Evaluating Programs and Policies

Fall 2023

Instructor Information

- Dr. Anne Marie Brady
  - Email: amb228@nyu.edu
  - Office hours: by appointment
- Class Meeting Time: Wednesday 6:45 pm – 8:25 pm
- Class Location: GCASL Room 375

Course Prerequisites

Students must have completed (or waived) CORE-GP 1011 (Statistical Methods) and CORE-GP 1022 (Introduction to Public Policy), as this course builds on these introductory courses.

Course Description and Objectives

Program evaluation is a critical component in designing and operating effective programs. Evaluations supply information to program managers and policymakers that can assist them in making decisions about which programs to fund, modify, expand, or eliminate. Evaluation can be an accountability tool for program managers and funders. This course serves as an introduction to evaluation methodology and evaluation tools commonly used to assess publicly funded programs. Students will become familiar with the concepts, methods, and applications of evaluation research; learn how to read evaluation research critically; understand how to use evaluation results to anticipate or improve program performance; and be able to propose an appropriate evaluation plan to assess the implementation and effectiveness of a program.

Course Learning Objectives

Course objectives include:

1) Become familiar with the concepts, language, methods and applications of evaluation research;
2) Understand how to develop a logic model for an intervention and how to use it to guide evaluation;
3) Develop the ability to formulate clear, answerable research questions for evaluation;
4) Develop the ability to identify, modify, or develop appropriate measures of outcomes that are valid, reliable and feasible;
5) Learn how to read evaluation research critically;
6) Develop a detailed, feasible, and rigorous evaluation proposal to assess the implementation and effectiveness of a program.

Learning Assessment Table

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<tr>
<th>Course Learning Objective Covered</th>
<th>Corresponding Assignment Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Program memo</td>
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<td>Measurement memo</td>
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<td>Midterm exam</td>
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<td>Optional review memo</td>
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<td>#2</td>
<td>Program memo</td>
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<td>Logic model in-class presentation</td>
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<td>Midterm exam</td>
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<td>#3</td>
<td>Measurement memo</td>
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<td>Final paper</td>
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<td>Midterm exam</td>
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<td>Optional review memo</td>
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<td>#6</td>
<td>Final paper</td>
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Course Structure

The class includes lecture, readings, and discussion. There is no specific policy or sector focus to this course, as evaluation tools are used in all policy areas and by public (government) and private (foundation) funders as well as by public and private sector program managers. Students are encouraged to relate the general material of the course to their specific policy interests.

Required Readings

The required textbook for this course is:


In addition to the required text, you will have additional readings, which are mostly articles (case studies). Most of the articles are available through Bobst electronic journals, and ones that aren’t will be posted in Brightspace. There are also additional optional readings, all of which can be downloaded.
There is a sizable body of literature that deals with program evaluation and policy analysis. The journal “Evaluation Review” (previously “Evaluation Quarterly”) is an especially rich source on the subject, as is the “Evaluation Studies Review Annual” (Sage, more or less annually). “Evaluation Practice,” “Evaluation and Program Planning,” “New Directions for Program Evaluation,” and “Journal of Policy Analysis and Management” are also recommended. There are also evaluation journals for specific fields, including “Evaluation and the Health Professions,” “Evaluation in Education,” and “Evaluation and Human Services.”

Course Requirements

Class preparation and participation are important for this course. Students need to read required text and articles in advance and be prepared to participate in class discussion. In addition to class participation, students will write two brief memos, complete one take-home midterm exam, and write a final evaluation design paper. **Note: The following descriptions are not enough to complete the assignments adequately. More detailed instructions for each assignment are posted in Brightspace.**

Program Statement Memo – October 4
Students will submit a short description of a selected program, indicating the problem to be addressed by the intervention, the intended beneficiaries or targets of the program, the intended benefits, and the causal model/program theory underlying the program. This memo is a preliminary step in writing the final design paper.

Midterm Examination – November 1
There will be a take-home essay style examination

Measurement Memo – November 15
Using the program model developed in the first memo, students will specify the research questions, operational definitions, and specific measures they would use in an evaluation of the program.

Final Paper: Outcome Evaluation Design – December 13
The final paper builds on earlier assignments. Students will design a comprehensive evaluation plan for their chosen programs. The proposal will focus on outcome or impact evaluation but will include a brief section on process evaluation as well. Students will work in groups.

Relative Weight of Assignments

- Midterm Exam: 40%
- Two Memos: 10%
- Final Paper: 40%
- Class Participation: 10%
Final Grades

- A: 94.5+
- A-: 88.5 - 94.4
- B+: 85.5 - 88.4
- B: 82.5 - 85.4
- B-: 78.5 - 82.4
- C+: 76.5 - 78.4
- C: 73.5 - 76.4
- C-: 68.5 - 73.4

Course Schedule

Part I: Planning and Implementation

Class 1: September 6

Topics:
- Introduction to the course and the field of program evaluation
- Purposes and stakeholders

Readings:
- Weiss Chapters 1 & 2

Class 2: September 13

Topics:
- Pre-program evaluation activities: needs assessment

Readings:
Class 3: September 20

Topics:
- Explicating and assessing program theory

Readings:
- Weiss Chapter 3

Class 4: September 27

Topics:
- Process evaluation and implementation analysis

Readings:

Class 5: October 4

Topic:
- Program Memo Presentations

Deliverable Due:
- Program memo due (send electronically)

Part II: Measuring the Impacts of Programs

Class 6: October 11

Program memo returned.
Topics:
- Outcome/Impact evaluation: design, internal and external validity.

Readings:
- Weiss Chapter 8

Class 7: October 18

Topics:
- Outcome/Impact evaluation: randomized experimental design

Readings:
- Weiss Chapter 9

Class 8: October 25

Topics:
- Outcome/Impact evaluation: quasi-experimental designs

Readings:
Class 9: November 1

Topics:

- Formulating Research Questions and Measurement

Readings:

- Weiss, Chapter 6
- Engle & Schutt (2014). Conceptualization & Measurement

Deliverable Due:

- Midterm answers due (send electronically).

Class 10: November 8

Topics:

- Full coverage and reflexive designs
- Sampling

Readings:

- Weiss, review Chapter 8 pp. 191-199

Midterm exam returned.

Class 11: November 15

Topics:

- Evaluation and Research Ethics
Readings:

- Weiss, Chapter 14

Deliverable Due:

- Measurement memo due (send electronically)

November 22 No Class Thanksgiving

Measurement memo returned

Class 12: November 29

Topics:

- Qualitative Methods; Participatory Evaluation

Readings:

- Weiss, Chapter 11

Class 13: December 13

- Final Project Group Presentations

Final Paper Due: December 13 electronically by end of day midnight.

Academic Integrity
Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by Wagner’s Academic Code. All Wagner students have already read and signed the Wagner Academic Oath. Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

Using ChatGPT and related tools will reduce what you learn in this course. Consequently, the use of ChatGPT, Bard, and other generative AI tools is not allowed in this course. As a reminder, please review Wagner’s Academic Integrity Policy.

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at NYU

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) website and click on the Reasonable Accommodations and How to Register tab or call or email CSD at (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.