

PAF 541/NLM 598 – Program Evaluation

Arizona State University
School of Public Affairs and The Center for Nonprofit Leadership & Management
Spring 2003 - January 24, February 7, 8, 9, April 25, 26, 27
ASU Downtown Center

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The most fundamental question within the field of program evaluation is “Do social programs work?” This course is designed to provide students with the tools to answer this question as both *users* and *producers* of evaluation research.

Program evaluation serves many important functions. It supplies information to policymakers and program administrators who face decisions about which programs to fund, scale back, expand, modify, or eliminate. Evaluation is an accountability tool: when individuals or agencies decide to finance a program, they have a right to ask what their funds bought. Evaluation is also a vehicle for improving public services. By finding out what efforts succeed and fail—and how new ideas and approaches fare against existing practices—policymakers and administrators can improve new policy and program designs, and devote resources to programs that work and fix programs that are inefficient or marginally effective.

The course involves students in consulting teams, conducting evaluation research for actual non-profit and government agency clients. The combination of real-world experience with course readings, lectures and discussions aims to educate course participants in both the theoretical and practical realms of program evaluation. Throughout the course, just as I will share from my own experience as an evaluator of welfare and employment policies and programs, I encourage students to relate the general material to their own experience and specific policy interests.

Prerequisites

Prerequisites for this course are PAF 501 and 502 Research Methods I & II and PAF 505, their equivalents, or instructor permission.

Requirements

Class attendance & participation: Students who attend class greatly improve their chances of doing well in the course. Students who participate in class demonstrate that they are engaging the material. Attending and participating class are important elements of this course.

Applied Evaluation Project: Students will work together in teams to perform evaluation research for one of six area organizations, nonprofit or public. Clients will make presentations to the

class to aid in students' decisions about which project to select. The following are brief project descriptions:

- *What are the impacts of linking volunteers with hospital need?* Project MVP (Medical Volunteers Helping People in Public Health) is a volunteer placement service that began in 1996 and has grown substantially since then. By placing skilled volunteers in hospital and clinic environments, the project aims to improve the quality of care specifically for underinsured, uninsured and disadvantaged populations. Community C.A.R.E. Connections (contact: Courtney Kutta) is the local agency that facilitates these placements, and the agency seeks an evaluation of the effectiveness of Project MVP. Prior evaluation reports are available to provide the beginning of a possible time-series analysis.
- *What are the effects of the Doran Mentoring Program?* This Spring, Salvation Army South Mountain (contact: Angela Adams) will operate a pilot mentoring program that links ASU Doran Community Scholar students with volunteer junior high students from the Roosevelt School District. Each Scholar will be matched with two students in a mentoring relationship. Together these mentoring groups will engage in community service activities and conduct research on social issues. The evaluation of this pilot project will focus on the effects of the program on personal growth and self-esteem, academic performance, attitudes toward service and desire to affect social change, among other outcomes. Because this is a pilot project, the evaluation will be important to informing future directions.
- *What effects does hand-on biology learning have on student outcomes?* ASU's Academic Community Engagement Services (contact: Nancy Crocker) places interns in one of Sunland School's science classes. The interns lead 8th graders in hands-on learning activities in an effort to increase the latter's academic performance. The evaluation of this project may involve a comparison classroom and ultimately will measure the effects of enriched biology instruction primarily on the participating 8th grade students (though additional measures may examine change among the ASU interns providing instruction).
- *How do public perception and organizational goals match?* In the recent past, the Tempe Historical Museum (contact: Amy A. Douglass) has undertaken some strategic planning to help focus its exhibits and special projects. This has involved, in part, deciding on specific themes that exhibits should follow. The museum has begun collecting community data in an effort to ascertain the extent to which its new directions are like or dislike the public's expectations. The class project will continue/expand the community survey, possibly undertake additional research, and ultimately evaluate the connections between the organization's goals and public perception/desires/expectations.
- *What effects does youth volunteerism have?* The Volunteer Center (contacts: Lenore Parker, Amy Kelly, Lanette Rosenbaum) operates a program that aims to create a stronger sense of citizenship among youth who volunteer in the program. The evaluation will involve using existing data, collecting new data and devising a strategy for assessing the effect of volunteering on individual attitudes and outcomes.
- *Improving tools for effective service targeting.* The Arizona Department of Economic Security (contact: Mark McCain, with Denise Blackman of the Jobs Policy Unit) is interested in further refining the screening guide that case managers use to assess the employment skills

and barriers among the state's public assistance recipients. Prior research has shown that the instrument is valid (it appropriately identifies those with higher and lower employment needs), which therefore allows the Jobs program to be responsive its clients. This project may involve fielding another wave of the survey or analyzing longitudinal data on the first wave's respondents in order to inform the effectiveness with which case managers link program clients with necessary training, education, services and work supports.

The exact research design, measures of interest, data collection plan and analysis strategies will be determined in consultation with each projects sponsor/advisor. The evaluation results from all of these projects are likely to inform future decisions about the involved projects. Note the following key dates and times:

February 19, noon first Journal entries due
March 5, 5PM Research Plan due
March 12, noon Journal update due
March 26, noon Journal update due
April 9, noon Journal update due
April 26-27 in-class Presentation; draft Final Report due
May 7, 5PM Final Report due, final Journal due

Additional materials on components of the project (Journal, Research Plan, Presentation, Final Report) and expectations of student/team performance will be distributed in class.

Grading

Grades will be weighted as follows:

Attendance & participation	20 points
Applied evaluation project	80 points total (distributed as follows)
Research Plan	(10 points)
Final Report	(50 points)
Presentation	(10 points)
Journal/other	(10 points)

There will be no incompletes given, with the exception of serious *unexpected* events that prevent course completion. Any student in this situation must confer with me in advance.

Reading

Students may purchase the following books from the ASU bookstore:

Bingham, Richard D., and Claire L. Felbinger. Evaluation in Practice: A Methodological Approach, 2nd ed. New York, NY: Seven Bridges Press, 2002.

Orr, Larry L. Social Experiments: Evaluating Public Programs with Experimental Methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999.

Other required readings, identified by author and chapter throughout the syllabus, will be distributed in class.

Students are encouraged to undertake additional reading in specific areas of interest to them. The GAO (<http://www.gao.gov>) is a good source for relevant reports in many areas. Many think tanks have evaluation reports available online. Some of the more prominent/prolific include the

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) (<http://www.mdrc.org>), the Urban Institute (<http://www.urban.org>), Abt Associates (<http://www.abtassociates.com>), and Mathematica Policy Research (<http://www.mathematica-mpr.com>). Journals that are particularly relevant to program analysis and evaluation are:

The Journal of Policy Analysis and Management
Evaluation Review (previously *Evaluation Quarterly*)
The American Journal of Evaluation

Academic Integrity

The ASU Graduate College bulletin summarizes the university's statement on academic honesty as follows: "The highest standards of academic integrity are expected of all students... Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, fabrication, tampering, plagiarism, or facilitating such activities..." In particular, "'fabrication' means falsification or invention of any information or citation" and "'plagiarism' means representing the words or ideas of another as one's own." Both the university and I take these issues very seriously. If you have any questions about how to cite someone else's work, please ask; using others' ideas to generate your own is part of the learning process, and it is important to give appropriate credit along the way.

Course Schedule

The following is the schedule for class meetings, with reading assignments for each. For each date, students should do the readings *in advance*, to permit participation in discussion (all readings are required, with the few optional readings identified as such).

Introduction

- Introduction to each other, to course methods and to course substance
Bingham & Felbinger, Chapter 1
- Defining the problem: size, scope, place, time, people, institutions
Rossi & Freeman, Chapter 2 (handout)

Day One

- Describing the intervention: articulating goals, the logic/causal model and the nature of causation, the implementation/operational model
Kellogg Foundation, Chapter 1 (handout); Werner, Chapter 1 (handout)
- Measurement: operationalization, reliability, validity, survey design I
Bingham & Felbinger, Chapter 3; Babbie, Chapters 5-6 (handout);
Hamilton, *et al.* (handout, optional)
- Introduction to impact evaluation: threats to internal validity/thinking about plausible rival explanations; evaluation design overview
Bingham & Felbinger, Chapter 2

Day Two

- Determining program impacts I: experimental design in theory and in practice
Bingham & Felbinger, pp. 55-56, Chapter 5 intro, Chapter 7 intro; Hamilton *et al.*, Executive Summary (handout); Orr, Chapter 1, pp. 35-50

- Determining program impacts II: more evaluation designs (reflexive, comparison group)
Bingham & Felbinger, Chapters 8, 10, 11
- Presentations by clients (~3-4PM)
- Complete Project Preference & Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Day Three

- Determining program impacts III: more evaluation designs (time series)
Bingham & Felbinger, Chapter 12
- Data Collection: ethics, human participants and confidentiality considerations; data collection logistics, timing, planning; instrument/survey design II
NIH, entire
- Data Analysis: pre-post comparisons, regression adjustment
Orr, pp. 50-62, 187-93
- Evaluation in Practice: getting started with applied projects

Day Four

- Advanced topics in design I: solomon four, cost benefit, meta-evaluation, theory-driven evaluation/theory of change
Bingham & Felbinger, Chapter 9 intro, Chapter 13 intro, Chapter 16;
New Approaches, pp. 1-85 (handout)
- Two group presentations

Day Five

- Advanced topics in design II: site selection, sample size and detectable effects, cluster random assignment
- Two group presentations

Day Six

- Advanced topics in analysis: participation v. nonparticipation, subgroup analysis
Orr, pp. 62-64, 194-229
- Two group presentations