



Western
SocialScience

Western University

Network for Economic and Social Trends

Evidence-based Policymaking and Program Evaluation

Winter 2025

Instructor: Jesse Helmer, PhD Candidate
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Office hours: [Book a time to meet](#).
When/where: Tuesdays, 1:00pm to 4:00pm

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 will be available from the library. The cost of the ebook version of the Peters textbook, as of Dec 2024, is \$38.08.

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 (20%). 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 (20%). Each student will select/identify a program case study at end of class on 21 January. Your assignment will be to evaluate the overall design and effectiveness of the evaluation using the techniques inherent in the Program Logic Model.

Review of an evaluation (20%). Each student will be provided with a published evaluation, at the conclusion of class on 4 February. Your assignment is to critique the evaluation on the basis of design, validity threats, conclusions and recommendations.

Program evaluation proposal (40%). 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 an individual reflection (5%).

Course Component	Date	Mark
Class Contributions		20%
Program Logic Model	14 Feb	20%
Review of an Evaluation	7 Mar	20%
Team Project	Presentations: 11 Mar or 18 Mar Final Team Report: 4 April Reflection: 4 April	40%

Class Schedule & Readings

Class	Topic	Readings
Class 1 Tuesday, January 7, 2025	Welcome and Introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class introductions • Course overview and expectations • What is evaluation research and how do we apply it to programs and policies? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course outline & OWL site – please see Prof. Helmer if you do not have access to the site • McDavid et al (2019), Chapter 1
Class 2 Tuesday, January 14, 2025	Key Concepts and Issues in Program Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Concepts • Program Evaluation Process • Policy Cycles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scriven (2004), <i>Causation</i> • Grasso (2003), <i>What makes an evaluation useful</i> • Peters (2021), Chapters 1 – 2
Class 3 Tuesday, January 21, 2025	Program Logic Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Logic models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McDavid et al (2019), Chapter 2 • W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide
Class 4 Tuesday, January 28, 2025	Program Logic Model (cont'd) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and Use • Limitations • Case study presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Canadian Firearms Program: a case study
Class 5 February 4, 2025	Research Designs for Program Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Research Design? • Validity • Performance Measure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McDavid et al., (2019), Chapters 3 – 4 • Treasury Board of Canada, Secretariat (1998) Program Evaluation Methods

Class	Topic	Readings
Class 6 Tuesday, February 11, 2025	Performance Measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduction ● Growth of Performance Measure ● Comparison with performance evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Peters (2021), Chapter 4 and Chapter 7
<i>Take a break! Spring Reading Week is February 15 - February 23, 2025</i>		
Class 7 Tuesday, February 25, 2025	Performance Measures – continued <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Design and implementation ● Intended vs. actual uses ● Problems and issues in implementation and sustaining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Peters (2021), Chapters 5 – 6
Class 8 Tuesday, March 4, 2025	Joining Theory and Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cultures that Support Evaluation ● Ethics and evaluation practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Peters (2021) Chapter 9 ● McDavid et al., (2019), Chapters 9 – 12
Class 9 Tuesday, March 11, 2025	Joining Theory and Practice (Cont'd) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professional judgment ● The political factor Student Team Presentations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Peer Feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Peters (2021), Chapter 3
Class 10 Tuesday, March 18, 2025	Criteria, Standards and Measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Approaches to qualitative evaluation ● Connecting qualitative evaluation to performance method ● Benchmarking ● Needs assessments Student Team Presentations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Peer Feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● McDavid et al., (2019), Chapters 5 – 6
Class 11 Tuesday, March 25, 2025	Economic Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Types ● In Performance Measure ● Cost - Effectiveness, Utility, Benefit - Analysis ● Case study presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● McDavid et al., (2019), Chapter 7 ● Peters (2021), Chapter 8 ● Gul & Dogutis (2009), <i>Providing efficient police services: a CBA</i>, Case Study ● Litman (2021) “Evaluating Public Transit Benefits and Costs” ● IBI Group (2017) “Shift Business Case”, Case study

Class	Topic	Readings
Class 12 Tuesday, April 1, 2025	Measurements in Program Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measurement: procedures, terminology, and validity • Units of analysis & sources of data • Survey & Research Design • Case study presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hafstad, Aaro & Langmark (1996), <i>Evaluation of an anti-smoking mass media campaign</i>, Case Study

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.

Assignment Deadlines

Students must submit their assignments by the date and time stated in the course outline and on the OWL website. Late assignments will be penalized 10% for each day they are late. Any assignment not received within 5 days of the due date will not be accepted, except in the event of a documented medical or family emergency. If a student anticipates an issue with an assignment, they are recommended to speak to the professor as early as possible to make alternative arrangements.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory, with the option for students to miss a maximum of two classes without penalty. If you are absent for more than two classes, a discussion with the course instructor will be required in order to determine whether it is possible to make up the missed time or a Fail will be assigned to the course.

Plagiarism

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence (the Scholastic Offence Policy can be viewed in the Western Academic Calendar). All required assignments may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for 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 (www.turnitin.com).

Standards of Professional Behaviour

It is the responsibility of all to adhere to and promote standards of professional behaviour that support an effective learning environment. These include:

- Respect for others both in and out of the classroom through words and actions (be professional, fair, and respectful in interactions with people on-line and in-person; understand and respect differences among classmates and colleagues; avoid disrupting the learning environment; respect others' expectations of confidentiality and privacy).
- Active engagement in learning and commitment to quality (being prepared for classes; participating and listening actively to others; using technology and social media appropriately, striving to do your best). Take responsibility for your own learning by: relating course content and projects to your own professional interests; monitoring your own understanding; seeking clarification and assistance when necessary.
- Personal integrity (following through on commitments; doing one's own work).
- Students should also be aware of the UWO Student Code of Conduct found at: <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/code.pdf>

Copyright of Lectures and Other Course Materials

Any materials created by the instructor (e.g., videos, notes, handouts, summaries, slide decks, assignments, exams, etc.) are protected by copyright law and may not be copied or distributed in any form without the explicit permission of the instructor. Any non-authorized use of these materials constitutes an academic offence.

Scholastic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence

(www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf).

Artificial Intelligence

Unless otherwise explicitly stated by your course instructor, all assignments must be completed independently, without the aid of artificial intelligence (AI). Suspected use of AI will result in an automatic zero on assignments and may be escalated to the Program's Director to investigate for possible scholastic offence.

Accommodation

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 encouraged to register with Student Accessibility Services, a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both SAS 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. For more information, see <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/>.

Completion of Course Requirements

Course requirements must be completed by the end of the term in which the course is offered (Fall–December 31; Winter–April 30, Summer–August 31). Only in exceptional circumstances may a student take additional time to complete the course requirements. In such a case, the student must first meet with the Graduate Chair to request permission to carry the incomplete. Medical documentation, where required, will be kept on file in the graduate program office. More details regarding incompletes are outlined in the Graduate Handbook: http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate_handbook/course_information.html.

Accessibility Options

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519-661-2111, x82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website: www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html.

Mental Health

Students in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html) for a complete list of options on how to obtain help.

Health and Wellness

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. The Wellness Education Centre (lower level UCC) assists students in finding mental health and other related resources best suited to their needs (<http://se.uwo.ca/wec.html>). Western's School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' Living Well website provides tips for thriving at grad school and other helpful information (http://grad.uwo.ca/current_students/living_well/index.html). Western provides several on-campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the

year. Also, we encourage you to check out the Faculty of Music web page (<http://www.music.uwo.ca/>), and our own McIntosh Gallery (<http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>).

Disputing a Grade

Students who wish to dispute an assignment, exam, or course grade must write a one-page explanation justifying why their work should be re-evaluated. Work will not be re-evaluated on the basis that students were sick or feeling stressed when completing the assignment. Please be advised that a student's mark may go up or down upon re-evaluation.

Extraordinary Circumstances

The content and/or evaluation of this course is subject to change in the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's or instructor's control.

Course Schedule

Please note: This schedule is subject to change over the course of the term in order to meet the needs of the class. Any changes will be announced through our Brightspace course website.