PA 871: Public Program Evaluation, Fall 2021

CREDITS: 3

CANVAS COURSE URL: https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/266466/modules

COURSE DESIGNATIONS AND ATTRIBUTES: General

MEETING TIME AND LOCATION: Tuesday 3:30 – 5:25pm, Social Science 4308.

INSTRUCTIONAL MODE: in-person

The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 180 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit), which include regularly scheduled instructor - student meeting times (120 minutes per week), reading, writing, problem sets, and other student work as described in the syllabus.

INSTRUCTOR: Professor Yang Wang

OFFICE HOURS: Wednesday 2:30 – 4:30pm via Zoom and by appointment

INSTRUCTOR EMAIL: ywang26@wisc.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Public program evaluation is the systematic, data-based assessment of the performance of programs or policies that have been implemented in public sectors. The main purpose of program evaluation is to provide valid findings to determine whether a particular program or policy is achieving its goals, and whether it should be continued, improved, expanded, or curtailed. And program evaluation has been increasingly required by policy makers concerned with accountability and efficient use of public resources.

This course will expose you to a variety of “state of the art” research designs and related methodological tools useful for evaluating the impact of public policies and programs. It will also provide you with an understanding of when and how these tools can be most usefully applied to produce knowledge and evidence of program effectiveness to guide program and policy decision making.

This course focuses primarily on quantitative methods of program evaluation necessary for you to first become critical consumers and effective users of evaluations and then build higher quality programs and policies.
In this course we will examine evaluation designs that have been applied to various public programs and issues in order to demonstrate key points. Each design relies on different sets of assumptions to construct the counterfactual state (what would have happened in the absence of the program) and to justify the causal claims it produces. We will learn to evaluate what these assumptions are, when these assumptions are likely to be violated, and how such violations lead to misleading conclusions.

REQUISITES: PA818

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES
By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

• Describe the key elements of the field of program evaluation;
• Understand the purpose, logic, and process of program evaluation;
• Explain contemporary program evaluation methods, including their strengths and weaknesses;
• Assess existing program evaluations; and
• Design and implement their own program evaluation, as well as contextualize, interpret, and present their findings.

TEXTBOOK AND OTHER RESOURCES
There is no required textbook for this course.


We will also use readings that illustrate “real world” applications of the methods we learn in class in academic, government, and other contexts. All the readings are available online or will be made available at CANVAS (please check ‘Modules’, not ‘Files’ or other parts) or directly from me.

Required readings should be completed before we meet each week.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING
All assignments are designed to hone evaluation skills and provide experience that will be useful on the job market. Please use this course and the course assignments to deepen your expertise in a policy area of interest and to complement your other course work. Course grades will be based on the following components and descriptions of some of these components will be given separately:

• Class attendance and participation (general participation + some structured activities): 25%
• Paper presentation + one-page knowledge card: 10%+5%
- Attend at least two seminars/presentations on campus or at other universities (in-person or online) that use quantitative methods covered in class, and write a one-page summary for each seminar/presentation you attend: 10%
- Homework 10%
- Policy briefing: 10%
- Final program evaluation paper and presentation (group project): 30%

Grade Criteria: A >= 93%, AB >= 89%, B >= 80%, BC >= 75%, C >= 65%, D >= 55%, F <55%

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION
Attendance is required for this class. Please email me if you cannot make it to the class for any reason. Class participation is an essential component of the course and is critical to your learning and that of your peers. You will be expected to read assigned materials prior to our class meetings and come prepared for discussions. In this way, lecture provides a second exposure to the material. I will not go over all the details in lecture but will highlight the important parts. Active participation (i.e., sharing your thoughts and listening to the thoughts of others) in structured, in-class activities such as group discussions, case studies, role plays, and debates is also important. You should also ask questions during lectures, as this will get you actively involved, generate discussion, and indicate which ideas and information you find interesting, important, or confusing. Regular class attendance is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for getting full credits in class attendance and participation.

COURSE WEBPAGE
We have a CANVAS webpage for this course. You can find most course materials there (please check ‘Modules’, not ‘Files’ or other parts), including the syllabus, readings, and so forth. You will also submit your assignments onto CANVAS course webpage, so please make effort to get familiar with how it works. You are responsible for accessing the course webpage on a regular basis.

PRIVACY OF STUDENT RECORDS & THE USE OF AUDIO RECORDED LECTURES STATEMENT
Lecture materials and recordings for this course are protected intellectual property at UW-Madison. Students in this course may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in this class. Students may also take notes solely for their personal use. If a lecture is not already recorded, you are not authorized to record my lectures without my permission unless you are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability requiring accommodation. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or have lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities. Students are also prohibited from providing or selling their personal notes to anyone else or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the instructor’s express written permission. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university’s policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.
ASSIGNMENTS
Please try your best to work on the assignments, as it is one of the best ways to learn the materials. You are encouraged to discuss with your classmates, but be sure that you understand the materials yourself.

ILLNESS POLICY
If you are sick and you think it could be contagious, please stay at home and rest. Email me or check with classmates to get the material you have missed. If you believe that your illness or anything else might give you a long absence from class, please contact me immediately so that we can work out a plan to make sure that you do not fall too far behind.

CLASS MANNERS
- Please come to class on time. If you know that you will be late, please let me know in advance.
- Please do not leave class early. If you have to leave early, please let me know in advance.
- Please mute your phone prior to class.
- Please do not use your phone or computer in class unless asked to. A growing body of evidence suggests that the use of laptops, tablets, and phones in classrooms tends to be detrimental to learning. If you want to use a device during class, I ask that you contact me first to make this request. For more context on this policy, see this video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9eaPx_NYGo&t=296s).

COURSE EVALUATIONS
Students will be provided with an opportunity to evaluate this course and your learning experience. Student participation is an integral component of this course, and your confidential feedback is important to me. I strongly encourage you to participate in the course evaluation.

USEFUL RESOURCES
- University Health Services
- Students’ Rules, Rights & Responsibilities
- Academic Calendar & Religious Observances

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STATEMENT
Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT
By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but is not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion.

ACCOMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES STATEMENT
The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: McBurney Disability Resource Center)

COURSE SCHEDULE
Please note that the following outline and listed readings will be adjusted and updated to accommodate new materials, class needs, and student interests and experience. I will also frequently bring in additional materials reflecting current events and issues related to program evaluation. Changes will be communicated in class and/or by e-mail, and an updated syllabus will be posted on CANVAS.

Part One: Introduction
Week 1: September 14, “Introduction to Program Evaluation”
• What is program evaluation?
• Why should we care about program evaluation?
• Course overview

Required Readings
Week 2: September 21, “Ethics of Program Evaluation”
- Ethical issues in evaluation: early abuses, current oversight, and lingering controversies
- Guiding principles for evaluation
- Asking the right questions

Required Readings

Recommended Readings

Week 3: September 28, “Basic Concepts & Logic Models”
- Basic statistical concepts
- Guest speaker: Sun Joo Hwang, MPA ’21, PhD candidate in Public Health at University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill

Required Readings

Recommended Readings
• UW-Extension Logic Model training and tools: https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/programdevelopment/logic-models/

Part Two: Experiments

**Week 4: October 5, “Randomized Experimental Design”**

- What are randomized experimental designs?
- Why are they considered the “gold standard” of evaluation?
- What are the limitations and challenges of implementing experimental designs?
- Guest speaker: Mitch Running, MPA ’17, MPH ’18, Outreach Specialist, La Follette School of Public Affairs, UW-Madison

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


Part Three: Quasi-experiment: Selection on Observables

**Week 5: October 12, “Propensity Score Matching”**

- What is propensity score matching?
- What are the key assumptions?
- What are the limitations and challenges of propensity score matching?

**Required Readings**
• Evaluation, Ch. 9, Assessing Program Impact: Alternative Design (Note: please focus on the parts on propensity score matching and skim the other parts on regression discontinuity, time-series design, etc.)

Recommended Readings

Part Three: Quasi-Experiment Design: Selection on Unobservables
Week 6: October 19, “DD and DDD”
• What is difference-in-differences?
• What are the key assumptions?
• What are the limitations and challenges of DD?

Required Readings

**Recommended Readings**


**Week 7: October 26, “Instrumental Variable”**

• What is IV?
• What are the key assumptions?
• What are the limitations and challenges of IV?

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


• Levitt, Steven D. 1997. “Using Electoral Cycles in Police Hiring to Estimate the Effect of Police on Crime.” American Economic Review. 87(3): 270-290. [Read the “easy” parts of this paper and don’t worry about the complicated parts.]


**Week 8: November 2, “Methodological Debates: Experimental vs. Non-Experimental Designs”**

- What are the pros and cons of experimental and non-experimental designs?
- Which method is better?

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**

- Rodrik, Dani. "The new development economics: we shall experiment, but how shall we learn?" (2008).

**Week 9: November 9: “Fixed Effects”**

- Why do we want to use fixed effects?
- What is the difference between fixed effects and first difference?
- *Guest speaker: Joe Chrisman, State Auditor, Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau*

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**

Week 10: November 16, “Regression Discontinuity”
• What is RD?
• What are the key assumptions?
• What are the limitations and challenges of RD?

Required Readings
• Shadish, Cook & Campbell (2002), Ch. 7, “Regression Discontinuity Designs”

Recommended Readings

Week 11: November 23: “Power, Effect Sizes, and Meta-Analysis
• Effect sizes
• Meta-analysis

Required Readings
• Evaluation, Ch. 10: Detecting, Interpreting, and Analyzing Program Effects
• Shadish, Cook & Campbell (2002), Ch. 13, “Generalized Causal Inference: Methods for Multiple Studies”

Readings for Class Discussion


**Week 12: November 30, “Quantile Regression”**

• What is quantile regression?

• Why do we want to do quantile regression?

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 13: December 7, “Synthetic Control”**

• What is Synthetic Control?

• What are the key assumptions?

• What are the limitations and challenges of Synthetic Control?

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 14: December 14, “Final Presentations”** (Please note that we may have to run a bit long on the last day to accommodate all presentations.)