SW945: Evaluation Research  
Spring 2014

Instructor: Kristi Slack  
Class: Friday 9:00 to 11:30 a.m., School of Social Work, Room 114  
Offices: School of Social Work, 2nd floor  
Office Hours: By appointment  
Phone: 608-263-4630 (but I do not check this frequently—email is preferred)  
E-mail: Ksslack@wisc.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a comprehensive introduction to the practice of evaluation research with regard to social welfare 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 evaluation research, ethical issues in evaluation, 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), 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 and guest lecturers 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 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 (no need to turn it in, just have it guide your thoughts about the readings).

**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.

*Develop and defend a logic model.* 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, 3/14/14.

*Develop evaluation protocol.* The culminating project of the semester will be to (a) prepare a 8-12 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 weeks 15 and 16, as assigned; final project due Friday, 5/16/14.

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

**Grading**

30% Logic model—graphic (10%) and logic model critique (10%)  
20% Presentation of case studies (10% each)  
40% Final project—evaluation protocol (25%) and in-class presentation (15%)  
10% weekly class participation
COURSE READINGS

The readings for each week will be posted on the class Learn@UW website.

COURSE OUTLINE

Please note that there are several places throughout the syllabus where the readings are TBA. This is intentional so that after meeting together in Week 1, I can select readings that align with the interests of students in class. When readings are added to the syllabus, I will notify the class by email.

WEEK #1, 1/24/14: Introduction and overview/organization of the course, and discussion of ethical issues in evaluation


WEEK #2, 1/31/14: The role of experimentation in program evaluation and standards of evidence


WEEK #3, 2/7/14: Logic models and theory-driven program design


**WEEK #4, 2/14/14: Program implementation and process evaluation**


Additional Reading TBA

**WEEK #5, 2/21/14: Evaluating Organizational Change Initiatives**

**GUEST SPEAKER: LYNN BRADY, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, JOURNEY MENTAL HEALTH**

Readings TBA
WEEK #6, 2/28/14: Measurement selection for program evaluation and sample size considerations


Additional Reading TBA

WEEK #7, 3/7/14: Balancing agency/provider/stakeholder needs with scholarly needs

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


Additional Reading TBA

WEEK #8, 3/14/14: Implications of and strategies for recruitment and retention in evaluation research

GUEST SPEAKER: TBA, UW-MADISON, SURVEY RESEARCH CENTER

Readings TBA

LOGIC MODEL ASSIGNMENT DUE 3/14/14

Spring Break – No Class: 3/21/14
WEEK #10, 3/28/14: Evaluation design I: randomized experiments


Additional Reading TBA

WEEK #11, 4/4/14: Evaluation design II: quasi-experimental designs


Additional Reading TBA
WEEK #12, 4/11/14: Evaluation design III: evaluation research with observational data


WEEK #13, 4/18/14: Cost-benefit analysis


**WEEK #14, 4/25/14: Translational research**

**GUEST SPEAKER: TBA**


**WEEK #15, 5/2/14: Student presentations**

**WEEK #16, 5/9/14: 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 issues in each reading. 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 (as explicitly stated by authors or otherwise apparent to you):

Comments/questions about sampling and recruitment, measurement choices, and data collection:

Comments/questions about key analytic methods and their rigor:

Thoughts about the contribution of the findings about “what works” and what doesn’t, according to authors and according to you:

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