



NYU

**ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE**

PADM–GP 2171

Evaluating Programs and Policies

Fall 2024

Instructor Information

- Professor Rachel Swaner
 - Email: RLS200@nyu.edu
 - Phone: 917-445-7219
 - Office hours: by appointment
- Class Meeting Time: Thursdays, 6:45-8:25 pm
- Class Location: Silver, Room 407 (31 Washington Place)

Course Prerequisites

Students must have completed (or waived) CORE-GP 1011 Statistical Methods (or a similar course), as this class builds on that introductory course.

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, and how to improve their existing programming. This course serves as an introduction to evaluation methodology and evaluation tools commonly used to assess programs.

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

Course Learning Objective Covered	Corresponding Assignment Title
#1	Program memo Measurement memo Midterm exam
#2	Program memo Logic model in-class presentation Midterm exam
#3	Measurement memo Final paper
#4	Measurement memo Final paper
#5	Midterm exam
#6	Final paper

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 program/policy interests.

Required Readings

Most of the required readings are articles in peer-reviewed journals that provide “real life” case studies of evaluations, with some representations of evaluation research in popular media. There are also a few required chapters from textbooks. All the required articles and chapters are available on BrightSpace under Resources (organized by class session). Also listed are optional readings if you want to dig deeper into the topic.

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 (with an optional third for extra credit), 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 are posted under Assignments on NYU Brightspace.**

Midterm Examination – October 24th

There will be a take-home essay style examination due **October 24th**. Students will work in groups.

Program Statement Memo – October 3rd

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.

Measurement Memo – November 14th

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 16th

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%
- Program Memo: 5%
- Measurement Memo: 5%
- 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 5

Topics:

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

Videos to Watch:

- UCLA Library. (2021) Positionality & Research: How our Identities Shape Inquiry. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTHFud7fr8c>. (2 minutes 20 seconds)
- UCLA Library. (2021) Positionality & Research: Awareness Strategies. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORrF7cKktrQ>. (1 minute 51 seconds)

Class 2: September 12

Topics:

- Pre-program evaluation activities: needs assessment

Readings:

- Witkin BR. (1994) "Needs Assessment Since 1981: The state of the practice." *Evaluation Practice*, 15(1): 17-27.
- Berberet HM. (2006) "Putting the pieces together for queer youth: a model of integrated assessment of need and program planning." *Child Welfare*, 85(2): 361-384.
- Nadeem E, Shernoff ES, Coccaro C, & Stokes-Tyler D. (2022) "Supporting teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic: A community-partnered rapid needs assessment." *School Psychology*, 37(4), 309–318.
- Loewenberg S. (2012) "Mapping Toilets in a Mumbai Slum Yields Unexpected Results." *NY Times*, July 22, 2012. Available at: <http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/mapping-toilets-in-a-mumbai-slum-yields-unexpected-results/>
- Optional: Collier AF, Munger M, & Moua YK. (2012) "Hmong mental health needs assessment: a community-based partnership in a small mid-western community." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 49(1-2): 73-86.

Class 3: September 19

Topics:

- Explicating and assessing program theory

Readings:

- Chen HT, Wang JCS, & Lin LH. (1997) "Evaluating the process and outcome of a garbage reduction program in Taiwan." *Evaluation Review*, 21(1): 27-42.
- Epstein D & Klerman JA. (2012) "When is a Program Ready for Rigorous Impact Evaluation? The Role of a Falsifiable Logic Model." *Evaluation Review*, 36(5): 375-401.

- Becker KL. (2017) "Dance your heart out: a community's approach to addressing cardiovascular health by using a logic model." *Family and Community Health*, 40(3): 212-220.

Class 4: September 26

Topics:

- Process evaluation and implementation analysis

Readings:

- Curran A, Gittelsohn J, Anliker J, Ethelbah B, Blake K, Sharma S, & Cabellero B. (2005) "Process evaluation of a store-based environmental obesity intervention on two American Indian reservations." *Health Education Research*, 20(6): 719-729.
- Coulon SM, Wilson DK, Griffin S, St. George SM, Alia KA, Trumpeter NN, Wandersman AK, Forthofer M, Robinson S, & Gadson B. (2012) "Formative Process Evaluation for Implementing a Social Marketing Intervention to Increase Walking Among African Americans in the Positive Action for Today's Health Trial." *American Journal of Public Health*, 102(12): 2315-2321.
- Robbins LB, Ling J, Kilicarslan Toruner E, Bourne KA, & Pfeiffer KA. (2016) "Examining Reach, Dose, and Fidelity of the 'Girls on the Move' After-School Physical Activity Club: A Process Evaluation." *BMC Public Health*, 16: 671.
- Optional: Mye SC & Moracco KE. (2015) "'Compassion, pleasantry, and hope': a process evaluation of a volunteer-based nonprofit." *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 50: 18-25.

Class 5: October 3

Topic:

- Program Memo Presentations

Deliverable Due:

- Program memo due (send electronically)

Part II: Measuring the Impacts of Programs

Class 6: October 10

Program memo returned.
Midterm posted.

Topics:

- Outcome/Impact evaluation: design, internal and external validity.

Readings:

- Bornstein D. (2012) "[The Dawn of the Evidence-Based Budget.](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/30/worthy-of-government-funding-prove-it/)" *NY Times*, May 30, 2012. Available at: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/30/worthy-of-government-funding-prove-it/>

- Porter E. (2016) “Job Training Works. So Why Not Do More of It?” NY Times, July 5, 2016. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/06/business/economy/job-training-can-work-so-why-isnt-there-more-of-it.html>
- Reynolds G. (2019) “Why So Many of Us Don’t Lost Weight When We Exercise.” NY Times, July 3, 2019. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/03/well/move/weight-loss-gain-exercise.html>
- Stevenson MT. (2023) “Cause, Effect, and the Structure of the Social World.” Boston University Law Review 103: 2001-2047.

Class 7: October 17

Topics:

- Outcome/Impact evaluation: randomized experimental design

Readings:

- Seron C, Ryzin GV, Frankel M, & Kovath J. (2001) “The impact of legal counsel on outcomes for poor tenants in New York City’s housing court: results of a randomized experiment.” *Law & Society Review*, 35(2): 419-434.
- Kim JS, Capotosto L, Hartry A, & Fitzgerald R. (2011) “Can a mixed-method literacy intervention improve the reading achievement of low-performing elementary school students in an after-school program?” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 33(2): 183-201.
- Carroll AE. (2018) “Workplace Wellness Programs Don’t Work Well. Why Some Studies Show Otherwise.” NY Times, August 6, 2018. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/06/upshot/employer-wellness-programs-randomized-trials.html>
- Ripley A & Williams T. (2017) “Body Cameras Have Little Effect on Police Behavior, Study Says.” NY Times, October 20, 2017. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/police-body-camera-study.html>
- Rosenberg T. (2012) “Out of Jail, and into a Job.” NY Times, March 28, 2012. Available at: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/out-of-jail-and-into-jobs>
- Frakt A & Carroll AE. (2020) “Alcoholics Anonymous vs. Other Approaches: The Evidence Is Now In.” NY Times, March 11, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/upshot/alcoholics-anonymous-new-evidence.html>
- Optional: Zinn A & Courtney M. (2017). “Helping foster youth find a job: a random-assignment evaluation of an employment assistance programme for emancipating youth.” *Child and Family Social Work*, 22(1): 155-164.

Class 8: October 24

Topics:

- Outcome/Impact evaluation: quasi-experimental designs

Readings:

- Elbel B, Kersh R, Brescoll BL, & Dixon LB. (2009) “Calorie Labeling and Food Choices: A First Look at the Effects on Low-Income People in New York City.” *Health Affairs*, 28(6): w1110-w1121.

- Cantor J, Torres A, Abrams C, & Elbel B. (2015) "Five Years Later: Awareness of New York City's Calorie Labels Declined, With No Changes in Calories Purchased." *Health Affairs*, 34(11): 1893-1900.
- Carroll AE. (2015) "The Failure of Calorie Counts on Menus." *NY Times*, November 30, 2015. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/01/upshot/more-menus-have-calorie-labeling-but-obesity-rate-remains-high.html>
- Robinson M, Mackay D, Giles L, Lewsey J, Richardson E, & Beeston C. (2021) "Evaluating the impact of minimum unit pricing (MUP) on off-trade alcohol sales in Scotland: an interrupted time-series study." *Addiction*, 116(10): 2697-2707.
- Optional: Connelly BS, Sackett PR, & Waters SD. (2013) "Balancing Treatment and Control Groups in Quasi-Experiments: An Introduction to Propensity Scoring." *Personnel Psychology*, 66(2): 407-442.
- Optional: Chemin M. (2008) "The benefits and costs of microfinance: evidence from Bangladesh." *Journal of Development Studies*, 44(4): 463-484.

Deliverable Due:

- Midterm answers due (send electronically).

Class 9: Class canceled October 31

Midterm exam returned.

Class 10: November 7

Topics:

- Formulating Research Questions and Measurement

Readings:

- Litwin MS. (2003) *How to assess and interpret survey psychometrics*, 2nd edition, Chapters 2 and 3: 5-43.
- Kolata G. (2016) "We're So Confused: The Problems With Food and Exercise Studies." *NY Times*, August 11, 2016. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/11/upshot/were-so-confused-the-problems-with-food-and-exercise-studies.html>
- Boyd D & Marwick A. (2011) "Bullying as True Drama." *NY Times*, September 22, 2011. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/23/opinion/why-cyberbullying-rhetoric-misses-the-mark.html>
- Optional: Scherer M, Debra Furr-Holden C, & Voas RB. (2013) "Drug Use Disorder Questionnaire: Scale Development and Validation." *Evaluation Review*, 37: 35-58.
- Optional: Dufrene RL. (2000) "An evaluation of a patient satisfaction survey: validity and reliability." *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 23: 293-300.

Class 11: November 14

Topics:

- Full coverage and reflexive designs
- Sampling

Readings:

- Pettifor A, Taylor E, Nku D, Duvall S, Tabala M, Mwandagalirwa K, Meshnick S, & Behets F. (2009) "Free distribution of insecticide treated bed nets to pregnant women in Kinshasa: an effective way to achieve 80% use by women and their newborns." *Tropical Medicine and International Health*, 14(1): 20–28.
- Gettleman G. (2015) "Meant to Keep Malaria Out, Mosquito Nets are Used to Haul Fish In." NY Times, January 24, 2015. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/25/world/africa/mosquito-nets-for-malaria-spawn-new-epidemic-overfishing.html>
- Wheeler-Martin K, Soghoian S, Prosser JM, Manini AF, Marker E, Stajic M, Prezant D, Nelson LS, & Hoffman RS. (2015) "Impact of mandatory carbon monoxide alarms: and investigation of the effects on detection and poisoning rates in New York City." *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(8): 1623-1629.
- Babbie ER. (2013) Chapter 7: The logic of sampling. In *The Practice of Social Research*, 13th Edition.
- Optional: Avan BI, Berhanu D, Mekonnen Y, Beaumont E, Tomlin K, Allen E, & Schellenberg J. (2021) Embedding Community-Based Newborn Care in the Ethiopian health system: lessons from a 4-year programme evaluation. *Health Policy and Planning* 36(Supplement 1): i22-i32.

Deliverable Due:

- Measurement memo due (send electronically)

Class 12: November 21

Measurement memo returned.

Topics:

- Evaluation and Research Ethics

Readings:

- Schutt RK. (2012) *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*, 7th Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Chapter 3, pages 63-89.
- Mertens DM. (2009) *Transformative Research and Evaluation*, New York: The Guilford Press. Chapter 1, pages 9-42.
- Optional: Murphy K. (2017) "Some Social Scientists Are Tired of Asking for Permission." The NY Times, May 22, 2017. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/22/science/social-science-research-institutional-review-boards-common-rule.html>
- Optional: Norris N. (2005) "The politics of evaluation and the methodological imagination." *American Journal of Evaluation*, 26(4): 584-586.
- Optional: Gaddy M & Scott K. 2020. Principles for Advancing Equitable Data Practice. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. Available at: https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102346/principles-for-advancing-equitable-data-practice_0.pdf

No class November 28 (NYU closed for Thanksgiving recess)

Class 13: December 5

Topics:

- Qualitative Methods; Participatory Evaluation; Equitable Evaluation

Readings:

- Scott S, D'Silva J, Hernandez C, Villaluz NT, Martinez J, & Matter C. (2017) "The Tribal Tobacco Education and Policy Initiative: Findings from a Collaborative, Participatory Evaluation." *Health Promotion Practice*, 18(4): 545-553.
- GreenMills LL, Davison KK, Gordon KE, Li K, & Jurkowski JM. (2013) "Evaluation of a Childhood Obesity Awareness Campaign Targeting Head Start Families: Designed by Parents for Parents." *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 24(2)(S): 25-33.
- Dean-Coffey J, Casey J, & Caldwell LD. (2014) "Raising the Bar – Integrating Cultural Competence and Equity: Equitable Evaluation." *The Foundation Review*, 6(2): 81-94.
- Optional: Richardson L. (2013) "Putting the Research Boot on the Policymakers' Foot: Can Participatory Approaches Change the Relationship between Policymakers and Evaluation?" *Social Policy & Administration*, 47(4): 483-500.
- Optional: O'Sullivan RG. (2012) "Collaborative Evaluation within a framework of stakeholder-oriented evaluation approaches." *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 35(4): 518-522.

Class 14: December 12

- Final Project Group Meetings

Final Paper Due: Monday December 16

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.

Because writing is a form of thinking, you should not use ChatGPT or other AI tools as a shortcut or substitute for drafting and editing written work in this class. Taking credit for writing you did not create is a violation of NYU's Academic Integrity policy.

NYU's Moses Center for Student Accessibility

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the [Moses Center for Student Accessibility website](#) 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 deliverables to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.

NYU's Wellness Exchange

[NYU's Wellness Exchange](#) has extensive student health and mental health resources. A private hotline (212-443-9999) is available 24/7 that connects students with a professional who can help them address day-to-day challenges as well as other health-related concerns.