COURSE OVERVIEW

“We need to go beyond ideological positions and find out what actually works for children. If something works for children, let’s do it.” Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

Of course, the education system does not always do what works for children. In many cases, the system chooses not to do what it already knows (or suspects) works for children. You can learn why educators “know but don’t do” in courses about the politics of education or the politics of public policy. In other cases there exists authentic uncertainty regarding whether or not a particular education approach or policy improves outcomes for children.

This course provides students with training in the methods used to generate evidence-based answers to questions regarding the efficacy and impacts of education programs. The central questions that motivate most educational program evaluations are: (1) What is the problem? (2) What policies or programs are in place to address the problem? (3) What is their effect? (4) What works? (5) What are the relative benefits and costs of alternatives?

I. Goal

The course is designed to provide a basic understanding of why and how program evaluations are carried out in the U.S. and abroad. The specific evaluations studied will include international, national, state, and local programs in a variety of content areas, though the greatest amount of attention will be paid to evaluations of education programs in the U.S. at the national, state, and local levels. After learning of program evaluation methods and best practices, students will further develop their evaluation skills by planning their own evaluation design.

II. Competencies

Upon completing this course, the student should be able to:
A. Have familiarity with the leading scholars and practitioners in program evaluation
B. Understand the traditional and cutting edge methods of evaluating government programs effectively and comprehensively
C. Apply this familiarity and understanding to practical applications of program evaluation in the field
III. Content
A. Read and discuss the motivations for and traditional approaches to program evaluation
B. Read and discuss examples of challenges that emerge in the context of program evaluation and how evaluators effectively address those challenges
C. Apply lessons learned to real and hypothetical research situations
D. Present and defend evaluation proposals in the class context

IV. Evaluation
Attendance and class participation = 5 points
Homework Assignments = 15 points
Mid-term essay exam = 30 points
One-page evaluation proposal = 5 points
Evaluation proposal first complete draft = 25 points
Evaluation proposal final draft = 10 points
Evaluation proposal presentation = 10 points

V. Syllabus Change
The instructor reserves the right to make changes as necessary to this syllabus. If changes are made, advance notification will be given to the class.

VI. Grading Scale
90-100 points = A
80-89 points = B
70-79 points = C
60-69 points = D
59 and below = F

VII. Academic Honesty
The University of Arkansas Academic Honesty Policy, as stated in the Student Handbook will be fully adhered to in this course. Grades and degrees earned by dishonest means devalue those earned by all students; therefore, it is important that students are aware of the University of Arkansas Academic Honesty Policy. Academic dishonesty involves acts which may subvert or compromise the integrity of the educational process such as presenting other people’s words or ideas in your work without proper quotation and attribution. Students must take care not to commit acts of academic dishonesty, either by design or by accident.

VIII. Accommodations
Students with disabilities requesting reasonable accommodations must first register with the Center for Students with Disabilities. The CSD is located in the Arkansas Union, room 104 and on the web at: http://www.uark.edu/ua/csd/applications.htm. The CSD provides documentation to students with disabilities who must then provide this documentation to their course instructors. Students with disabilities should notify their course instructors of their need for reasonable accommodations in a timely manner to ensure sufficient time to arrange reasonable accommodation implementation and effectiveness. A typical time frame for arranging reasonable accommodations for students who are registered with the CSD is approximately one to two weeks.
IX. Classroom Behavior
Appropriate classroom behavior is expected of the instructor and all students. Inappropriate and disruptive classroom behavior (improper language and gestures, class disruptions, disrespect to other students or instructor, and other behavior as determined by the instructor) will not be tolerated and will result in possible removal from the class and/or disciplinary action as per the Student Handbook. Students are encouraged to challenge and disagree with the opinions and claims of the instructor and other students but are required to do so respectfully. All class periods will begin on time at 12:00 pm. Tardiness disrupts the classroom experience and will reduce a student’s participation grade. Students who will be late or must miss a class due to circumstances beyond their control should notify the instructor in advance if possible.

X. Late Assignment Policy
All assignments are due at the start of class. Any assignment that is submitted late will be docked one full letter grade plus an additional letter grade for each added day that it is late. Exceptions will only be made in case of an extreme health or personal emergency, communicated to the instructor in a timely manner.

XI. Inclement Weather
Students will be informed by email of the cancellation of class because of weather. University closing announcements are also made on KAUF Radio, 91.3 as well as local radio and television stations. The University’s inclement weather site is updated frequently on both UARKINFO and University Online at: http://emergency.uark.edu/

XII. Course Resources
Required course reading materials will come from four sources: two required textbooks, reports and articles available on the web, selections of books available on library reserve, and unpublished materials handed out by the instructor. The required texts for this course are:


Both texts have been ordered by the University Bookstore and also are available online at Amazon.com and BarnesandNobles.com. The Second Edition of Sommer & Sommer (1986) is acceptable.

The major report that you will read as an example of program evaluation in action is:

The other reading materials are specified below. All readings are required unless specifically designated merely "recommended."

XIII. Course Plan

Week 1, August 26 – What is Program Evaluation?
Rossi, Freeman & Lipsey, "An Overview of Program Evaluation" and "Tailoring Evaluations," pp. 1-65 (Chapters 1 and 2)
Wolf et al., Executive Summary and Chapter 1, pp. xvii-11

Week 2, September 2 – Identifying Questions: Program Theory and Needs Assessments
Sommer and Sommer, “How to do a Literature Review,” pp. 21-25 (Chapter 3)

Recommended:

Week 3, September 9 – Measurements and Performance
Sommer and Sommer, “Standardized Tests and Inventories,” pp. 185-193 (Chapter 15)
Maier, M., “Education” in *The Data Game: Controversies in Social Science Statistics*, pp. 77-95 (reserve)

Week 4, September 16 – Basic Concepts of Probability and Statistics (Homework I Distributed)
Sommer and Sommer, “Sampling,” pp. 197-204 (Chapter 16)
Weisberg, H. F., J. A. Krosnick and B. D. Bowen, “Sampling Procedures” in *An Introduction to Survey Research and Data Analysis*, pp. 31-60 (reserve)
Boruch, R., “Population, Power, and Pipeline” in *Randomized Experiments for Planning and Evaluation*, pp. 71-95 (reserve)
Langley, R., “Introduction” and “Nature of Probability” in *Practical Statistics Simply Explained*, pp. 11-36 (reserve)

Week 5, September 23 – Causal Inference and Hypothesis Testing (Homework I Due)
Rossi, Freeman & Lipsey, "Detecting, Interpreting, and Analyzing Program Effects," pp. 301-330 (Chapter 10)


Recommended:


King, G., R. O. Keohane and S. Verba, “Causality and Causal Inference” in Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research, pp. 75-114 (reserve)


Week 6, September 30 – Gathering and Summarizing Data (One-page evaluation proposal due)

Sommer and Sommer, “Attitude and Rating Scales,” pp. 130-158

Weisberg, H. F., J. A. Krosnick and B. D. Bowen, “Questionnaire Construction” and “The Data Collection Stage” in An Introduction to Survey Research and Data Analysis, pp. 61-102 (reserve)


Wolf et al., Chapter 2

DC Opportunity Scholarship Program Evaluation: Parent, Student, and Principal Surveys (handout)

Recommended:

Spector, P., Summated Rating Scale Construction: An Introduction (reserve)

Converse, J. M. and S. Presser, Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardized Questionnaire (reserve)

Week 7, October 7 – In-Class Mid-Term Examination

Week 8, October 14 – Experimental and Pseudo-Experimental Designs


Sommer and Sommer, “Experimentation” and “Simulation,” pp. 61-82 (Chapters 6 & 7)

Wolf et al., Chapters 3 and 4, pp. 31-66

Gray, N. L., “The Achievement Effects of Ohio Charter Schools” (handout)

Recommended:

Week 9, October 21 – Challenges in Implementing Experiments (Homework II Distributed)

Boruch, R., “Randomization Plans and Processes” and “...Maintaining Contact with Target Individuals” in Randomized Experiments for Planning and Evaluation, pp. 96-137 (reserve)


Wolf et al., Appendix A, pp. A1-A32


Recommended:

Hulleman, C., and D. S. Cordray, “Moving from the Lab to the Field: The Role of Fidelity and Achieved Relative Intervention Strength,” Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness 2(1) (reserve)

Puma et al., Missing Data Issues in Randomized Control Trials: What to do When Data Are Missing? (handout)

Week 10, October 28 -- Observational Studies with Matching or Control Designs (Homework II Due)


Gormley, W. T., Jr., “The Effects of Oklahoma’s Pre-K Program on Hispanic Children” in Social Science Quarterly 89(4) (reserve)

Recommended:


Week 11, November 4 – Qualitative Designs (Class delivered in 343 GRAD ED)

Sommer and Sommer, “Interview” and “Case study,” pp. 85-105 & 170-175


King, G., R. O. Keohane and S. Verba, “Increasing the Number of Observations” in Designing Social Inquiry, pp. 208-230 (reserve)

Stewart et al., “Family Perspectives on the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program,” pp. 1-74 (handout)

Whyte, W.F., Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum, pp. v-xxii (Preface & Introduction) (reserve)
Recommended:
Yin, R., “Introduction,” “Designing Single and Multiple Case Studies” and “Conducting Case Studies: Collecting the Evidence,” in *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, pp. 13-60 & 84-104 (reserve)

**Week 12, November 11 – Summarizing Evidence: Meta-Analysis & Graphic Display (First Complete Draft of Evaluation Proposal Due)**


Recommended:


**Week 13, November 18 – Benefit-Cost Analysis & Research Ethics**

Rossi, Freeman & Lipsey, "Measuring Efficiency," pp. 331-368 (Chapter 11)

Sommer and Sommer, “Ethics in Behavioral Research,” pp. 11-20 (Chapter 2)

Rivlin, A., “What Does the Most Good?” in *Systematic Thinking for Social Action*, pp. 46-63 (reserve)


Recommended:

**No Class on November 25 due to Thanksgiving Break**

**Week 14, December 2 – Student Presentations on Evaluation Proposal (Final draft of evaluation proposal due)**

**No Final Exam**