90-823: Program Evaluation
Carnegie Mellon University
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Instructors:

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Class times

Lecture: Tuesday & Thursday, HBH 1202, 11:00 am – 12:20 pm
Office hours: TBD

Course description

In all parts of the world, governments, funding agencies, organizations, and individuals are involved in activities meant to improve some aspect of people's lives. Disaster relief in Puerto Rico, human rights work in Sierra Leone, increasing school attendance in Detroit, or improving outcomes for drug users in Barcelona are just a few examples. The needs addressed by these programs are often compelling and the programs themselves can be innovative and inspired. From those running and funding social programs to those whose needs are meant to be addressed by these programs a central question arises:

Does this social program work?

In this course you will learn how to gather and synthesize evidence to address this question. Program evaluation is the systematic application of social science methods to assess each aspect of a program: the need for the program, the program's design and implementation, and ultimately the program's impact on relevant outcomes. A completed program evaluation results in (a) information regarding the program's merit, (b) an accounting of the objective strengths and limitations of this information and (c) the implications of both (a) and (b) for decision making. Program evaluations differ as much as the social programs they study. Social programs may carry out an evaluation internally, or an external organization may be brought in. An evaluation may be highly quantitative or entirely qualitative. It may focus exclusively on needs assessment or only on outcomes. Evaluations and their results may be highly politically charged or of interest only to direct stakeholders. There are excellent program evaluations that have had positive impacts on programs and their target populations. There are also flawed program evaluations that provide weaker information than could have been obtained, provide incorrect information, or are misleading.

This course is designed to familiarize the student with the central concepts and methods of program evaluation. Students will be taught how to conduct basic program evaluations as well as how to critique and monitor more comprehensive program evaluations. Successful completion of this course will prepare students to be productive members of teams that design and carry out program evaluations or that commission program evaluations and make decisions based upon their results.

Learning objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Be a valuable member of an evaluation team, able to contribute to both planning and execution, while having a solid foundation on which to build.
- Be an informed consumer of program evaluations, and assist governments, nonprofits, or funding organizations in making decisions based on evaluations.
- Differentiate between strengths, limitations, and weaknesses of an evaluation and communicate those distinctions clearly.
- Understand the methods and concepts introduced in the course, and be able to explain them clearly, in plain language, to diverse stakeholders with diverse backgrounds.
- Identify when each method for evidence gathering and analysis would be appropriate or inappropriate, and defend those assessments.
- Explain to a program administrator how to assess their program.

Course text

Rossi PH, Lipsey MW, Freeman HE. (2019). *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach* (8th ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. ISBN: 978-1-5063-0788-6.

A restricted digital copy of the textbook is available through the CMU library at https://cmu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/delivery/01CMU_INST:01CMU/12324610730004436 (Only one student can use at a time)

Your role

We are partners in this learning experience. I expect you to:

- Conduct your learning with academic integrity
- Attend class and constructively participate in it
- Contribute to and take responsibility for the team project
- Do the individual assignments and prepare for exams
- Pursue your own understanding: What is solid, missing, or vague? What can you do to make it more solid: attend office hours, create a study group, review reading, make an appointment with the instructor or TA.

Course grading

Participation:	5%
Homeworks:	25%
Team Project:	25%
Midterm exam:	20%
Final exam:	25%

The Dean's guideline for grades in this class is a class average of 3.33–3.42 (B+).

Participation in classroom discussions (5%): The ability to engage in informed, productive conversations about program evaluation with multiple stakeholders is essential to success as a funder, consumer, or conductor of evaluations. Students will have opportunities to practice engaging in such conversations, to reflect on their contributions, and to improve their performance in class. Attendance also is incorporated into this part of the grade.

Homeworks (25%): You may work with others, but you must write up your own response and note on your homework the names of those with whom you worked. Please submit all homeworks electronically on Canvas. Your single lowest homework grade among the first five assignments will be dropped from your final grade (the sixth assignment cannot be dropped). At your own risk, you may choose not to hand in the assignment that you intend to drop.

Midterm and final exams (45% total): The midterm exam will cover all course material prior to the exam. The final exam is cumulative and will cover all course material, with a focus on the material covered in the second half of the semester. On both exams, students are allowed to use one sheet (both sides) of handwritten notes and will need a calculator.

Team project: Propose an evaluation in response to an RFP (25%):

- The goal of this project is to put the concepts, vocabulary, and methodologies of program evaluation into practice.
- The product of this project will be a substantial written report that clearly describes the proposed design, gives justification for the design choices, and demonstrates how the design is appropriate for the RFP, the program, and the target population. Your final draft is expected to be polished and professional.

Class format, attendance, communication, and late assignment policies

Students are expected to attend class and all class sessions are in-person (and recorded). Attendance and participation contribute to the final grade. Please inform the Head TA and instructor beforehand if you will miss class. Please use the email capability within Canvas to communicate with the instructors/Head TA. The Head TA is your first point of contact for all class logistics questions. Students are responsible for all assignments and for all material discussed during class, whether present or absent. Given the policy of dropping the lowest homework grade (among homeworks 1 – 5), we will not accept or grade any late assignments.

Academic accommodations

If you have or wish to request an accommodation due to a documented disability, please inform Prof. Haviland and if needed contact Disability Resources as soon as possible. They can be reached at access@andrew.cmu.edu or (412) 268-2013.

Use of electronic devices during class

Please silence your electronic devices and place them out of sight during class in order to minimize distractions to our learning environment. There will be certain class periods where we ask you to use a laptop/tablet computer for an in-class activity. Otherwise, we expect you to refrain from using your laptop/tablet during class, even for note-taking purposes. Hard copies of lecture slides will be available at the start of each class. All lecture materials will be posted after class on Canvas, and the class sessions will be recorded on Zoom. Please speak to me if you have questions or concerns about this policy, or if you have an academic accommodation that involves a laptop/tablet.

Cheating and plagiarism

Students are expected to honor the letter and the spirit of the Carnegie Mellon University Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism. All activities cited in that policy will be treated as cheating in this course. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with this policy. Students are also encouraged to review the Carnegie Mellon University Academic Disciplinary Actions Overview for Graduate Students, which details penalties and sanctions, as well as students' rights. We will take a zero-tolerance policy on cheating and plagiarism and will consult with college leadership on appropriate action for all instances of cheating and plagiarism. As the aforementioned policies indicate, penalties can include course failure, suspension, and dismissal from the program.

Carnegie Mellon University Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism
http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Cheating.html

Carnegie Mellon University Academic Disciplinary Actions Overview for Graduate Students
http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/GradDisc.html

Use of generative AI tools

To best support your own learning, you should complete all graded assignments in this course yourself, without any use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT. Please refrain from using AI tools to generate any content (text, video, audio, images, code, etc.) for an assignment or classroom exercise. Passing off any AI generated content as your own (e.g., cutting and pasting content into written assignments, or paraphrasing AI content) constitutes a violation of CMU's academic integrity policy. If you have any questions about using generative AI in this course, please email or talk to me.

Writing assistance

Visit the Global Communication Center (GCC) for assistance with the written or oral communication assignments in this class. GCC tutors provide instruction on a range of communication topics and can help you improve your papers, presentations, and job application documents. The GCC is located in Hunt Library. It is a free service that is open to all students. You can make tutoring appointments directly on the GCC website: http://www.cmu.edu/gcc. You may also browse the GCC website to find out about communication workshops offered throughout the academic year.

Diversity and inclusion

We must treat every individual with respect. We at Heinz College are diverse in many ways, and this diversity is fundamental to building and maintaining an equitable and inclusive campus community. Diversity can refer to multiple ways that we identify ourselves, including but not limited to race, color, national origin, language, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, creed, ancestry, belief, veteran status, or genetic information. Each of these diverse identities, along with many others not mentioned here, shape the perspectives that our students, faculty, and staff bring to campus. We, at CMU, and I as your professor, will work to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion not only because diversity fuels excellence and innovation, but because we want to pursue justice. We acknowledge our imperfections while we also fully commit to the work, inside and outside of our classrooms, of building and sustaining a campus community that increasingly embraces these core values. Each of us is responsible for creating a safer, more inclusive environment. It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, a strength, and a benefit to all.

Student health and well-being

Your graduate school experience is likely to entail some degree of stress. The University Provost provides the following thoughts for students:

Take care of yourself. Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting enough sleep, and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress.

All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. There are many helpful resources available through CMU and an important part of the graduate school experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is almost always helpful.

If you or anyone you know experiences any academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings like anxiety or depression, we strongly encourage you to seek support. Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) is here to help: call 412-268-2922 and visit their website at http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/. Consider reaching out to a friend, faculty, or family member you trust for help getting connected to the support that can help.

Schedule

Week	Topic	Readings	Work due	Methods
1	Stage 0	Rossi chs. 1 & 12	Class survey: 1/18	Capture-recapture
2	Stage 1	Rossi ch. 2 Case Study 1	HW 1: 1/25	Incidence & prevalence
3	Stage 1	Fowler ch. 3	HW 2: 2/1	Sampling
4	Stage 2	Rossi ch. 3 Case Study 2	HW 3: 2/8	Logic models
5	Stage 3	Rossi ch. 4 Case Study 3	HW 4: 2/15	Focus Groups
6	Stage 3	Fowler chs. 5,6,7	HW 5: 2/22	Surveys
7	Survey methods; Midterm exam	Rossi ch. 11	Midterm exam: 2/29 Team project initial steps: 3/3	
8	Spring break			
9	Qualitative methods	T: FHI interviews Th: FHI field observations		Interviews; Field observations
10	Stage 4	T: Rossi ch. 5 Th: Rossi ch. 6		Intro to impact evaluation
11	Stage 4	T: Rossi ch 7 (pp 157-167) Th: Rossi ch. 8 (skip parts about regression discontinuity)		Causal Inference; Sources of bias; Randomized experiments
12	Stage 4	T: Rossi ch. 7 pp. 167 – 176 Th: Rossi ch. 7 pp. 176 - end	Team project stage 1/2/3 worksheet and stage 4 questions: 3/24	Selection on observables; Diff-in-diff
13	Stage 4	T: Rossi ch. 8 (only parts about regression discontinuity) Th: *Spring carnival – no class*	Team project stage 4 worksheet: 3/31	Regression discontinuity
14	Stage 4	T: Rossi ch. 9 Th: None		Statistical power; Hypothesis testing; Heterogenous impacts
15	Stage 4	T: Rossi ch. 10	Team project final draft: 4/18	Cost-benefit analysis;

		Th: Brown (2023) – Rossi award lecture	HW 6: 4/28 Final exam during exam week (date TBD)	Closing discussion