PLS 506—Research Methods and Program Evaluation
Spring 2006

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Course Description: This course focuses on research methods and basic quantitative analysis and how these tools can be used in conducting a program evaluation. There is an emphasis on theory development and hypothesis testing for the public manager. The ethical issues of research and program evaluation are also explored.

All students will need to have access to the computers in the Departmental Lab so get an account and password from Professor Jones if you do not have one as yet.

Goals:

✓ To understand the basic elements of research design, theory development, and hypothesis testing
✓ To develop skills in basic data collection and data analysis when conducting a program evaluation
✓ To improve skills in the presentation of quantitative information to decision makers and public managers
✓ To design and complete a program evaluation
✓ To become sensitive to the ethical issues in research practice and program evaluation

Books:


Claire Hewson, et. al., Internet Research Methods, Sage, 2002.
Assignments:

There will be weekly reading and written assignments and an objective final exam. There will also be the completion and presentation of a program evaluation.

Class Grade:

Weekly Written Assignments 30%

Program evaluation and presentation 30%

Final Exam 30%

Class Participation 10% (based on contributions made in class and presentation of written assignments).

Class Schedule and Assignments:

January 17

Logic and Tenets of Scientific Inquiry
Why Research is important
Using Research to make decisions
Key Themes in Course
Basic Vocabulary of research (review)

January 24

Guidelines for doing research
Variables and Hypothesis Testing
Development of Theory
SPSS Exercise

Read: Read sections in Payne and Payne: action research, association and causation, grounded theory, hypothesis, indicators and operationalizations, reliability, validity.

Assignment: Bring to class an empirical article that uses data to evaluate an existing program. In class, we will critique these articles for their hypotheses, data sufficiency, major methods used, and overall strengths and weaknesses. Students will turn in assignments at the end of the class session. See Journals at the end of syllabus for suggestions.
January 31

Bring project idea to class
Exemplar Program Evaluations

Quantitative Designs
Selecting the right design—Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs
Cost Effectiveness and Cost Benefit Analysis
Other Designs

Read: Bingham and Felbinger, skim pp. 55-208.

Assignment: Bring a preliminary one page description of a program you would like to evaluate. Include the program mission/goals, a brief history of the program, and a description of what the program does. Use bullet format. Make 15 copies for distribution.

February 7

Qualitative Designs
Case Studies
Ethnography
Focus Groups
Elite Interviewing
Role Playing
Content Analysis
Expert Judges
Agency Records
Unobtrusive behavior and measures

Read: Payne and Payne: case study, coding qualitative data, content analysis, documentary methods, ethnography, experiments, interviewing, key informants, observation, qualitative methods, quantitative methods.

Assignment: Indicate how you would (could) use each of the qualitative methods above to evaluate your program. Briefly indicate in about a paragraph what you would do and how you would use the method.
February 14

Internet Research
Library Search Engines and Resources
Triangulation of measures in Qualitative Designs
More hypothesis testing

Read: Payne and Payne: Internet and other searches, official statistics, unobtrusive methods and triangulation. Also Hewson, et al., chapters 1-5.

Skim methodology:


Assignment: In the second part of the class in the library take one of the following concepts and find three different measures of the concept. Write the measures down and turn in the paper at the end of the hour. Give a brief explanation of why you chose these measures. Choose one—social class, welfare dependency, productivity, civic participation, economic growth, urban sprawl.

February 21

Introduction to Program Evaluation
Ethics and Politics of Evaluation
Who is asking the questions and who is the audience?
Basic Principles and Design of an Evaluation

Read: Bingham and Felbinger, chapters 1,2,3. Payne and Payne: evaluation studies.

Assignment: Identify the main stakeholders in the program you will be evaluating. Indicate tentatively what you think their “stake” in the program is. This is just a guess. Research will come later.
February 28

Program Theory
The Counterfactual in program evaluation
The Outcome Line
Efficiency, Outcome, Productivity

Read: Skim, parts vii and viii in Bingham and Felbringer.

Assignment: Pick the strongest and the weakest exemplar in the reading and indicate in two pages the reasons for your answer. Use bullet format.

March 14

Performance Measurement and Benchmarking
Organizational vs. Service Outcomes

Read: Chapter 4 in Bingham and Felbinger.


Assignment: we will do the assignment in class. You will develop a measure of input, output, outcome, efficiency, and productivity for the program you will be evaluating.

March 21

Presentation of Project Design (power point)

Everyone will make a power point presentation of no more than 10 minutes which indicates the overall design of the evaluation to include: research questions, research design, research methods, data collection methods and measures, and the timeline for completing the project (Gantt chart).
March 28

Field work on projects

April 4

Field work on projects

April 11

Field work on projects

April 18

Presentations of program evaluation

Power point presentation of no longer than 15 minutes.

April 25

Presentation of program evaluation (continued)

Final Exam will be given during the finals week as scheduled.
Selected Public Administration Journals:

Public Administration Review
American Review of Public Administration
State and Local Government Review
Journal of Policy Analysis and Management
Public Budgeting and Finance
Public Management and Productivity Review
Urban Affairs Review
Journal of Urban Affairs
Journal of Public Administration, Research, and Theory
Municipal Finance Journal
Governing
Administrative Science Quarterly
Journal of Political Economy
Economic Development Quarterly
Publius

Evaluation Journals:

Evaluation and Program Planning
Evaluation in Education
Evaluation Practice
Evaluation Quarterly
Evaluation Review
Evaluation Studies Review Annual