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PA 5311: Program Evaluation

Spring 2023

Humphrey School of Public Affairs

University of Minnesota

Friday, 12:30 PM – 03:15 PM.

Synchronous In-Person Meetings – Jan 27, Feb 10, Feb 24, Mar 17, Mar 31, Apr 14, Apr 28

Credits: 3 Credits

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1. Instructor

Nishank Varshney

Email: varsh011@umn.edu

Office Hours: Before class, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Other appointments by request

2. Course Description

Program Evaluation is a systematic process to determine the merit, worth, or value of a program. A variety of policies, programs, and projects around the world are implemented aiming to make the world a better place. Program evaluation can be used to answer questions like: To what extent does the program achieve its goals? How can it be improved? Are the program's benefits worth the program costs? Should it be expanded or discontinued?

This class will teach you how to create program evaluations that are methodologically sound, practical, and useful in public affairs. It explores the complexities and realities of conducting program evaluation studies in community-based settings, such as public agencies, non-profit organizations, and collaborative initiatives. I have designed this course as a service-learning course. I expect students to work in groups and engage with a community partner to provide a professional-quality proposal for evaluating a program, project, or initiative to support their organizational mission. Through working on a practical project, students will understand the complexities of conducting a program evaluation shaped by a use-focused approach.

The course is offered in a "hybrid format" with in-person and online course elements, using an array of tools to learn together. We have seven in-person meetings over the course of the semester. These sessions will be opportunities to apply reading and lecture materials, meet with clients, refine our data collection tools, and make final presentations.

Throughout the semester, you will work with an evaluation project team on your work for a client. We will establish these groups during the first week of class. You should plan to spend ~6 hours per week on course-related activities and assignments. For example, you will meet face-to-face or virtually with your project team during weeks we are not meeting as a whole class to make progress on the work for your client, as well as do readings and review virtual lectures.

3. Learning Objectives

The course has two primary goals: 1) provide experience applying frameworks and tools to create a use-focused evaluation project, and 2) build an understanding of the profession of program evaluation. At the end of the term, students will:

- Understand the purposes and uses of program evaluation in public policy
- Be familiar with common evaluation terminology, practices, and ethics
- Be able to design an evaluation plan for a specific public or non-profit program/initiative
- Use and employ a logic model, apply appropriate research strategies, and engage primary stakeholders in using developed products
- Recognize and navigate the cultural and power dynamics at play in evaluations

We will pursue these learning outcomes through project-based learning that allows students to compare different evaluation projects across the course. We will establish guiding evaluation questions, articulate a clear evaluation purpose, and incorporate the projects' theories of action/change. The evaluation plan will lay out a data collection and analysis strategy and will be presented to the client.

4.1. Expectations of Students

You are expected to:
- Read the assigned material and watch the pre-recorded videos before each class
- Actively participate in class discussions and group project
- Complete the deliverable due before each class
- Work in groups on developing evaluation plans for your clients
- Be respectful and inclusive to all classmates and instructors
- Inform me of excused absences to obtain missed course materials
- Ask me questions in class or during office hours when anything is unclear

4.2. Instructor expectations

You can expect me to:
- Create a welcoming and inclusive environment
- Come prepared and on time for class
- Provide timely feedback on assignments and exams
- Answer all questions to the best of my ability
- Utilize your feedback to improve our class
- Admit that I am not perfect and be open to discussing any errors in grading, assignments, or exam questions
- Respond to emails within 24 hours (except on weekends when there may be a delay)
- Communicate any changes to class and office hour schedule in a timely manner in-person and via Canvas announcements

5. Class Design

5.1. Course Material

There is no required textbook for this course. You will be able to access all course materials through the course Canvas site - canvas.umn.edu. For help with Canvas, go to https://z.umn.edu/CanvasHelpandSetup or click the "Canvas Help" link on our course Canvas site. You should check the website regularly to attain the necessary readings, assignments, announcements, and other information.

Students lose access to Canvas sites and course reserves at the end of the semester. If you'd like to download class material (depending on copyright) or your own work for personal use, please do so during the semester.

5.2. Set Your Canvas Notification Preferences

This course depends upon your ability to receive communications from your instructor about the class. It's important that you set up your Canvas "notification preferences" to choose how and when you'd like to receive messages via text, email, or both. Find easy-to-follow instructions at "How do I set my Canvas notification preferences as a student?: https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10624-4212710344. I strongly recommend that you opt to receive notifications of announcements and conversation messages, so you don't risk missing important class communication.

5.3. Active Learning Culture

We will follow a flipped learning model, where I will post pre-recorded lectures covering the class material each week in advance. I expect you to come to the class having watched these lectures so we can use the synchronous class time on active learning activities. Prior feedback from students has shown that in-class group activities significantly improved their learning outcomes. Hence, I have incorporated several activities into the class structure. This classroom environment, therefore, relies on you to come to class prepared and ready to participate, and you will be expected to respect and value the opinions of your peers.

Students are expected to spend approximately two to three hours per credit hour per week on assignments and readings for this course. Since this is a three-credit course, you can expect to spend approximately six hours per week working on readings and assignments for this course. For more information, review: https://policy.umn.edu/education/studentwork

The online delivery of parts of this course gives you the flexibility to arrange your own weekly schedule. That flexibility requires that you plan and manage your time efficiently. You are responsible for actively using the online learning material and managing your time to complete assigned reading and online activities before their deadlines. Work done between in-person takes the place of additional class meetings.

5.4. Assessment

The assignments for this course move you toward achieving the course's learning outcomes - understanding conceptual frameworks and practical strategies for conducting evaluation projects and building an understanding of program evaluation as practiced across the globe.

Program Evaluation Fieldwork (60%):

You will demonstrate your mastery of knowledge in this course, mainly through developing a complete program evaluation plan and data collection/analysis strategy for a public or non-profit client. Students will work in groups of 3 or 4 to create an evaluation plan (approx. 20-25 pages), written in APA style, suitable for submission to a potential evaluation client. You will be graded on the quality of writing, clarity, organizational structure, and quality of the plan in addressing evaluation questions. This document should be professional and appropriate to give to a community partner. If the client actually hired you to conduct the evaluation, this would be your contract.

There will be assignments due related to the following items: Draft Object Description (5%); Logic Model (5%); Design Matrix (5%); Evaluation Design (5%); Data Collection Tool(s) & Analysis Plan (10%); Results (5%); Draft Presentation (5%); and Final Plan & Presentation for Client (20%). You will submit these as a group (please have every member's name and the team name on each group submission).

Peer Feedback (10%):

Your peers on the project team will determine 10% of your grade in this class. Every student will rate each of their team members (including themselves) regarding their contribution to the evaluation design process and final evaluation plan. To receive full credit, you need to be an active, engaged, and equal partner in all aspects of the evaluation proposal.

Reflection Memos (15%):

You will individually complete two reflection memos, one before the Spring Break (5%) and one at the end of the semester (10%). These memos will allow you to reflect upon your current and desired knowledge and skills in the context of your group project. Professional practice is improved when people take the time to reflect on what they are doing now and how to improve effectiveness. (10%)

Contribution to the collective learning process (15%):

This is an active learning environment which means your absence affects your learning as well as that of your peers. Since we only meet seven times in person, attendance in those sessions is highly encouraged. Please keep this in mind when deciding if missing the class is necessary. However, I acknowledge that we all have different life situations, which sometimes restrict our abilities to be in class. Therefore, each student may have one absence with no consequence to their grade. Points will be deducted from your Collective Learning grade for repeatedly missing class.

Before each class meeting, you must read all assigned readings and come prepared to discuss and challenge the covered content. You are expected to contribute one or more questions, summaries of the readings, or other insights per week of class. Be prepared to contribute through Canvas if you cannot attend the in-person class due to extenuating circumstances.

To receive credit for attending class: Students must upload a PDF of a job description that illustrates job opportunities for individuals with master's or doctoral degrees in program evaluation in a context they find exciting and engaging.

Rationale: This activity is inspired by Dr. John LaVelle, OLPD 5501. It will provide you with experience searching for job opportunities, raise your awareness of the knowledge, skills, and other abilities desired for evaluation-related work, and provide Humphrey with a student-driven resource of potential job opportunities across the world.

Assessment	Weightage	Due Date
Draft Object Description	5 points	Feb 8
Logic Model	5 points	Feb 15
Design Matrix	5 points	Mar 1
Mid-Semester Reflection Memo	5 points	Mar 3
Evaluation Design	5 points	Mar 22
Draft Data Collection Tools & Analysis Plan	-	Mar 29
Final Data Collection Tools & Analysis Plan	10 points	Apr 5
Results	5 points	Apr 19
Draft Presentation	5 points	Apr 19
Final Plan & Presentation	20 points	Apr 26
End-Semester Reflection Memo	10 points	May 8
Peer Feedback	10 points	May 8
Contribution to Collective Learning	15 points	-

5.5. Assignment Extension and Late Submission Policy

All assignments should be submitted by the due date listed in the course schedule. If an extension is required, please email me with the reason, and the time you would be able to submit the assignment. Students who fail to submit work on time and do not ask for an extension will be subject to a 10% per day reduction for up to five days. After that point, the assignment will be graded as zero.

5.6. Grading

For each assessment component, I will review your work, comment on it, and return it to you with points earned in the following class. Grading levels are as follows:

A	100-94 points
A-	<94-90 points
B+	<90-87 points
B	<87-84 points
B-	<84-80 points
C+	<80-77 points
C	<77-74 points
C-	<74-70 points
D+	<70-67 points
D	<67-64 points
D-	<64-61 points
F	<61 points

You may request to receive an "I" (Incomplete) if extenuating circumstances prevent you from completing your coursework on due time. An "Incomplete" assignment requires a written agreement specifying the time and manner in which you will complete your unfinished work.

5.7. Extra Credit

I might give opportunities for extra credit on activities that help you engage with the course material outside the class. I will announce them in class and on canvas.

6. University and School Policies

For links to the University of Minnesota and Humphrey School policies, please click the "U of M Policies" link on our course Canvas site, or see https://z.umn.edu/PolicyStatements. Policies include information on student conduct, scholastic dishonesty, sexual harassment, equal opportunity, disability accommodations, and more.

Day	Readings and Other Learning Objects (complete prior to the date in the first column)	In-Person Classes & Virtual Lectures (VL)	Deliverables
1/20	**Overview and Being an Evaluator** • Marvin C. Alkin (2011), "What is evaluation?" *Evaluation Essentials: From A to Z*. Guilford: pg. 1-15. • American Evaluation Association (July 2018). *Guiding Principles for Evaluators*. • Recommendations from previous PA 5311 students	VL: Introduction VL: Being a program evaluator	Answer the survey to inform which project you will work on (1/20)
1/27	**Project Assignment** • Michael Patton (2012), "Introduction, Overview, & Context" *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation*. pg. 1-14 • Y. Salabarría-Peña, B.S. Apt and C.M. Walsh (2007), Practical Use of Program Evaluation among Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Programs: Ch. 1, Engage Stakeholders. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. pg. 13-32.	**In-person class** **Meet clients**	
2/3	**Understanding the program** • Michael Patton (2012), "Determining What Intervention Model or Theory of Change is Being Evaluated," (Chapter 9) Sage Publications: pg. 230-260. • John A. McLaughlin, Gretchen B. Jordan (2015), Using Logic Models (Chapter 3), Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation, Fourth Edition, Kathryn E. Newcomer, Harry P. Hatry, and Joseph S. Wholey.	VL: Understanding the program VL: Establishing Questions	Object description (2/8)
2/10	**Shaping evaluation questions** • Peter H. Rossi, Howard Freeman, & Mark Lipsey, (1999) "Identifying Issues and Formulating Questions (Chapter 3), *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach*, 6th edition. Sage Publications. pg. 79-116. • Center for Disease Control (2013). "Good Evaluation Questions: A Checklist to Help Focus Your Evaluation," National Asthma Control Program.	**In-person class**	Logic model (2/15)
2/17	**Design for Evaluating Process Improvement and Assessing Impact** • Emil J. Posavac (2011). "Monitoring the Implementation and the Operation of Programs," Program Evaluation Methods and Case Studies, 8th edition. Prentice-Hall, Inc. pg. 125-144. • Darlene Russ-Eft and Hallie Preskill (2009). Selecting an Evaluation Design (Chapter 6). Evaluation in organizations: A systematic approach to enhancing learning, performance, and change. Basic Books: pg. 173-208	VL: Process evaluation VL: Evaluation Design VL: Evaluating program impact	
2/24	**Monitoring Outcomes** • Theodore Poister (2010). "Performance Measurement: Monitoring Program Outcomes," Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation, Wholey, J.S., Hatry, HP, and Newcomer, KE Jossey-Bass: pg. 100-124. • Carol H. Weiss (1998). "Measures," *Evaluation*, (Second edition). Prentice Hall: pg. 114-151.	**In-person class**	Design matrix (3/1)

Day	Readings and Other Learning Objects (complete prior to the date in the first column)	In-Person Classes & Virtual Lectures (VL)	Deliverables
3/3	**Data Collection Methods** • Darlene Russ-Eft and Hallie Preskill (2009). Choosing Data Collection Methods (Chapter 7). Evaluation in organizations: A systematic approach to enhancing learning, performance, and change. Basic Books: pg. 209-228 • Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J., and Kathleen MT Collins. "A typology of mixed methods sampling designs in social science research." The qualitative report 12, no. 2 (2007): 281-316.	VL: Data sources VL: Sampling	Mid-Semester Reflection paper (3/2)
3/10	**Spring Break**		
3/17	**Gathering Quality Information** • Ellen Taylor-Powell and Mary Gladys Marshall (1998). Questionnaire Design: Asking questions with a purpose. Cooperative Extension Service, University of Wisconsin-Extension • Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey (2001). Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews (Chapter 2). "Social analysis: selected tools and techniques." Social Development Paper 36: pg. 4-23 • William C. Adams (2015). "Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews," (Chapter 19) *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation* (Fourth Edition), JS Jossey-Bass: pg. 492-505.	**In-person class**	Evaluation design (3/22)
3/24	**Data Analysis** • Patricia Rogers and Delwyn Goodrick, (2010). "Qualitative Data Analysis," (Chapter 19) *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation* (Third Edition), Wholey, J.S., Hatry, HP, and Newcomer, KE Jossey-Bass: pg. 429-453. • Kathryn Newcomer and Dylan Conger (2015). "Using Statistics in Evaluation," (Chapter 23) *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation* (Fourth Edition), JS Jossey-Bass: pg. 596-635. • Yu Xiao and Maria Watson (2019). "Guidance on conducting a systematic literature review." Journal of planning education and research, 39(1), 93-112.		Draft data collection tool and analysis plan (3/29)
3/31	**Use of findings** • Michael Patton (2012), "Simulating Use of Findings," (Chapter 12) *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation* Sage Publications: pg. 309-322. • George F. Grob (2015). "Providing Recommendations, Suggestions, and Options for Improvement," (Chapter 27) Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation (Fourth Edition), Jossey-Bass: pg. 725-738.	**In-person class**	Revised data collection tool and analysis plan (4/5)
4/7	**Project** No readings	VL: Communicating the Full Plan	

Day	Readings and Other Learning Objects (complete prior to the date in the first column)	In-Person Classes & Virtual Lectures (VL)	Deliverables
4/14	**Communicating findings** • Stephanie Evergreen & Ann Emery (2014). "Data Visualization Checklist." • Gary Miron (2004). "Evaluation Report Checklist."	**In-person class**	Draft results and draft presentation (4/19)
4/21	**Project team meetings** No readings		
4/28	**Final Presentation of Project with your Team**	**In-person class**	Final report (4/26) Peer assessment (5/8) End-Semester Reflection paper (5/8)