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EVALUATION RESEARCH FOR APPLIED SOCIOLOGY
Sociology 6640
Fall, 2014

Required Readings:

Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman (2004)
Evaluation: A Systematic Approach.
Sage (7th edition)

Fitzpatrick, Christie, Mark (2009)
Evaluation in Action
Sage

Additionally, I will provide selected handouts, such as the **Handbook of Evaluation Methods I** have developed, and Web sites to supplement required books listed above.

Overview of the Course: Evaluation research begins with the common-sense observation that it is useful to know the impact of programs. At first glance, it is not apparent how evaluation research differs from other kinds of empirical social science that examine the impact of human interventions. From a purely methodological perspective, evaluation looks a lot like most other social science research. But it is not the tools that define evaluation research; rather, it is the tasks to which the tools are put. What distinguishes evaluation research from basic research are (a) the questions asked by evaluators (does the program reach its intended clients, does the program deliver its services, does the program meet its goals and objections, does it work as intended, is the program worth its cost?); (b) the audience (not other academics but the stakeholders for whom the evaluation is intended); (c) the issues addressed (current programs and policies); (d) the variables that are examined tend to be mutable ones that can be manipulated by social policy; and (e) the programs evaluated tend to be practical ones that ordinary mortals can design and implement. In practice, then, evaluation research tackles somewhat different questions from basic academic social scientific research, even if basic research concerns the same social problems.

This course will introduce students to current theories, debates, principles, and techniques of evaluation research from an applied sociological perspective. It is suitable for graduate students in Sociology, Education, Criminal Justice, Public Administration, Public Policy, and other fields. Students will learn how to incorporate social theory, substantive sociological knowledge, and research techniques into the evaluation of a variety of applied programs. This course has a practical component in that students will design an evaluation for a social or educational program of their choice (with instructor approval). The course is designed to present students with a set of evaluation skills and other intellectual tools needed to conduct evaluation research. These can be used far beyond program evaluation; in fact, students will become a better overall researcher because of this course.

Course Requirements and Grading System: Students are required to attend class, complete all reading assignments each day before class, and complete several assignments as the schedule below details. This course requires extensive active participation of students. Therefore, your enrollment in this course signifies your agreement to fully participate. Completion of all assignments and their components (written and oral) is required to receive course credit.

1. Class participation includes (a) weekly two page summaries of readings due at the beginning of the class, (b) knowledgeable discussion of readings, (c) active questioning of the instructor and other students, (d) constructively critiquing other class member's work, (e) various exercises in class which teach specific skills or concepts. Excessive class absences (three or more) may result in one letter grade drop in your course grade—or no credit in the course. [10%].

2. Three written critical essays on published articles from peer refereed evaluation research journals: The topic of the article will reflect the program area, field, agency, or institution upon which students' own evaluation work will focus this semester. These will be 3-4 pages in length (typed, double spaced). The instructor will provide you provided with more guidelines later in the semester. These articles should serve as "case studies" that will illustrate the concepts and skills discussed in class this semester. Be aware that there are many, many published evaluations that do NOT meet the standards you will learn about in this course. Do not be afraid to critique something even if it is published. Hard copies of your critical essay will be due the day you give your 5-7 minute class presentation (see below). Each critical essay is worth roughly 7% of your course grade. [21%]

3. An oral presentation to the class (5-7 minutes or less) about each of the three evaluation reports/articles described above: Again, these reports should serve as "case studies" that will illustrate to class members the concepts and skills discussed in class this semester. In addition, they will give you an idea of how to or how not to approach the program evaluation plan you will develop as your core research project for the semester. Each oral presentation is worth roughly 4 % of the course grade. [12%]

4. Three midterm exams each worth 9% of your grade [27%].

5. A formal evaluation plan prepared for the program that you selected to evaluate that is so complete and professionally prepared, an independent evaluator could take it and perform the evaluation. This evaluation plan will be the major project of the course. You will not actually DO the evaluation for the course (although the directors/managers of your program may actually invite you to do it next semester).

- a. preliminary draft of evaluation plan [10%]
- b. oral presentation of your program evaluation proposal to the class (as if the class were the prospective stakeholder considering hiring you [5%].
- c. final draft of evaluation plan [15%]

Additional factors to keep in mind:

- Because this class meets only once per week, it is especially important that you attend all the classes and that you do all the reading before class so that the weekly lectures and readings can compliment each other.

- I will enforce the UNC-Charlotte Code of Student Academic Integrity. You are responsible for knowing what is considered unethical behavior and/or violations of the code. Please review the code at: <http://integrity.uncc.edu/>
- You are encouraged to use nonsexist, nonracist language in any oral or written work you produce in the course.
- I give no extra credit assignments.
- You are welcome --yes, encouraged-- to disagree respectfully with the instructors and other students.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1	Aug. 20	Introduction to and overview of the course.
Week 2	Aug. 27	What is evaluation research? Types of evaluations <i>Readings:</i> Fitzpatrick, Ch. 1, 14*
Week 3	Sept. 3	The Purposes and Uses of Evaluation Research <i>Readings:</i> Rossi, Ch. 1;
Week 4	Sept. 10	How to Begin. Designing Evaluations: <i>Readings:</i> Rossi, Ch. 2; Fitzpatrick, Ch. 2, 3, 5, 6, and 13 Preliminary Choice of Program to be Evaluated
Week 5	Sept 17	Identifying Issues and Formulating Questions <i>Readings:</i> Rossi, Ch. 3; First in class midterm (covering weeks 1-4)
Week 6	Sept. 24	Assessing the Need for a Program <i>Readings:</i> Rossi, Ch. 4; Fitzpatrick, Ch. 8 Final Choice of Program to be Evaluated
Week 7	Oct. 1	Identifying the Logic Model Underlying the Program <i>Readings:</i> Rossi, Ch. 5; Oral Presentations of 1st Case Studies of Evaluations
Week 8	Oct. 8	Process Evaluations <i>Readings:</i> Rossi, Ch. 6; Fitzpatrick, Ch. 2, 4, 9 * If a Fitzpatrick chapter appears more than once, review it for relevant content each time it appears on the syllabus but write your weekly summary about it only once.
Week 9	Oct. 15	Outcome Evaluations

Readings: Rossi, Ch. 7; Fitzpatrick, Ch. 3, 6,
**Oral Presentations of 2nd Case Studies of Evaluation Research
on your topic**

Week 10	Oct. 22	Assessing Program Impact <u>Readings:</u> Rossi, Ch. 8, 9; Fitzpatrick, Ch. 9, 11, 12, and 13 Second in-class midterm (covering weeks 5-9)
Week 11	Oct. 29	Detecting, Interpreting, and Analyzing Program Effects <u>Readings:</u> Rossi, Ch. 10, 11 Preliminary/First Draft of Evaluation Proposal due
Week 12	Nov. 5	Social and Political Context of Evaluation Research <u>Readings:</u> Rossi, Ch. 12 ; Fitzpatrick 2, 4, 5, 12, 13 [review]
Week 13	Nov. 12	Analyzing and Interpreting Data I <u>Readings:</u> Fitzpatrick, Ch. 3, 6, 7, [review]
Week 14	Nov. 19	Analyzing and Interpreting Data II <u>Readings:</u> TBA Oral Presentations of 3rd Case Studies of Evaluation Research on your topic
Week 15	Nov. 26	Thanksgiving Break
Week 16	Dec. 3	Ethical Issues in Evaluation Research <u>Readings:</u> TBA Third in-class midterm (covering weeks 10-15)
	Dec. 10	Final Exam Period 7-10 pm Final Evaluation Plan due Oral Presentations of Students' Evaluation Proposal

* Some readings from Fitzgerald will appear multiple times because they pertain to several topics. You are responsible for summarizing a reading only once.