run by either a nonprofit or public organization or a policy. Importantly, the program or policy must be currently be unevaluated. In this assignment, you will describe the program that you plan to evaluate (providing links to primary sources on the program), you will document the theory of change espoused by the program, and sketch up a logic model that appropriately characterizes the program. The hard cap for this assignment is 4 single-spaced pages, not including the diagrammatic representation of the logic model. Specific requirements for Memo #2 will be provided on the Canvas page closer to the assignment release.

Memo #3: Data Collection & Analysis Plan (25%)

In this assignment (Part II of your final), you will specify the methods you plan to employ in your evaluation, the data that you will need, a full consideration of the metrics you will use, and an honest evaluation of the strengths and limitations of the design. This assignment should not exceed 7 single-spaced pages, not including diagrams/tables/figures.

Final Evaluation (30%)

The final assignment will be your completed program evaluation proposal, including revised versions of the previous two assignments as well as an additional component to be specified closer to the formal release of the assignment. The hard cap for assignment length is 12 single-spaced pages, appendices not included. Because of the length of this assignment, there will be no “wobble room” on its deadline.

Summary of Assignments, Grade Value, & Due Dates

Assignment	Grade Value	Due Date
Participation	5	--
Weekly Reading Questions	10	Wednesday evenings at 5pm
Memo #1: Evaluation Critique	15	Thursday, April 25, 2019 at 8:00am
Memo #2: Understanding the Program	15	Thursday, May 9, 2019 at 8:00am
Memo #3: Data Collection & Analysis Plan	25	Thursday, May 23, 2019 at 8:00am
Final Program Evaluation Proposal	30	Tuesday, June 11, 2019 at 5pm

Course Outline

This course outline (specifically the list of readings) may change slightly from week to week depending on emerging themes in our discussions. Always check the Weekly Modules on Canvas as all materials will be available there.

	Topics & Guiding Questions	Readings
Week 1 April 4, 2019	Introduction to Program Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is program evaluation? • What tools do we use in these processes? • Where is program evaluation situated/how does it “fit in” with the rest of the Evans curriculum? • How do we ensure that we, as evaluators, are reaching the highest ethical standards? 	Rossi et al. Chapters 1 & 2; Chapter 12 Weiss Chapter 1
Week 2 April 11, 2019	Program Design, Theory of Change, Needs Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the program purport to solve the social problem of interest? • How do we know that the program is necessary? • Do the activities of the program logically connect to the desired outcomes? • How are users engaged? To what extent is the program reaching those that need it? 	Rossi et al. Chapters 4 & 5 Weiss Chapter 3 Levy & Ohls (2007). <i>Jamaica PATH Evaluation (Part I + Targeting Analysis on page 17 of the document.)</i>
Week 3 April 18, 2019	Causality, Validity, & Metrics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we determine whether our program <i>caused</i> our outcomes? • Did we measure what we thought we measured? • How generalizable are our results? <p>Guest Speaker: Professor Mary Kay Gugerty</p>	Rossi et al. Chapter 7 Shadish et al. Chapter 1 Gugerty & Karlan (2018) Chapters 1 & 2 Miguel & Kremer (2004) - <i>selected parts only</i>
Week 7 April 25, 2019	Implementation Research & Process Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we characterize the nuances of program implementation? • What are some of the key methods for conducting process evaluation? 	Rossi et al. Chapter 6 Bess, King, & LeMaster Article Levy & Ohls (2007). <i>Jamaica PATH Evaluation (Parts III & IV)</i>

Week 4 May 2, 2019	<p>Impact Evaluation: Experimental Designs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is an RCT and what benefits does it confer in terms of causal inference? • What are the challenges associated with RCTs? 	<p>Murnane & Willett Chapters 3-5 Weiss Chapter 9 (excerpt) Rossi et al. Chapter 8</p> <p>Banerjee et al. (2015): <i>The Miracle of Microfinance?</i> AEJ.</p>
Week 5 May 9, 2019	<p>Impact Evaluation: Difference-in-Differences Designs, Regression Discontinuity, and Instrumental Variable Designs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we take advantage of natural variation in order to determine the causal effect of the program? • What are some of the challenges/threats to validity involved with these designs? 	<p>Murnane & Willett Chapters 8 & 9 Somers et al. (2013) Sections 1-4</p> <p>Levy & Ohls (2007). <i>Jamaica PATH Evaluation. (Parts V and VI)</i></p> <p>Wong et al. (2008): <i>Evaluating Pre-Kindergarten Programs (RDD)</i></p> <p>Dynarski (2003). <i>Does Aid Matter? (DID)</i></p>
Week 6 May 16, 2019	<p>Impact Evaluation: Propensity Score Matching & Interrupted Time Series Designs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we take advantage of natural variation in order to determine the causal effect of the program? • What are some of the challenges/threats to validity involved with these designs? 	<p>Rossi et al. Chapter 9</p> <p>Hill (2013). <i>Paid Sick Leave. (PSM)</i></p>
Week 8 May 23, 2019	<p>Data Collection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where can we obtain high quality data to evaluate policies and programs? • What are the advantages and challenges associated with each of these sources? • What considerations go into designing and implementing a survey? <p>Mixed Methods & Qualitative Designs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we make causal inferences with qualitative data? • How can we use qualitative methods to enhance evaluation? 	<p>Wholey et al. Chapters 11-18 (<i>just skim these</i>) Weiss Chapter 11 Huston, Duncan, & Yoshikawa (2016) (Chapter 17 in Hay)</p> <p>Levy & Ohls (2007). <i>Jamaica PATH Evaluation (Pg 13-17 in document; 31-35 in pdf)</i></p>
Week 9 May 30, 2019	<p>Big Data, Automation, & Future Directions of Program Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is “big data” and how is it currently being utilized to evaluate 	<p>Schintler & Kulkarni (2014)</p> <p>Eubanks, V. (2018) <i>Automating Inequality</i>. Chapter 5</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • policies and programs? What are the advantages & challenges of these methods? 	Backes, Holzer, and Velez (2014). <i>Is It Worth It?</i>
--	---	--

Week 10 June 6, 2019	<p>Evaluation Design Presentations</p> <p>Each group will have 4 minutes to present their proposal and 2 minutes to solicit feedback from the audience as well as respond to any questions.</p>	
-------------------------	--	--

Finals Week	Final Project (complete with revisions) due Tuesday, June 11th at 5pm
--------------------	--

Discussion Section

Discussion section will be used as an opportunity to further discuss the nuances of our cases, to develop evaluation questions and research designs, and to revise our work in accordance with a “Critical Friends” framework. As such, it is essential that you attend and actively participate in discussion sections. A complete discussion section schedule will be provided in the first week of classes.

Academic Honesty

Evans students are held to the highest standard of academic integrity. You are expected to do your own work and claim only ideas that are authentically yours. Any breaches in academic honesty will be met with a zero on the assignment in question. Please see the [University of Washington’s Academic Honesty Policy](#) for definitions and clearly defined expectations.

Access and Accommodations

Your experience in this class is important to me. If you have already established accommodations with Disability Resources for Students (DRS), please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course.

If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924 or uwdrs@uw.edu or disability.uw.edu. DRS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s) and DRS. It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law.