

**Psy 868, Spring 2016, Program Evaluation in the Social and Behavioral Sciences
Course syllabus, CRN 20984, 3 credit hours**

Instructor

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Logistical Details

Meeting times: 12:20-3:05, Wednesdays, Cammack 27

Prerequisites: Graduate standing and Psy 820.

Textbook: Emil Posavac, *Program Evaluation: Methods and Case Studies*, 8th ed. (ISBN 978-0-205-00349-5)

You will also need an undergraduate textbook in research methods and statistics (Jackson, *Research Methods and Statistics*, 3rd ed.)

Computer access and skills: You must have access to a computer with which you can use the internet, including especially PsycInfo and other library databases. EKU provides on-campus student computer labs that are sufficient for this purpose. You must also have access and know how to use email, basic word processing programs (MS Word), spreadsheets (MS Excel), and SPSS.

Course Description

Catalog description: Survey and application of program evaluation theory, designs, implementations and problems. Emphasis on preparing students to design and implement program evaluations of social, educational, and organizational programs.

Program evaluation is the scientific process of determining if some sort of program (policy, treatment, plan, intervention, etc.) actually achieved its objectives. It is quite common for some sort of institution (like a school or company) to enact a program that is designed to improve the institution. Program evaluation is the process of scientifically documenting the effects of the program.

Program evaluation can be thought of as “research methods on steroids.” The basic concept of a program evaluation is the same as the basic concept of any research project. However, there are many more details involved in designing and executing a program evaluation than in doing a simple research project. This course is designed to build on your already existing knowledge of research methods and teach you about these greater details.

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessments

At the end of the semester, you should have:

- An understanding of the theory behind program evaluation
 - You should be able to describe in detail the steps of a program evaluation: design, collect, analyze, and present
- A knowledge of program evaluations that have been done in psychology
 - You should have read and analyzed about 30 published program evaluations
- An understanding of how to do a program evaluation in your area of specialty
 - You should be able to write a proposal for a program evaluation in your area of specialty.

The primary forms of assessment closely match these objectives.

- The chapters in the textbook provide the basic theory and logic of program evaluation. To confirm that students have mastered the theory, students are required to do pre-reading exercises, read the material, take quizzes and exams on the material, and actively discuss it during seminars.
- Students will read about 30 published reports of program evaluations so that they have a working knowledge of how the theory is actually applied in real settings. To confirm that students have understood these applications, students are required to prepare answers to discussion questions before class and to actively participate in discussion during seminars.
- Students will write a proposal for a program evaluation (working with other students in the course). To confirm that students have understood how to do a program evaluation, students are required to submit their literature review, first draft, and final version of their papers. In addition, students are required to make an in-class presentation on their work and to review the work of other students.
- Students will make at least three presentations on program evaluations during the course of the semester. These presentations cover all three learning outcomes, and they give students practice thinking critically and communicating effectively, as required by the ECU quality enhancement plan.

Remember that students in all psychology courses are expected to use correct grammar, spelling, and composition in written assignments. These elements will be taken into consideration in grading all out-of-class writing assignments. If you would like free help with your writing, you may visit the Noel Studio in the library, 859-622-7330, or <http://www.studio.ecu.edu/>

Course Requirements and Grading

1. Reading outlines (5%). Instructions are provided below. Due on Monday night 11:59 pm.
2. Reading notes (prepared after reading articles) (15%). Instructions are provided below. Due on Wed mornings before class.
3. Reading comprehension quizzes (TBD). Quizzes will be given in some class periods to confirm that students have read the materials.
4. Final exam (20%). Cumulative, comprehensive final exam will be given during final exams week.
5. Other activities as developed and announced.

A: 90-100 B: 80-90 C: 70-80 F: <70

Workload and Expectations

As mentioned in the Graduate Catalog, “Graduate level courses are expected to require a minimum of four hours of outside preparation for every hour of lecture.” Thus, you are expected to spend at least 10 hours per week doing the reading and assignments. You can probably do all the reading in one pass in about 5 hours, but the expectation is that you are not just “doing the reading;” rather, you are actively taking notes, fleshing out your written outlines, and otherwise working with the material.

Academic accommodations

A student with a “disability” may be an individual with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities such as learning, seeing or hearing. Additionally, pregnancy or a related medical condition that causes a similar substantial limitation may also be considered a disability under the ADA.

If you are registered with the Office of Services for Individuals with Disabilities, please obtain your accommodation letters from the OSID and present them to the course instructor to discuss any academic accommodations you need. If you believe you need accommodation and are not registered with the OSID, please contact the office in the Whitlock Building Room 361 by email at disserv@ecu.edu or by telephone at (859) 622-2933. Upon individual request, this syllabus can be made available in an alternative format.

Academic Integrity

Students are advised that ECU's Academic Integrity policy will be strictly enforced in this course. The Academic Integrity policy is available at www.academicintegrity.ecu.edu. Questions regarding the policy may be directed to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Official Email

An official ECU email is established for each registered student, each faculty member, and each staff member. All university communications sent via e-mail will be sent to this ECU e-mail address.

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Preparing reading outlines

One of the key things to do as you start to read any technical or academic work is to get an overview of what you are about to read. Having an overview in mind before you start reading gives you a framework for comprehending the material. By analogy, it's a lot easier to reach your destination if you have a general idea of where you are going. Getting an overview of what you are about to read is like getting a map that shows you where your destination is. It makes it a lot easier to learn and understand the material.

To emphasize the importance of getting an overview, this semester you are asked to generate a formal structured outline for everything that we will read; your typewritten outlines are due on Monday nights submitted through Blackboard.

Textbook chapters and non-research articles: For textbook chapters, your outline will look a lot like the table of contents for each chapter. The main sections (level 1 headings) should be numbered with Roman numerals. The subsections (level 2) should be indented half an inch and begin with capital letters. Some subsections have sub-subsections (level 3), indent them and use regular numbers. Include all figures, boxes, case studies, etc. where they are most appropriate. You may be tempted to just copy directly from the table of contents of the book, but please resist this urge. For one, the table of contents does not have the level 3 headings in it. But more importantly, you want to get an overview of the material, and the best way to do that is to systematically flip through the chapter.

For non-research articles (articles that do not follow the standard Intro-Method-Results-Discussion format), please outline the article according to whatever sections the author has created.

Research reports and empirical articles: Outline all the research reports. Typically, the four main sections of the report (Intro, Method, Results, Disc) will form the Roman numeral headings. Always use the exact headings provided in the article. Often, the Introduction section does not begin with a heading (this is consistent with APA format—the intro is obviously the Intro). If no heading begins the article, use “I. Introduction” to begin your outline. Use capital letters for sub-sections, and indent them half an inch. If you need a third level, use regular numbers, and indent them an inch. Some very short articles have few headings, so just outline the article by developing a phrase or heading for each paragraph or two.

Formatting using Word: Word is the preferred software to use. Two “buttons” in Word can become your best friends. In the “Home” tab, there are several buttons in the “paragraph” group. One of the buttons is for “multilevel list,” and another is for “increase indent.” One very easy way to make a professional looking outline is to first go through the chapters/articles and enter each heading on its own line without any sort of numbering or indentation. Then, go through the Word document and indent the appropriate sections using the “increase indent” button (level 1 should be against the left margin, level 2 should be .5 inches in, level three should be 1 inch in, etc.) Once you have the blocks appropriately indented, you can highlight all the text and click on “multilevel list.” Choose the option that has level 1 Roman numerals, level 2 capital letters, and level 3 regular numbers.

Please submit your outlines (formatted as Word documents, .doc or .docx, all outlines in one document) for each week's reading assignments on Monday evening through Blackboard. The outline only needs to consist of the headings for all the sections and subsections; you do not have to include any content or details in order to get full credit for outlining the material. However, it is hoped that once you have this outline prepared, you will see how you can easily use this document for making notes about the readings, summarizing the material, and otherwise using it for studying for exams.

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Preparing reading notes for chapters from the textbook

The main source for all the technical and theoretical information about how to do a program evaluation is the textbook. Each chapter is relatively short—about 20 pages—and is “chunked” into sections and sub-sections.

One skill that we want to work on that compliments reading comprehension, critical thinking, and preparing for the future is determining what is the most important content from what you are reading. Each chapter contains a lot of information, but not all of that information is equally important: some things are simply more important to learn than other things.

When you come to class each week, you should bring a printed list of the 10 most important points from each chapter. Your list should be in rank order in that #1 on your list is the most important thing you learned from the chapter, #2 is the second-most-important, etc. Your list is unlikely to be the exact same as anyone else’s—that’s OK! You have to learn how to determine what the most important information for you is.

For each item on the list, use a headline to capture the idea, and then summarize it in a paragraph (75-150 words) and elaborate on it in 1-2 paragraphs (100-200 words). In your elaboration, think about situations you are likely to encounter in your professional careers, and say why keeping this information in mind would be important.

You might find yourself straining to find 10 items from each chapter. That’s OK, and it’s understandable if you get to the bottom of the list and find yourself grasping for things. But do your best to generate 10 things for each chapter.

For our class discussions, you’ll be called on to offer up some items from your list, describe them, explain your elaborations, and generally participate in discussions of these things with other students. You should not just read what you have written; rather, you should be able to glance at your notes and then be able to discuss your ideas with others.

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Preparing reading notes for empirical articles and preparing for class discussions

One of our goals this semester is to read about 30 empirical reports of program evaluations. The purpose of reading these articles is to provide you with an understanding of what program evaluation is, how it is done, and how it is reported. As you read, follow the 5 steps for reading an empirical report (from Psy 820).

We will discuss the research reports in class. As you know, there is more to preparing for a class discussion than reading through the article once before class. For each report, please type up written notes that answer each of the 6 areas below, submit them through Blackboard before class, and bring a copy to class for use during the discussions.

1. A brief description of the program that is evaluated: the who, what, when, where, why of the program. The why of a program is quite important: what need is the program trying to address? Understanding the need that the program addresses is one of the keys to determining if the evaluation provides useful information.
2. What the primary independent variables are, and this often includes specifying the research design. Research designs are typically:
 - a) One group, posttest only
 - b) One group, pretest-posttest
 - c) Quasi-experimental designs (non-equivalent control group)
 - d) Experimental design (including random assignment or matching to ensure equivalent control groups)
 - e) Combinations of above, including treatment-control pretest-posttest (TCPP)
 - f) Qualitative research designs (often these fit into a design above)
3. What the primary dependent variables are, how they are measured, if they are categorical or continuous, and how they are reported. In addition to knowing and interpreting the results, you should also look for information that reports the quality of the measurements, usually expressed in terms of reliability and validity. DV's often fall somewhere along this hierarchy:
 - a) Participation: How many people participated in the program?
 - b) Liking or attitude: Did participants like the program? Did they have a good attitude toward the program?
 - c) Learning or knowledge: Did participants learn anything? Can they demonstrate new knowledge?
 - d) Behavioral or outcome: Did the participants change their behavior? Were the desired outcomes achieved?
4. What the results are and if they are presented and interpreted correctly. We are interested in the statistical information that the researchers offer. The results may be univariate, bivariate (from the 3x3 table), multivariate (including things like two-way ANOVA, ANCOVA, MANOVA, partial correlation, etc.), or some other more sophisticated design. In addition to identifying the types of stats that are presented, look carefully at how they are presented. Is the presentation concise and descriptive, or is awkward and unclear? Are the most appropriate results presented? Do the results provide meaningful information about the program?
5. What the limitations or shortcomings of the research are. Often these limitations are identified by the researchers, but you should also use your own researcher intuition to develop a fair critique of the research.
6. An overall assessment of
 - a) how well designed the evaluation was.
 - b) how worthwhile the evaluation probably was for the stakeholders.
 - c) how well-written the article was.