SW945: Evaluation Research
Spring 2011

Instructors: Lonnie Berger and Kristi Slack
Class: Monday 8:00 to 10:30 a.m., School of Social Work, Room 114
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a comprehensive introduction to the practice of evaluation research with regard to social welfare and human development programs and policies. It is organized around a variety of methods for planning, evaluating, and assessing social interventions in order to understand and improve their efficacy. Topics will include theory-driven approaches to ethical issues in evaluation research, the role of the evaluator, conducting needs assessments, producing logic models, measuring and assessing multiple types of evidence, planning and implementing evaluations of new and existing programs, evaluation design (experimental, quasi-experimental, observational), cost-benefit analysis, and translational research. Whereas the primary focus of the course will be impact evaluation—estimating the quantitative effects of social programs and policies—other stages of evaluation will also be covered. Additionally, considerable attention will be given to program theory and design. Case studies will be utilized throughout the course to illustrate current approaches to each topic. Finally, we will address effect sizes, interpretation of findings, and the role of evaluation results in program and policy development.

In contrast to many evaluation research courses, we will heavily focus on applied examples of on-the-ground interactions with program staff, program evaluation planning and implementation, issues of quality assurance and monitoring, problem-solving strategies for inevitable road blocks, and how to achieve the most rigorous possible evaluation of a social welfare program in a context of resistance to randomization and/or the quantitative evaluation process.

The primary objectives of the course are to: (1) expose students to the multidisciplinary field of evaluation research; (2) familiarize students with contemporary approaches to evaluation research; (3) facilitate an understanding of the strengths and limitations of a range of evaluation models; and (4) prepare students to design, implement, utilize, and critique evaluation research, as well as to contextualize and interpret findings.

COURSE FORMAT

The course is organized as a seminar. Students are expected to take an active role in class discussions. Class sessions will include limited lecture and considerable discussions of the readings and opportunities for student presentations. As such, students are expected to come to class having carefully read the materials and ready to fully participate in discussion. To facilitate this, we have included as the last page
of this document a “concept sheet,” which is designed to help you identify the important issues in each of
the assigned articles and chapters. We strongly recommend that you use this document to organize your
thinking for class discussion.

ASSIGNMENTS

Present two case studies. Twice during the course of the semester students will be asked to present a case
study to the class that is relevant to the weekly topic. This assignment will require that you identify a case
example, disseminate a relevant reading, and lead the class through a discussion in which the concepts for
the week are applied to the case. DUE: As assigned.

Conduct a needs assessment. Students will conduct a comprehensive needs assessment using data
provided by the instructors. The assignment involves making resource allocations for child maltreatment
prevention program funding by region (i.e., Wisconsin county) informed by (imperfect) available data on
prevention service availability, indicators of child and family well-being, and rates of child abuse and
neglect. DUE: Friday, 2/25/11.

Prepare a logic model and critique. Students will develop a detailed logic model outlining the theory of
change underlying an existing or proposed program or policy and detailing the steps through which a
given set of outcomes is expected to be achieved. Students are free to choose a program that they are
familiar with (e.g., related to a field placement, place of employment, or volunteer setting), but should
choose something for which a logic model has not yet been developed. DUE: Friday, 3/11/11.

Develop evaluation protocol. The culminating project of the semester will be to (a) prepare a 10-15 page
(single-spaced) evaluation protocol in which you apply the concepts covered in class—including program
theory and description, design, implementation, measurement, methodology, data analysis plan, issues of
internal and external validity—to propose 2-3 alternative evaluation strategies for assessing the impact of
the program you selected for the logic model assignments; and (2) deliver an in-class power-point
presentation that gives an overview of your evaluation protocol. DUE: Presentations during sessions 13
and 14, as assigned; final protocol due Friday, 5/6/11.

Detailed instructions for the written assignments will be provided during the course of the semester.

GRADING

20% Needs assessment
20% Logic model—graphic (10%) and logic model critique (10%)
10% Presentation of case studies (5% each)
40% Final project—evaluation protocol (25%) and in-class presentation (15%)
10% class participation
COURSE READINGS


The articles for each week will be posted on the class Learn@UW website (on the content page in pdf format).

COURSE OUTLINE

Please note that this outline is tentative, in that we may make changes to the readings as the course progresses. These changes will be communicated in class and/or by e-mail two weeks in advance of the due date for readings.

Session #1, 1/24/11: Introduction and overview/organization of the course; discussion of ethical issues in evaluation research

Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapter 1.

Kellogg Foundation, Chapters 2 & 3.


Session #2, 1/31/11: Needs assessment

Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapter 4.


Session #3, 2/7/11: Logic Models

GUEST SPEAKER: JENNIVER NOYES- ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF IRP

Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapter 5.


Session #4, 2/14/11: Types and standards of evidence I

Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapters 6 & 7.

Kellogg Foundation, Chapter 4.


Session #5, 2/21/11: The role of the evaluator; balancing agency/provider/stakeholder needs with scholarly needs

GUEST SPEAKER: JENNY GREther- PROGRAM MANAGER, EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE

Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapters 2 and 12.


**NEEDS ASSESSMENT ASSIGNMENT DUE Friday, 2/25/11**

**Session #6, 2/28/11: Types and standards of evidence II**

Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapter 10.


**Session #7, 3/7/11: Planning and implementing the evaluation**

Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapter 3.

Kellogg Foundation, Chapter 5, pp. 47-95.


**LOGIC MODEL ASSIGNMENT DUE 3/11/11**

**Spring Break – No Class: 3/14/11**

**Session #8, 3/21/11:** Evaluation design I: randomized experiments

Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapter 8.


Session #9, 3/28/11: Evaluation design II: quasi-experimental designs

Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapter 9.


*Other readings: TBA

Session #10, 4/4/11: Evaluation design III: evaluation research with observational data


Other readings: TBA

Session #11, 4/11/11: Cost-benefit analysis

Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapter 10.


Session #12, 4/18/11: Translational research

GUEST SPEAKER: TBA

Kellogg Foundation, Chapter 5, pp. 96-104.


*Other readings: TBA

Session #13, 4/25/11: Student presentations

Session #14, 5/2/11: Student presentations
Concept Sheet
Evaluation Research

This sheet is designed to help you to identify the key points in the readings for the week and to organize your thoughts so that you are prepared to actively participate in class discussion. Its purpose is to facilitate identification of the major themes in each reading, including support for a theory or conceptual advance; concepts related to classification, description, and causation; key analytic methods or identification strategies; major research contribution and findings; and implications or importance for program evaluation, practice, or policy. You are not required to address each of these topics for every reading; rather comment on those that are most relevant.

Support for a theory or conceptual advance:

Concepts related to sampling, measurement, and data collection:

Key analytic methods, analytic rigor:

Major research contribution and findings:

Implications or importance for program evaluation, practice, or policy: