

PPL 806: POLICY EVALUATION

SPRING 2013

Thursday 6:00 - 8:50 p.m.

134 S. Kedzie Hall (lecture/seminar)

Office Hours: Wednesday 1-3 or by appointment

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This course focuses on a key element of contemporary policymaking: Policy evaluation. It has two main objectives: 1) to provide a firm understanding of the complexity and scope of policy evaluation; and 2) to demonstrate the importance of conducting policy evaluations that address key problems and issues in a timely, sound, and useful manner. Overall, the course is appropriate for anyone who intends either to do policy evaluation (now or in the future) or to be a serious consumer of the results of evaluation research.

The course is divided into three sections. In the first part of the course, we will cover the nature of policy evaluation in public policymaking. Here, the basic features—both the objective and subjective dimensions— of policy evaluations will be discussed. Then, the need for policy evaluation principles and methods will be presented. Similarities and differences between policy evaluations and other types of analyses will be identified. Particular attention will be given to the development of evaluation strategies aimed at public-sector problems and issues. We will then look at the practice of policy evaluation in two areas of policy making: Evaluations used for program planning and those aimed at monitoring program developments.

In the second part of the course we will focus on the key types of evaluation research: Evaluations used to assess program impacts; evaluations that make projections about future program developments; and evaluations that focus on the benefits and costs of policy decisions. During this part of the course, we will focus on various models and techniques can actually be used to evaluate policy-relevant issues.

Then, in the last section of the course, we will discuss the role of evaluation in improving governmental performance. We will also cover the major factors (i.e., political, economic, administrative, ethical and practical) that affect the development and utilization of evaluation research, as well as the overall potential and importance of evaluation in modern day policymaking.

Throughout the semester, we will look at evaluations that have been conducted on various public programs and issues in order to demonstrate key points. We will also work through the application of fundamental evaluation concepts and techniques in relation to particular policy issues and problems. Some of this will be done in class exercises and simulations, while other applications will be demonstrated in computer lab exercises.

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REQUIRED TEXTS:

Dipak K. Gupta
Analyzing Public Policy: Concepts, Tools, and Techniques (Second Edition)
Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2011

Peter H. Rossi, Mark W. Lipsey, and Howard E. Freeman
Evaluation: A Systematic Approach (Seventh Edition)
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004

Additional readings will be distributed directly to you or will be available at the MSU library or the internet.

CLASS FORMAT, REQUIREMENTS, AND EXPECTATIONS:

Class Schedule. The class meets on Thursday evening from 6:00 to 8:50 p.m in 134 S. Kedzie Hall. We may move to another room if computer lab sessions are necessary.

Class Attendance, Participation, Discussion Questions, and Exercises. A graduate seminar should provide the opportunity for the collective exchange of ideas. So, regular attendance and appropriate class preparation is absolutely essential. This means that you should read and think about the assigned materials *before* the date on which they will be discussed in class. You should also come to class with the expectation that *you* will be involved in raising key points and working through major evaluation issues. So, in order to facilitate this, you must send me TWO discussion questions related to each week's assigned readings. Your questions should be sent electronically to me before the class meeting each week, and no later than that Wednesday at 5:00 p.m. You should also be prepared to orally explain your questions in a clear and concise manner during class sessions. You can work in groups to go over the readings, but the questions you submit to me must be your own. A series of short exercises will also be assigned throughout the semester. These exercises will focus on specific topics, such as causal inference, measurement, research design, data collection, and various data analytic techniques. We will go over the basic ideas and applications of these exercises in class. Then, you will be asked to work through similar examples outside of class and submit your responses.

Class participation (including regular class attendance, the submission of thoughtful discussion questions, active involvement in class discussions, and the successful completion of class exercises) is worth 20% of your grade.

Exams. There will be two exams— a mid-term and a final. The exams will cover material discussed in lectures, readings, and class discussions, and they will be a combination of essay and short answer in format. The mid-term exam is worth 20% of the grade; the final is worth 30%. Thus, the two exams comprise 50% of the total semester grade.

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Policy Evaluation Project. Each student is required to complete a policy evaluation project. For this project, you are expected to apply evaluation principles and techniques to a substantive policy area of interest to you. The project can take the form of a proposal in which you identify how an evaluation of an existing program should be conducted. It can also involve the collection and analysis of information that would comprise the basis of an actual policy evaluation. Or, it can be a critical assessment of a policy evaluation of a particular program or policy. You are encouraged to select projects that relate to you own academic, professional, and personal interests. You must identify a suitable topic for the project by February 14. I must approve the topic for the project in advance– no exceptions. You must submit a detailed outline or rough draft of your project by April 5. You are expected to give an oral presentation of you project during one of the last class sessions of the semester. Your final, written project is due on or before Friday, May 3, 2013 at 5:00 p.m. The project is worth 30% of the total grade. More information will be distributed about the evaluation project at a later date.

Academic Honesty. No form of academic dishonesty or misconduct will be tolerated in this class. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating on examinations, misrepresenting reasons for absences, professional misconduct, or plagiarism. Anyone guilty of any violation of academic integrity will receive a penalty grade. Depending upon the violation, the penalty will be a reduced score or grade for the assignment/exam/project or a reduced grade for the entire course. See MSU’s Academic Freedom Report (AFR) for a definition of a “penalty grade” and for the University’s policy regarding academic dishonesty, violations of professional standards, falsification of academic records, and plagiarism: www.msu.edu/~ombud/academic-integrity/.

Class Attendance, Submission of Class Assignments, and Make-up Policies. All students are expected to attend class on a regular basis and turn in all class discussion questions, exercises, and assignments on their respective due dates. All students are also expected to take the exams at the scheduled times and to meet all deadlines for the evaluation project. No late discussion questions, exercises, or project assignments will be accepted. No make-up exams are allowed except in well-documented emergency situations. If an emergency arises that prevents you from attending class, handing in the class or project assignments, or taking an exam at the scheduled date, you must notify me immediately– on or before the class, the due date of the assignment or the exam date– and provide me with a well-documented explanation of the emergency situation. If you need to miss class due to the observance of a religious holiday, you must notify me in advance to make sure that the necessary arrangements are made so that you can complete all coursework.

Assignment of Final Grades:

Class Participation, Discussion Questions, Exercises	20 %
Exams	50 %
Policy Evaluation Project	30 %

TOPICS AND READINGS*

(January 10)

Introduction and Overview of the Course

(January 17)

I. The Role of Policy Evaluation in Public Policymaking

- A. An Introduction to Policy Evaluation**
- B. The Various Functions of Evaluations**
- C. The Basic Principles of Evaluation Research**

**** Gupta, Chapters 1-2**

**** Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapters 1-3**

(January 24)

II. The Practice of Evaluation— The Role of Evaluation in Planning

- A. Determining the Need for a Program**
- B. Identifying Program Theory**

**** Gupta, Chapters 3-4**

**** Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapters 4-5**

(January 31)

III. The Practice of Evaluation— The Role of Evaluation in Program Monitoring

**** Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapters 6-7**

*** The organization of material and dates for specific topics may change as we proceed through the course.**

(February 7)

IV. The Practice of Evaluation– The Role of Evaluation in Decisionmaking

- A. Decision Models**
- B. Game Theory**
- C. Queuing Models**
- ** Gupta, Chapter 13**

(February 14)

V. The Practice of Evaluation— The Role of Evaluation in Impact Assessment

- A. Experimental Designs**
- B. Quasi-experimental Designs**
- ** Topic for Policy Evaluation Project Due**

(February 21)

**VI. The Practice of Evaluation— The Role of Evaluation in Impact Assessment
(continued)**

- A. Measurement and Data Issues**
- B. Basic Analytical Techniques**
- C. Regression-Based Techniques**
- ** Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapters 8-9**
- ** Gupta, Chapter 5, 8, 9**

(February 28)

Mid-Term Examination

(March 7)

Spring Break– No Class

(March 14-21)

VI. The Practice of Evaluation– The Role of Evaluation in Forecasting

A. Projection Methods

B. Causal Models

**** Gupta, Chapters 10, 11, and 12**

(March 28 and April 4)

VII. The Practice of Evaluation— The Role of Evaluation in Measuring Efficiency

A. The Basics: Welfare Economics

B. Cost-Benefit Analysis

C. Cost-Effectiveness Analysis

**** Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman: Chapter 11**

**** Gupta, Chapter 14**

(April 11)

**** No Class**

**** Detailed Outline or Draft of Policy Evaluation Project Due**

(April 18)

VIII. The Practice of Evaluation— The Role of Evaluation in Improving Governmental Performance

A. The Link Between Evaluation and Performance Measurement

B. The Role of Meta-Evaluations

C. The Context of Evaluation and the Communication of Evaluation Research

**** Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, Chapter 10 and 12**

**** Gupta, Chapter 15**

(April 25 and May 2)

**** Policy Evaluation Project Presentations**

(May 4, 5:00 p.m.)

**** Final Exam Due**

**** Final Written Policy Evaluation Project Due**