



Western University  
Network for Economic and Social Trends

## **Evidence-based Policymaking and Program Evaluation**

Winter 2024

Instructor: Jesse Helmer, PhD Candidate  
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Office hours: [Book a time to meet](#) on Google Meet.  
When/where: Mondays, 12:30 to 3:30 pm

### **Course Description**

The purpose of the course is to familiarize students with the major issues in the fields of program evaluation. Students will develop an understanding of the theoretical frameworks used for evaluative research, validity issues in evaluative research, and the multi-methods, theory-driven approach to evaluation.

The course begins with an overview of the process through which policies and programs are considered, developed, approved, implemented and evaluated. Evaluation research can be expensive, difficult, rarely conclusive, and politically unpopular. Still evaluation research is of increasing relevance in an era where economy, efficiency and effectiveness are integral to the delivery of public sector services. The new emphasis on results, coupled with a shift to contracting out, partnerships, and special operating agencies has increased the need for evaluation.

The major types of evaluations will be considered, including: formative, process and summative evaluation, economic evaluation, and performance measurement. A major focus in the course will be evaluation design and delivery in a climate of evolving citizen and political expectations regarding public services.

The evaluation process does not, however, take place in a vacuum. Issues and externalities such as professional judgment, ethics and objectivity, public expectation, and political sensitivities can (and do) have profound impact on the process. Understanding of and strategies to cope with these issues will be a key part of this course.

### **Course Objectives**

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- Think critically and solve problems about the challenges of program implementation, improvements and accountability that you may face, in the public or non-profit sectors
- Frame performance / accountability issues in analytical and policy terms
- Understand performance monitoring and program evaluation in their different purposes, methods, and relationships

- Explore and understand the key differences between alternative empirical methods commonly used in program evaluation
- Discuss the uses and limitations of ongoing performance information and periodic evaluations in policy decision-making
- Plan, develop, present and negotiate the terms of a simple program evaluation as group work to a non-technical authority
- Carry out a simple evaluation

## Course Materials

A combination of articles, book chapters and other media will be used. The assigned readings and materials will be made available through our OWL course site.

Readings. This course will rely primarily on the following textbooks (available online through Western Libraries):

McDavid, J. C., Huse, I., & Hawthorn, R. L. (2019). *Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement: an introduction to practice* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Peters, B. Guy. (2021). *Advanced Introduction to Public Policy*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. [Ebook Available [Here](#)]

The course is lecture based where concepts and ideas will be introduced and applied through problem solving in case studies, group discussions, assignments, and a group project.

## Evaluation and Assignments

**Class contributions.** At the graduate level the basic expectations in any course include attendance, completion in advance of all assigned readings, and participation in classroom discussions. The instructor will provide grades after each class.

**Program Logic Model – case study application.** Each student will select/identify a program case study at end of class on 22 January. Your assignment will be to evaluate the overall design and effectiveness of the evaluation using the techniques inherent in the Program Logic Model, due.

**Review of an evaluation.** Each student will be provided with a published evaluation, at the conclusion of class on 5 February. Your assignment is to critique the evaluation on the basis of design, validity threats, conclusions and recommendations.

**Program evaluation proposal.** Each team will develop an evaluation plan for a policy-program. The intention of the team project is to apply the material and techniques presented throughout the course and to facilitate collaborative learning. The group project consists of a team class presentation (10%), team report (25%) and individual reflection (5%).

Course Component	Date	Mark
Class Contributions		20%
Program Logic Model	15 Feb	20%
Review of an Evaluation	26 Feb	20%
Team Project	Presentations: 11 Mar or 18 Mar Final Team Report: 8 April Reflection: 8 April	40%

## Class Schedule & Readings

Class	Topic	Readings
<b>Class 1</b> Monday, January 8, 2024	<b>Welcome and Introductions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Class introductions</li> <li>Course overview and expectations</li> <li>What is evaluation research and how do we apply it to programs and policies?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Course outline &amp; OWL site – please see Prof. Helmer if you do not have access to the site</li> <li>McDavid et al (2019), Chapter 1</li> <li>Peters (2021), Chapters 1 – 2</li> </ul>
<b>Class 2</b> Monday, January 15, 2024	<b>Key Concepts and Issues in Program Evaluation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key Concepts</li> <li>Program Evaluation Process</li> <li>Policy Cycles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shriven (2004), <i>Causation</i></li> <li>Grasso (2003), <i>What makes an evaluation useful</i></li> </ul>
<b>Class 3</b> Monday, January 22, 2024	<b>Program Logic Model</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction to Logic models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>McDavid et al (2019), Chapter 2</li> <li>W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide</li> </ul>
<b>Class 4</b> Monday, January 29, 2024	<b>Program Logic Model (cont'd)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design and Use</li> <li>Limitations</li> <li>Case study presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Canadian Firearms Program: a case study</li> </ul>
<b>Class 5</b> February 5, 2024	<b>Research Designs for Program Evaluation</b> What is Research Design? Validity Performance Measure Key issues in Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>McDavid et al., (2019), Chapters 3 – 4</li> <li>Treasury Board of Canada, Secretariat (1998) Program Evaluation Methods</li> </ul>

Class	Topic	Readings
<b>Class 6</b> Monday, February 12, 2024	<b>Performance Measures</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Growth of Performance Measure</li> <li>• Comparison with performance evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peters (2021), Chapter 4 and Chapter 7</li> </ul>
<i>Take a break! Spring Reading Week is February 17 - February 25, 2024</i>		
<b>Class 7</b> Monday, February 26, 2024	<b>Performance Measures – continued</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and implementation</li> <li>• Intended vs. actual uses</li> <li>• Problems and issues in implementation and sustaining</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peters (2021), Chapters 5 – 6</li> </ul>
<b>Class 8</b> Monday, March 4, 2024	<b>Joining Theory and Practice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultures that Support Evaluation</li> <li>• Ethics and evaluation practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peters (2021) Chapter 9</li> <li>• McDavid et al., (2019), Chapters 9 – 12</li> </ul>
<b>Class 9</b> Monday, March 11, 2024	<b>Joining Theory and Practice (Cont'd)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional judgment</li> <li>• The political factor</li> </ul> <b>Student Team Presentations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer Feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peters (2021), Chapter 3</li> </ul>
<b>Class 10</b> Monday, March 18, 2024	<b>Criteria, Standards and Measures</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approaches to qualitative evaluation</li> <li>• Connecting qualitative evaluation to performance method</li> <li>• Benchmarking</li> <li>• Needs assessments</li> </ul> <b>Student Team Presentations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer Feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McDavid et al., (2019), Chapters 5 – 6</li> </ul>
<b>Class 11</b> Monday, March 25, 2024	<b>Economic Evaluation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types</li> <li>• In Performance Measure</li> <li>• Cost - Effectiveness, Utility, Benefit - Analysis</li> <li>• Case study presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McDavid et al., (2019), Chapter 7</li> <li>• Peters (2021), Chapter 8</li> <li>• Gul &amp; Dogutis (2009), <i>Providing efficient police services: a CBA</i>, Case Study</li> </ul>

Class	Topic	Readings
<b>Class 12</b> Monday, April 1, 2024	<b>Measurements in Program Evaluation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measurement: procedures, terminology, and validity</li> <li>• Units of analysis &amp; sources of data</li> <li>• Survey &amp; Research Design</li> <li>• Case study presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hafstad, Aaro &amp; Langmark (1996), <i>Evaluation of an anti-smoking mass media campaign</i>, Case Study</li> </ul>
<b>Class 13</b> Monday, April 8, 2024	<b>Concluding Thoughts</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case study presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Litman (2021) “Evaluating Public Transit Benefits and Costs”</li> <li>• IBI Group (2017) “Shift Business Case”, Case study</li> </ul>

## What Grades Mean

The University of Western Ontario Senate has adopted a set of grade descriptors which explain the meaning of grades assigned in all university courses:

- A+ 90-100% One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level
- A 80-89% Superior work which is clearly above average
- B 70-79% Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
- C 60-69% Competent work, meeting requirements
- D 50-59% Fair work, minimally acceptable
- F Below 50% Fail

## Email

Please use your uwo.ca email address when corresponding with the instructor and include RPE 9600 in the subject line of your email. The instructor will reply to your emails as soon as possible. Do not submit assignments via email. Announcements on the course OWL website will be sent to students' uwo.ca email addresses.

## Electronic Devices

Smartphones and laptops can help us be more productive. They can also distract us with alerts, notifications and other content unrelated to the course. During class time, students are expected to be focused on learning the course material and engaging in discussion with each other.

## Submission of Assignments

Students should submit all assignments via the course OWL website. Written assignments may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>). Note that you will be able to view your Turnitin Originality Report after submitting an assignment. You may resubmit an assignment at any time *before* the deadline.

## Academic Integrity

It is important for your own learning that the work you submit for evaluation is your own work and that you properly credit others for their ideas. Scholastic offences are taken very seriously. Students are directed to read the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

### **Health/Wellness Services**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

### **Accessible Education Western (AEW)**

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

### **Late Penalties**

It is important to submit assignments on time. If you have a reason that you cannot meet a deadline, please advise the instructor at least two days prior to the due date. Assignments submitted after the stated due date, without approval at least two days prior to the due date, will be deducted 3% per day for up to 10 days, at which time the assignment will receive a grade of zero.