

***PLS 506—Research Methods and Program Evaluation
Spring 2006***

Instructor: Milan J. Dluhy, Ph.D.

Office Hours: 4-6 pm, Tuesday or by appointment

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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:

Richard Bingham and Claire Felbinger, Evaluation in Practice, Second Edition, Chatham House, 2002.

Geoff Payne and Judy Payne, Key Concepts in Social Research, Sage, 2004.

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:

Milan Dluhy, et al., “Creating A Positive Future for a Minority Community: Transportation and Urban Renewal Politics in Miami,” Journal of Urban Affairs, Vol. 24, no. 1, 2002, pp. 75-95.

Milan Dluhy, et. al., “Choosing The Rowers: Are Private Managers of Public Housing More Successful Than Public Managers,” The American Review of Public Administration, Vol. 31, No. 2, June 2001, pp. 181-200.

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 Felbringer.

Milan Dluhy, "Enhancing the Utilization of Performance Measures in Local Government," reprinted in Howard Frank, Public Financial Management, Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2006.

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

