

Education/Psychology 6010

Introduction to Program Evaluation

Utah State University

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Time:	Fall, 2007; Thurs, 4:30-7:00	Classroom:	130 Education

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Texts: *Evaluation, 2nd Ed.*, by Carol H. Weiss (Prentice Hall, 1998)

Evaluation: A Systematic Approach, by Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman (Sage, 2004)

Reserve readings: Mark, Henry, & Julnes (MHJ), chaps. 1-3; Julnes, 2004; Julnes, draft; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell (SCC), chaps. 2 & 3; Julnes & Rog; Henry & Julnes; Caracelli & Greene

Case from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, "Cleveland's Scholarship-in-Escrow Program" (paid with most of your \$5 lab fee)

Goal

The overall goal of this course is straightforward: to introduce you, the students, to the skills and perspectives required for the effective practice of program evaluation. In focusing on the practice of evaluation, we will be adopting the pragmatic view that the best way to learn something is to be engaged in activities as close to the real-world counterparts as possible. Accordingly, we will focus on helping you leave this course with the concrete skills needed to write evaluation plans. Within this goal, I recognize that different students have different needs and will allow you to develop an evaluation plan for a program that is of interest to you.

Objectives

There are many things to know to be competent in writing evaluations plans, only some of which are required in any particular evaluation plan. In order to obtain the concrete skills that would allow you to plan and develop a range of evaluation plans, you should, by the end of the semester, feel that you have achieved the following:

1. Appreciate the process of evaluation, and the role of evaluation in a political context,
2. Be able to describe a problem and a program that attempts to address the problem,
3. Be able to recognize threats to internal and external validity in specific contexts
4. Be able to write a methodology section with an evaluation design to address those threats

5. Be able to use multiple regression analysis to interpret evaluation data,
6. Be able to conceptualize and interpret calculations for a benefit-cost analysis, and
7. Be self-reflective about the values that are reflected in any evaluation.

Requirements

To achieve these objectives requires some serious work for all of us. I will provide the organization and structure that focus your efforts most productively; you will commit an average of six or seven hours per week outside of class to read, think deeply about the material, and complete assignments so that you can fulfill the following requirements.

1. In-Class Exams. There will be three in-class exams (the first will be Sept. 27, the second Oct. 25, and the third Nov. 15) that will assess your understanding of the course material. The first covers the political context and program issues (Weiss; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman; and Mark, Henry, & Julnes material on the process and politics of evaluation; Objectives #1 &2), the second the material on design (from Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman; Mark, Henry, & Julnes; and Shadish, Cook, & Campbell (Objectives #3 and #4). The third exam will cover some new material, quantitative analysis (Objectives #5 & #6), but will also focus on integrating prior material.

2. Class Presentations. As students of pedagogy, we know that one of the best ways to develop our understanding of concepts and practices is to explain them to others using our own words. As such, you will be required to give one presentation to the class this semester. My preferred approach is for these to be group presentations (two or three students per group) as the group discussions (particularly when there are different points of view) generally sharpen understanding. These presentations should last about ten minutes and should center around a current events example (e.g., from a newspaper or a magazine) that illustrates the material of that class (so, start looking for interesting examples now).

3. Regression and Benefit-Cost Memos. You will be required to write a one-page memo, due Nov. 8 and written as if to your boss (Objective #5), that offers your interpretation of a multiple regression analysis that I will provide. You are to give the numbers an interpretation that fits a context that you know something about (work or other interest). Begin with a short statement of the context (why you ran the analysis) and then explain what the numbers in the analysis mean. In the last paragraph of the memo, offer some implications--perhaps recommendations--based on the analysis. You will also turn in a Benefit-Cost memo (Objective #6) that day, also to some boss, that explains the net-present value of some project that is relevant for you (numbers will be provided).

4. Group/Individual Evaluation Plan. In pursuit of the full range of course objectives listed above, particularly the reporting-oriented Objectives #2 and #4 listed above, you will write an evaluation plan during this semester. This will be the central task for this course, which I would prefer to be a group project where you work with one other person and submit a two-person group paper. If you'd rather work on this individually, you may.

As suggested by the pragmatic emphasis on learning-by-doing, putting together an actual evaluation plan is an important part of translating the wisdom of our assigned readings into

concrete skills for you. This evaluation plan will be completed in stages. The first stage, due Oct. 4, will require you to introduce the program being evaluated, and the problem that it attempts to ameliorate, and to address the questions to be addressed by the evaluation (about 4 pages; see oerl.sri.com for examples of 'project description' and 'evaluation overview'). The second part, due Nov. 1, covers the design part (about 4 pages; measurement and specific methodological approach) of an evaluation plan. The final plan, using revised versions of the first two stages and new material on analysis (about 3 pages; again, see oerl.sri.com for examples) and valuation, is due Nov. 29. Now, you have a choice for the focus of your evaluation plan; you can choose to develop a plan for either: (1) the Cleveland Escrow case that we will be analyzing or (2) a program or policy of your own choosing. While the first option is likely to be a bit more straightforward, the second option is likely to be more meaningful for you. Talk with me about your thoughts on these choices.

5. Final Exam. The semester will end with an in-class final exam (on Dec. 13) in which students will make 5-minute presentations of their evaluation plans.

6. Class Participation. A major point of the above requirements is to ensure that you are actively engaged in learning the material covered in class. Class participation is part of being engaged in learning, and participation this semester will take several forms. One form is simply reading the material and coming to class prepared to contribute and ask questions. For this, I will have a sign-up sheet each session on which you will indicate whether you have read the material assigned for that session. Another form will be the class discussions in which we relate the concepts in the assigned readings to examples of actual projects to be evaluated. Some of the examples that we'll discuss will come from the programs that you've chosen to evaluate. Another important example will be the Cleveland case that we'll all read about. Because we'll all read this case, it will provide a 'blackboard' of sorts that we can express our thoughts on with a shared understanding. An additional form of class participation will be your work with others in the class. We've mentioned the group presentations that you will be conducting, but I will also ask you to work in groups to share your knowledge with other students (the two areas where I know this will be important are 'validity' and multiple regression). This group work is likely to be a bit more than usual this semester because of the large class size.

Grades for the course will be calculated on a standard scale (95 and above: A; 90-94: A-; 87-89: B+; 84-86: B; 80-83: B-; 77-79: C+; 74-76: C; 70-73: C-; etc.) with the following assignment weights: in-class exams, 5%, 10%, and 20% for **35%** total; class presentations, **5%**; regression and benefit-cost memos, **5%** total; evaluation plan, 10%, 15%, & 15%, for a total of **40%**; final exam, **5%**; and participation, **10%**.

Schedule of Classes/Assignments

- Aug. 30 Introduction
Weiss: 1; MHJ: 1; RFL: 1
- Sept. 6 Introduction: Purposes of Program Evaluation and the Role of Values
Weiss: 2; MHJ: 2 & 3
- Sept. 13 Planning Evaluations: Strategy of Fitting the Evaluation to the Program/Decision
Weiss: 4; RFL: 2 & 3; case reading: Cleveland Voucher;
(Summary of one program for your evaluation plan)
- Sept. 20 Assessing Need and Program Theory
RFL: 4 & 5; Weiss: 3 **(Diagram a program theory for your program and bring it to class)**
- Sept. 27 Process/Implementation Evaluation
RFL: 6; Julnes-draft; **IN-CLASS EXAM**
- Oct. 4 Outcome Measurement & Monitoring
RFL: 7; Weiss: 6 & 7; **Plan Due: Description and Overview (w/ Prog. Theory)**
- Oct. 11 Impact Analysis: Randomized Experimental Designs
RFL: 8; SCC: 2 & 3; Julnes, 2004
- Oct. 18 Impact Analysis: Quasi-Experimental Designs
RFL: 9; Julnes & Rog; (SCC: 4 & 5)
- Oct. 25 Impact Analysis: Interpretation of Results
RFL: 10; **IN-CLASS EXAM**
- Nov. 1 Assessment of Program Value: Benefit-Cost Analysis
RFL: 11; Henry & Julnes; (Weiss: 10)
Plan Due: Design Section
- Nov. 8 Assessment of Program Value
Regression Memo due; Benefit-Cost Memo due
- Nov. 15 **IN-CLASS EXAM**
- Nov. 29 Critical Review: Triangulation of Evidence
Caracelli & Greene; **Plan Due: Final Plan**
- Dec. 6 Critical Review: Reporting and Ethics of Evaluation
Weiss: 13 & 14; RFL: 12
- Dec. 13 **Final Exam** (in-class)