

PSPA 604 Public Program Evaluation

Spring 2009
Wednesdays, 6:00-9:00
Hoffman Estates Education Center
Hours, HEEC, Tuesday 4:30-5:30

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The objective of this course is to introduce students to research design issues relevant for evaluating public policies and programs. The course takes a mainstream Campbellian approach to evaluation design. This is not a statistics course *per se*, though selection and interpretation of appropriate statistics is among the key tasks of research design.

In addition, the course affords MPA students an opportunity to design a competent, if not necessarily elaborate or expensive, policy evaluation, which may be executed, revised as necessary, and submitted as the student's MPA capstone paper.

Required Readings

The following may be purchased via either VCB or the Norris University Bookstore:

Emil Posavac & R. Carey, *Program Evaluation*, 7th ed., Prentice Hall, 2007;
Richard Bingham & Claire Felbinger, *Evaluation in Practice*, 2nd ed., Chatham House-Seven Bridges, 2001.

The following will be ordered in the first class meeting from VCB:

VCB "Starred Papers" packet: Anderson, Brown, Harris, Kalchbrenner, and McCray MPA papers; Jason et al. ch 23 from Bingham-Felbinger 1st ed.

The following book is required only for Ph.D. students, *including* MA and MPA students contemplating doctoral studies:

William Shadish, Thomas Cook & Donald Campbell, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference*, Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

The following will be available on reserve:

Donald Campbell, "Reforms as Experiments," *Amer. Psychologist* (April 1969);
Eugene Webb, Donald Campbell, et al., *Nonreactive Measures in the Social Sciences*, Houghton Mifflin, 1981, ch. 3.

Course passout pages will be provided to students on Blackboard.

Class Schedule

Class format will vary: about half the meetings will involve informal lecture with question-and-answer interaction; other meetings will consist of discussion of example evaluations (e.g., in Felbinger-Bingham), plus individual consultation and lab sessions. Since discussion is the key to developing an understanding of the methods, all students must be sure to complete all assigned readings – especially the example evaluations – before the applicable class.

- January 14.* Course organization. Program evaluation and policy research epistemology.
Read: Campbell, "Reforms as Experiments," 187-190, 217-220;
- January 21.* Goals, program elements, and outcomes; hypotheses and research questions; evaluability assessment.
Read: Posavac & Carey, ch. 1, 2, 3;
Bingham & Felbinger, ch. 1.
PhD's: Shadish, Cook & Campbell, ch. 1.
- January 28.* Measurement and reliability; research ethics and IRB review.
Read: Webb, Campbell, et al., "Approximations to Knowledge";
Posavac & Carey, ch. 4, 5, 7, 12;
Bingham & Felbinger, ch. 3, 4;
IRB procedures, at <http://www.orc.niu.edu/orc/>
PhD's: Webb, Campbell, et al., *Unobtrusive Measures* (rec.).
- February 4.* Measurement and data-collection protocols.
Measurement report presentations.
- February 11.* Validity and spuriousness; the Campbell framework; nonexperimental and experimental designs; needs assessments.
Read: Campbell, "Reforms as Experiments";
Posavac & Carey, ch. 8, 10, 6; rec. ch. 11;
Bingham & Felbinger, ch. 2.
PhDs: Shadish, Cook & Campbell, ch. 2-4, 8-10.
- February 17 & 24.* SPSS/Statistics Labs: Small-group sessions, by appointment.
Rec.: Meier & Brudney, *Applied Statistics for P.A.*, 6th ed., ch.14,18-22.
- February 18 - 25.* Nonexperimental and experimental example evaluations.
Read: Bronson et al. (ch. 10), Malitz (ch. 13), Solberg (ch. 7), McKay et al. (ch. 5), Extejt et al. (ch 6), and Rosenbaum (ch. 18) in Bingham & Felbinger; S. Anderson, D. McCray and J. Kalchbrenner starred papers.
Pretest distributed at end of Feb 25th; due (e.g., email) by March 4, 11:59PM.
- No class meetings March 4– work on paper Lit. Review– or March 11– Spring Break.*
- March 18-25.* Quasiexperimental designs: Theory and statistical issues.
Read: Posavac & Carey, ch. 9.
PhDs: Shadish, Cook & Campbell, ch. 5-7, 10-14.
Stats lab one-page write-up due March 18th.
- March 31 - April 5.* Individual design paper consultations, by appointment; no regular class April 1st.
Design prospectus and annotated bibliography due at consultation.
- April 8-15.* Quasiexperimental designs, example evaluations.
Read: Newcomb (ch. 8), Edwards et al. (ch. 11), Hicks & Spaner (ch. 15), Ennett et al. (ch. 16), Goetz (ch 12), Moran (ch. 9), Wagenaar & Holder (ch. 19), Witte et al. (ch. 20) and Greene, Peterson & Du (ch. 21) in Bingham & Felbinger; Jason et al. from Bingham & Felbinger *1st ed.*, M. Brown starred paper, C. Harris et al. Midwest paper, in VCB packet.
- April 22.* No class meeting – work on final research design paper.
- April 29.* Evaluation reporting and utilization; evaluating the outcome line. Conclusions.
Read: Posavac & Carey, ch. 13, 14.
Final research design papers due April 29th.
Posttest exam distributed at end of class.
- May 6.* *Posttest exam* papers due Wednesday 8:00 P.M. at 828 Forrest, or by arrangement.

Grading

There will be two exams, with the main, comprehensive exam administered at the end of the course. Both exams will be take-home, open-everything instruments. Due to the timing of Spring Break this year, there is a relatively short official turnaround on the first, "pretest" exam; most students will probably turn the pretest in by email attachment. The other key requirements involve a short paper on measurement and the draft and final evaluation design papers, below.

The computer lab component will be graded on a pass-fail basis (5 for a satisfactory lab report, vs. 0). Missed classes may cost a point (1%), while active, informed participation, especially during the key discussions of example evaluations, will receive bonus points.

The course grade will be based on the following weighting:

Measurement short paper	15%
Pretest	15%
Design prospectus & draft lit. review	15%
SPSS stats lab	5%
Posttest exam	25%
Final research design	25%
Total	100%
Attendance & participation	±5%

Students should be familiar with the University's and Division's policies regarding withdrawal from courses and academic honesty. The Division allows "incomplete" grades only in extraordinary and thoroughly documented circumstances.

Measurement Report

On February 4, groups of students will submit sets of short (~3 pages, single-spaced) how-to-do-it reports on particular data-gathering methods (e.g., surveys, content analysis). Reports should summarize the utility and weaknesses of the particular method and the key protocol issues of the method. Copies of the reports shall be distributed to the other members of the class. The reports will be based on key sources (see Bibliography) beyond the required readings.

SPSS Lab

The lab will consist of a three-hour review of how to assemble, input, and analyze data for statistical analysis using SPSS, plus a refresher on regression analysis in particular. Since the lab sessions will involve groups of 2-4 students, the times and places of the labs will be scheduled to accommodate individuals' schedules. The lab sessions may be held at the HEEC or on-campus MPA lab. Note that a \$75 fee subsidizes the on-campus MPA lab (the other fee reimburses for use of the HEEC building).

Evaluation Research Design

Whether or not you plan the research design to be executed as your capstone paper, your PSPA 604 design should propose a high validity research design using reliable data that is known to be accessible to the student within normal budgets and deadlines.

The first step in the project is to begin thinking about a research question that is interesting to you, and/or your agency (especially for interns). The only substantive limitation on this question is that it must be answerable using empirical data. (However, please avoid issues related to personal or personnel grievances.)

After identifying a question, *do not even think about data, methods, or a research design until after completing the key text readings* (i.e., through the March 18-25 readings).

Literature Review. Instead, go to a good research library, such as NIU's, and search for articles, government documents or similar reports, and books containing research designs, indicators, findings, explanations, descriptions, or histories of or about the subject of your project. In addition to the evaluation journals, such as *Evaluation Review*, and the major journals in the subfield of your project, you should consult relevant general indexes (e.g., *Criminal Justice Abstracts*, *Sage Urban Studies Abstracts*) in the

periodical index section of the library. Evaluations conducted for government agencies are often listed in federal or state publications indexes and can be obtained from government reports clearinghouses. The Division's file of old starred papers is often another important resource. The Internet, of course, provides easy access to a large amount of information, from descriptive or public-relations information on a program to on-line archives of recent journal articles (e.g., JSTOR), and even archival data sets. Please remember, however, that much of the information on the Net is *not refereed*; just as you should distinguish the credibility of an advocacy group's position paper from a study published in *Science* or *PAR*, so should you make judgements about the material you can download from the Internet. After searching for your relevant literature, read the items and keep a record of each item's citation and utility. This record will provide the basis for your annotated bibliography.

Design Prospectus. After completing course text reading and your literature search, you may think about a research design. We will consult over these proposals in individual meetings at the end of March. Your preliminary research prospectus should contain: (1) a short description of the program to be evaluated; (2) a statement of your general research question and a set of specific hypotheses; (3) a draft research design, that is, an X's and O's scheme; (4) specification of the O's indicators and measurement strategy; (5) a preliminary assessment of the availability of your data O's or a plan for assessing data availability; and (6) an annotated bibliography of evaluations of programs similar to yours and histories or descriptions of your program, consisting of citations plus 1-2 sentences describing each item's utility.

A key criterion for your research design is that it could actually be executed using *accessible* empirical data. You do not need to actually gather and analyze those data during PSPA 604, but you must thoroughly determine that you *could* gather them. For example, record keepers must grant you access to archival data and you must present, in your final research design, samples of the raw data. Data accessibility will thus be a significant topic during our consultations.

Final Research Design. The final design should follow the format of an empirical research report (see class passout). Your PSPA 604 design should include the executive summary through the research design sections, plus any methodology appendices and the reference list.

The design should be clearly and concisely written. Write your paper with two audiences in mind: methodologically attuned professors (i.e., your capstone paper or thesis director) and public administrators who want to read relevant explicit findings written in clear English devoid of jargon. Your paper should be only as long as necessary to thoroughly, yet concisely cover the material. Capstone papers should probably range from 25 to 40 pages, depending on the complexity of the design and the variety of data to be presented. At least half that material should normally consist of findings, which you will not have in your PSPA 604 paper. A concisely written 20-page product is far superior to fifty pieces of paper filled with aimless verbiage.

PSPA 604 and the Capstone Paper. Many MPA students use PSPA 604 to begin writing their capstone paper. For most students, capstone-paper designs can be implemented more effectively if the evaluation is responsive to any needs of a student's internship or in-service agency. You may wish to consult with your supervisor as soon as possible to learn if s/he has any apt evaluation questions. After the semester, you may implement your PSPA 604 design by consulting with your assigned capstone advisor, collecting data, analyzing it, and writing your capstone paper.

Student research projects are governed by strict procedures to protect human subjects, though most MPA capstone projects do not require the most elaborate level of IRB review. *However, before beginning any research work, including activities like preliminary interviews, students must review the IRB procedures and file either the preliminary screening form or a full human-subjects form.* See <http://www.orc.niu.edu/orc>

Supplemental Bibliography

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