Course Information

Meets: Mondays 4:30 – 7:10 pm, Founders Hall 478
Office Hours: Mondays and Thursdays, 3:00 – 4:00 pm, or by appointment, FH 652
Contact: Email bstabile@gmu.edu, or office phone 703 993-8566

Course Description

The purpose of program evaluation is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public policies and programs through systematic research. As such, evaluation is a major tool for policy analysis, assessment and decision-making. This course examines many facets of the evaluation process, including the purposes and types of evaluations, evaluation strategies, evaluation methodology, and applications. The course will also consider how evaluations are shaped by their social and political contexts.

The objectives for this course are for student to:

1. Be knowledgeable about general fundamental concepts of policy and program evaluation.
2. Understand what different kinds of program evaluation approaches are available.
3. Collect, manage, and manipulate select data for policy and program evaluation.
4. Select appropriate evaluation methods and interpret results based on policy or program evaluation.
5. Communicate and present evaluation findings to a non-technical audience in ways understandable to them.

Course Requirements/Evaluation

Class participation and presentations (see Appendix A)* 20%
Final paper: Evaluation Project (see Appendix B)* 40%
Take Home Test I 20%
Take Home Test II 20%

*See detailed descriptions of the requirements for Participation and the Evaluation Project at the end of the syllabus in Appendices on pages 9-11.
The class participation grade takes into account a student’s presence in class and contributions to the course dialogue. Conscientious participation entails:

- earnest discussion and demonstrated knowledge of assigned readings
- application of course concepts to relevant current events or the work circumstances and experience of individual students
- courteous, professional, and respectful dialogue with course colleagues
- meaningful engagement in class, while refraining from using a computer (except for note taking) or electronic devices

All written work is expected to be of the highest quality, representing both grammatically correct and carefully considered analysis. Elements of central importance to sound analysis include adequate depth, breadth, relevance and clarity of the concepts considered. Language is the most important tool available to evaluators. Use it well.

I encourage the use of the GMU Writing Center. Explore their offerings at http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/

Assignments must be submitted on time to receive full credit.

All assignments should be sent to the instructor as an email attachment, labeled first with the student’s last name, at bstabile@gmu.edu by class time on the date due.

Finally, you must have a functioning GMU email account in order to receive class notifications and correspondence.

**Required Readings**

Required course readings consist of a main textbook, *available in the George Mason University bookstore*, and various peer reviewed journal articles and government reports *available by accessing e-journals through the George Mason University library electronic databases*.


**Citation Rule of Thumb**

You are responsible for knowing how to properly cite referenced material. To be on the safe side, if you use more than three consecutive words of another author or speaker, put them in quotation marks and cite them. If you are citing five lines or more from another’s work, those lines should be single-spaced and indented. Plagiarism will automatically result in a grade of “F” for the assignment, and could lead to expulsion from the class or program.
Plagiarism is using another’s words or ideas and representing them as your own. In this age of clicking, cutting and pasting, it is easier than ever to plagiarize (and to detect plagiarism), but it is as important as ever to respect the rights of owners and originators in the marketplace of ideas. The use of quotation marks and meticulous, proper citation will help you to avoid going astray.

Every written assignment you submit should have a bibliography, and should make use of either footnotes, endnotes or in text citations.

George Mason Academic Policies

George Mason University policies are in effect. All your work must be your own, unless the instructor for this course authorizes collaboration, in which case you must, in writing, acknowledge the help you have received. Presenting as one's own the words, ideas, or expression of another in any form is cheating through plagiarism, and will not be tolerated.

The claim of ignorance is no excuse.

Honor Code: The Honor Code Policy endorsed by members of the Department of Public and International Affairs relative to the types of academic work indicated below is set out in the appropriate paragraphs.

1. Quizzes, tests, and examinations. No help may be given or received by students during the taking of quizzes, tests, or examinations, whatever the type or wherever taken, unless the instructor specifically permits deviation from this standard.

2. Course Requirements. All work submitted in fulfillment of course requirements is to be solely the product of the individual(s) whose name(s) appears on it. Except with permission of the instructor, no recourse is to be had to projects, papers, lab reports or any other written work previously prepared by another student, and except with permission of the instructor, no paper or work of another type submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of another course may be used a second time to satisfy a requirement in the Department of Public and International Affairs. No assistance is to be obtained from commercial organizations that sell or lease research help or written papers. With respect to all written work as appropriate, proper footnotes and attributions are required.

3. Required Reading. A signed pledge that reading required for a course has been completed may be made a condition of receiving credit in this course. Inability to sign the pledge when required on the final exam will result in the assignment of a grade of I.

Students with Special Needs
If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

**Weekly Readings and Assignments**

**Session 1: (January 26) Course Introduction: What is Evaluation and Why Do It?**

*Points highlighted in blue throughout the syllabus are recommended benchmarks for the final project*

**Evaluation Project Assignment Sheet Distributed**

Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, Chapter 1


**Session 2 (February 2): Getting Started: Ascending the Evaluation Hierarchy**

Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, Chapters 2 and 3


**Session 3 (February 9): Asserting Program Need**

*Evaluation Project Proposal Due (Program identified, sufficient literature exists to conduct the inquiry – that is, the program you have selected is “evaluable.”)*

Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, Chapter 4

Center for Regional Analysis. 2014. Improving the Washington Region’s Global Competitiveness. November. Available at http://cra.gmu.edu/research-reports/
**Sessions 4 (February 16): Expressing and Assessing Program Theory**

Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, Chapter 5


Recommended Reading:


**Session 5 (February 23): Monitoring Program Process and Implementation**

Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, Chapter 6


**Session 6 (March 2): Measuring and Monitoring Program Outcomes**

Take Home Test I Distributed

**Program Background and Need Described/Defined**

Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, Chapter 7


March 9 – No Class! – GMU Spring Break!

Session 7 (March 16): Assessing Program Impact: Randomized Field Experiments

Take Home Test I Due

**Guest Speaker (invited): Whitney Engstrom, MPP, Abt Associates**

**Sign up for an article presentation for our next class session.** (Choose one of those listed for Session 8 after Rossi and Sarewitz, which everyone should read.)

Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, Chapter 8


Session 8 (March 23): Assessing Program Impact: Alternative Designs

**Project Diagrams Devised**

Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, Chapter 9


**Session 9 (March 30): Detecting, Interpreting and Analyzing Program Effects**

*Studies Synthesized*

Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, Chapter 10


**Session 10 (April 6): Measuring Efficiency**

*Methodologies and Findings Described*

Sign up for article for next class session

Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, Chapter 11


**Session 11 (April 13): Evaluating Program Impact in Selected Topic Areas**

*Conclusion/Introduction Written*

Students will make a presentation/lead a panel discussion on one of the following articles according to their area of interest. Presentations will be in panel format.

**Poverty and Welfare**

**Education**


**National Security**


**Immigration (choose one)**


**Sex Education**


**Session 12 (April 20): The Social, Political and Historical Context of Evaluation: Reinventing Government and Beyond**

**Draft Completed and Reviewed**

Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, Chapter 12
Session 13 (April 27): Go Forth and Evaluate!

Student Research Presentations

Student Research Papers Due

Take Home Test II Distributed

Session 14 (May 4): Finish Student Research Presentations

Take Home Test II Due

Appendix A: Participation

I. Daily Participation

   a. Show up for class
   b. Participate meaningfully in discussion on the day’s topics. Prepare by actively reading the literature assigned for each session.

II. Discussant

   Select one class session in which you serve as discussant on the day’s topics. Be prepared to assist in raising, refining and elaborating on pertinent points from the readings.

III. Evaluation in the News

   For each class session, beginning with session 2 and ending with session 12, students will sign up to discuss an article or media item popular press that references or relates to an evaluation topic of interest. Evaluation can be hard to spot, but it is out there in many forms. This exercise will help us practice identifying the empirical and evaluative bases of assertions made in the press (or perhaps suggest where they are needed).

   During the designated session, each student will lead a brief discussion (just a couple of minutes at most.)
Appendix B: Evaluation Project*

The evaluation project for the semester may be approached in one of two ways as described below (as either an Evaluation Synthesis or an Evaluation Plan).

1. Conduct an Evaluation Synthesis of an existing program

Select a government or non-profit program to evaluate. An evaluation synthesis involves bringing together existing literature to gain an understanding of just how well functioning a program appears to be, and what facets of the program may be in particular need of improvement. In order to conduct a meaningful synthesis, an adequate amount of studies must have already been conducted on the program in question. For the purposes of this paper, it is strongly recommended that your literature review contain no fewer than the equivalent of six academic journal articles, GAO, CRS or PART reports, or independently commissioned studies. Your methodology section should describe how you have selected the included studies and give your readers confidence that the studies from which you are drawing conclusions fairly represent the extant literature on the program/subject at hand. You may also include additional sources with information on the program and its context, such as articles from the popular press and information from think tanks.


2. Develop an Evaluation Plan for your workplace

Apply principles from the evaluation hierarchy framework (page 80) in Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman to a program of interest at your workplace. (Group members may choose one from among the group members on which to focus.) All or part of the framework may be used in addressing your program of interest. Chapter 3 of our text should help in identifying the questions addressed by the evaluation plan. Literature on similar programmatic efforts in other organizations, as well as theoretical perspectives from evaluation literature should be referenced. Examples will be discussed in class.

Proposals for the evaluation project are due on February 9th. Proposals should consist of a well-articulated paragraph identifying the program to be evaluated, the proposed format of the paper, and the beginnings of a properly formatted bibliography containing at least six solid sources.

Evaluation reports are due April 27th and should be about 15 pages in length, excluding references and appendices. Beginning on April 27th, and continuing on May 4th, students will
give presentations of about 15 minutes in length on the results of their Evaluation Projects and have an additional five minutes for questions and discussion, for a total of no more than 20 minutes each.

Both proposals and final projects should be double-spaced, in 12 pt font, and on numbered pages with standard margins. They are due by the start of class on the designated days, and should be submitted to me in one document only as an email attachment, labeled with your last name, the course number and the assignment title as follows: “Smith 646 Proposal,” or “Smith 646 Eval Project.”

*Suggested Milestones for the Evaluation Project*

February 9: **Proposals due – required**

March 2: **Describe the program background and program need:** How did this program come about? What social problem is it meant to address? Who are the stakeholders? How many people are affected and at what cost?

March 23: **Devise a diagrammatic expression.** What would a logic model or backwards map of this program look like? What about a service utilization plan? Select some way to encapsulate the program in this kind of format to best convey its essence.

March 30: **Synthesize findings of the included studies by this date;**

April 6: **Describe and assess relevant methodologies and findings.**

April 13: **Write the conclusion for the paper.** Write or rewrite the introduction so that they are mirror images and you can be sure that the promise of the paper has been fulfilled. (What research question did you set out to answer? Did you answer it? What, simply stated, did you find?)

April 20: **Complete a final draft of the paper.** Check for grammar, syntax, readability, consistency; it should look beautiful, or at the very least, presentable.

April 27: **Evaluation Project Due – required**

    **Prepare Presentations of Research for April 27 and May 4**