

A-011B
Learning from Practice: Evaluation and Improvement Science
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Spring 2015

Instructor

Candice Bocala, Ed.D.
Gutman 431

Class Meeting Times

Six-week module, 2 credits

Teaching Fellow

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Course Description

All programs and organizations need information about what is working or not working in order to improve. But how do individuals and organizations learn to engage in continuous improvement, where improvement happens with frequency and depth across the whole system? This course is designed to introduce students to key concepts in improvement science and formative evaluation as a way to support learning from real-life attempts at improvement. It is meant for students who will be working or leading in educational settings where they will be asked to collect and use information to build organizational capacity and affect change, as well as for students interested in an introduction to the practice of evaluation. Students will acquire a practical set of skills, such as understanding and diagramming logic models, communicating with key stakeholders, and generating relevant evaluation questions and at least one way to collect related data. Students will practice these skills in an authentic setting by working closely with a real program and practitioners to document their program theories and develop a proposal for a formative program evaluation.

Students will reflect on their own understanding of the following essential questions:

- *How can program theory be used in evaluation and improvement?*
- *What are the relationships among practitioners, researchers, and evaluators in various models of continuous improvement?*
- *How can improvement science and evaluation practices be used to build organizational capacity?*

Course Requirements

Students will be evaluated based on the following elements:

| | |
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| Attendance and class participation: | 25% |
| Progress on components of evaluation proposal: | 25% |
| Completed evaluation proposal: | 25% |
| Final reflective memo: | 25% |
| Total | 100% |

Attendance and class participation: Due to the short duration of the module, students are expected to attend each class session. Class participation will be assessed based on students'

preparation of the readings, contributions to class dialogue, and adherence to class norms (to be set on the first day of class). If students know they will be absent for any reason, they must inform the instructor in advance, and in the cases where students are absent due to unforeseen emergency, they must still contact the instructor to explain their absence as soon as possible. The requirements for missing class include watching the recorded class video and submitting any components of the evaluation proposal (e.g., data collection protocols) that had been due in class via email.

Progress on components of the evaluation proposal: A key component of this course is working with and learning from practitioners. Over the six weeks, students will be drafting the first part of a formative evaluation proposal with input from practitioners. **Several programs and organizations have expressed interest in working with A-011B students, and the current list of partner organizations will be listed on the course iSite.** With student input, the instructor will match students with one of these organizations for the purposes of the course, or students can find an alternative organization. Students who are already placed in a practicum site are encouraged to develop the proposal for their practicum.

Students will be asked to submit elements of their evaluation proposal for use and discussion during class: for example, results from discussions with key program stakeholders, documentation of the program, etc. These assignments will be marked “completed” or “incomplete.”

Completed evaluation proposal: Students will receive feedback on the components of their evaluation proposal in class, and they will have the opportunity to revise before the final submission. The completed evaluation proposal (10-12 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font) will contain the following components:

1. Brief description of the program, intervention, or organization;
2. Diagram of program theory or logic model;
3. List of key stakeholders and their interests in this evaluation;
4. Evaluation questions;
5. Description of the approach to evaluation proposed (e.g., developmental evaluation) and rationale; and
6. Proposed list of data collection methods or evidence to be gathered (e.g., interviews, surveys) and brief description of each.

(*Note:* a more complete assignment description will be handed out in class.)

Students are expected to submit their assignments on time; however, late submissions will be considered only if the student and instructor agree to an extension in writing before the due date. Assignments submitted late without approval for an extension will be marked down a half letter grade (e.g., from A to A-); students submitting after the grading deadline for the course must take an “Incomplete” and contact the instructor to arrange for making up the assignment.

Final reflective memo: Together with their completed evaluation proposals, students will submit a reflective memo (5 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font) that addresses the following essential question: *How can improvement science and evaluation practices be used to build organizational capacity?* In this memo, students should reflect on their experiences with the course content and readings, as well as their interactions with the program and practitioners as they drafted their evaluation proposals.

The complete formative evaluation proposal and the final reflective memo are due **midnight on Friday, March 13, 2015** to the Dropbox on the course iSite.

A note on rubrics: Students will receive rubrics for the completed evaluation proposal and the final reflective memo in class before the final due date, and they will be asked to self-assess based on the rubric and turn in a copy together with their final products. The instructor will also provide an assessment against the rubric, together with comments and a final grade.

Academic Integrity

Although students will be discussing their ideas and drafts frequently in class, students are expected to be familiar with and abide by the Harvard Graduate School of Education's rules regarding academic integrity. Students are expected to properly credit ideas that they received from peers or outside sources. Information about this policy is in the student handbook and can be obtained from the Office of Student Affairs and/or the Office of Academic Services. If you have any questions regarding citations or plagiarism, please ask the instructor. The HGSE policy on academic integrity appears below.

“All work submitted to meet course requirements is expected to be the student’s own. In the preparation of all papers and other written work submitted to meet course requirements and dissertations, a student must be careful to distinguish between ideas that are his or her own and those that have been derived from other sources. Information and opinions drawn from all sources are to be attributed specifically to these sources. It is the student’s responsibility to learn and use the proper forms of citation. Quotations must be properly placed within quotation marks and must be fully cited. All paraphrased material must also be fully cited. In all cases where ideas or material presented are derived from a student’s reading and research, the source used must be indicated. Students who submit work either not their own or without clear attribution to the original source, for whatever reason, face sanctions up to and including dismissal and expulsion.”

Students are also encouraged to make use of the writing assistance available through the [Gutman Library Academic Writing Center](#).

Key for Accessing Readings

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| (iPa©) | Reading posted on course iSite under the iPa© tab |
| (Harvard Library) | Log into the Harvard system and put the journal information into Citation Linker or the Journal search page |
| (web link) | Reading can be found to download from the website provided |

Course Content

Week 1: Introduction to Improvement Science

Guiding questions:

- *What is evaluative inquiry and how might it be used for improvement?*
- *What are the relationships among information, feedback, action, and learning in an improvement process?*

Readings:

Langley, G.J., Moen, R.D., Nolan, K.M., Nolan, T.W., Norman, C.L., & Provost, L. P. (2009). *The improvement guide: A practical approach to enhancing organizational performance*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. **(iPa©)**

- Chapter 4, The Science of Improvement, pp. 75-88
- Chapter 5, Using the Model for Improvement, p. 89-106

Preskill, H., & Torres, R. T. (1999). Chapter 1: Evaluative inquiry and organizational change. *Evaluative Inquiry for Learning in Organizations*. (p. 1–16). **(iPa©)**

[Volkov, B. B. \(2011\). Beyond being an evaluator: The multiplicity of roles of the internal evaluator. In B. B. Volkov & M. E. Baron \(Eds.\), *Internal evaluation in the 21st century. New Directions for Evaluation, 132*, 25–42. **\(Harvard Library\)**](#)

Task due in Week 2: Determine which organization or group you will partner with for the course project, read about their program, and provide a description (if needed) on the course iSite.

Week 2: Theory-Based Evaluation & Logic Models

Guiding questions:

- *How do evaluators develop and use program theory in evaluation practice?*
- *What are the advantages and limitations to expecting fidelity of implementation?*

Readings:

Patton, M. Q. (2012). Chapter 4: Situation analysis conducted jointly with primary intended users. In *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (pp. 87–110). **(iPa©)**

W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2004). *Logic model development guide*. Retrieved from: <http://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resource/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide>**(web link)**

*** Note:** *You will need to register with the website to download your copy.*

Weiss, C. H. (1995). Nothing as practical as good theory: Exploring theory-based evaluation for comprehensive community initiatives for children and families. In J. P. Connell, A. C. Kubisch, L. B. Schorr, & C. H. Weiss (Eds.), *New approaches to evaluating community initiatives: Concepts, methods and contexts* (pp. 65-92). Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute. **(iPa©)**

[Harn, B., Parisi, D., & Stoolmiller, M. \(2013\). Balancing fidelity with flexibility and fit: What do we really know about fidelity of implementation in schools? *Council for Exceptional Children*, 79\(2\), 191-193. \(Harvard Library\)](#)

Task due in Week 3: Talk to the practitioners at your program site to get a sense of:

- Program description
- Key stakeholders
- Focus for the evaluation plan

Week 3: Utilization-Focused & Developmental Evaluation

Guiding questions:

- *How might organizations use utilization-focused evaluation or developmental evaluation, and how does one determine which approach is most useful?*
- *What is the role of data and evidence in evaluation practice?*

Readings:

Patton, M. Q. (2012). Chapter 5: Identify and prioritize primary intended users by determining priority purposes. In *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (pp. 113–137). (iPa©)

Gamble, J.A.A. (2008). *A developmental evaluation primer*. Montreal, Quebec: The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. Retrieved from: <http://www.mcconnellfoundation.ca/en/resources/publication/a-developmental-evaluation-primer> (web link)

Preskill, H., & Torres, R. T. (1999). Chapter 5: Carrying out the inquiry. In *Evaluative Inquiry for Learning in Organizations*. (p. 97–129). (iPa©)

Task due in Week 4: Continue conversations with stakeholders at your partner organization and refine your program description, list of stakeholders, and program theory or logic model.

Week 4: Participatory & Empowerment Evaluation

Guiding questions:

- *What are the key assumptions about stakeholder involvement in participatory evaluation and empowerment evaluation?*
- *How might evaluators think about the role of stakeholders, culture, and context during the process of improvement?*

Readings:

[Askew, K., Beverly, M., & Jay, M. L. \(2012\). Aligning collaborative and culturally responsive evaluation approaches. *Evaluation And Program Planning*, 35\(4\), 552-557. \(Harvard Library\)](#)

[Fetterman, D.M. \(2002\). Empowerment evaluation: Building communities of practice and a](#)

[culture of learning. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30\(1\), 89-102. \(Harvard Library\)](#)

[Sabo, K. \(2003\). A Vygotskian perspective on youth participatory evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 98, 13–24. \(Harvard Library\)](#)

Task due in Week 5: Continue any conversations with the partner organization, as necessary. Draft a description of the focus for evaluation, possible evaluation questions, and potential data collection ideas.

Week 5: Evaluation Capacity Building and Supporting Continuous Improvement

Guiding questions:

- *How can practitioners build greater capacity for using and understanding evaluation findings and program feedback more generally?*
- *How do organizations overcome barriers to using evaluative inquiry for continuous improvement?*

Required:

[Preskill, H., & Torres, R.T. \(2000\). The learning dimension of evaluation use. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 88, 25-37. \(Harvard Library\)](#)

[Henry, G. T., & Mark, M. M. \(2003\). Beyond use: Understanding evaluation's influence on attitudes and actions. *American Journal Of Evaluation*, 24\(3\), 293-314. \(Harvard Library\)](#)

[Corn, J. O., Byrom, E., Knestis, K., Matzen, N., & Thrift, B. \(2012\). Lessons learned about collaborative evaluation using the Capacity for Applying Project Evaluation \(CAPE\) Framework with school and district leaders. *Evaluation And Program Planning*, 35\(4\), 535-542. \(Harvard Library\)](#)

Task due in Week 6: Draft a rationale for which evaluation approach best fits the needs of your program or organization (e.g., theory-based, developmental, empowerment, etc.), suggestions for incorporating the evaluation activities into their future work, and suggestions for how the program could use the information gathered from the proposed evaluation. Next week, **bring your draft materials** to engage in a protocol to get feedback on your evaluation proposal thus far.

Week 6: Other Models of Improvement

Guiding questions:

- *What new innovations and models are changing the way we think about improvement science, research, and evaluation?*
- *What can be done to sustain evaluative inquiry and improvement in education?*

Required:

Bryk A. S., Gomez L. M., & Grunow A. (2010). *Getting ideas into action: Building networked improvement communities in education*. Stanford, CA: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Retrieved from

<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/resources/publications/getting-ideas-action-building-networked-improvement-communities-education/> (**web link**)

Park, S., Hironaka, S., Carver, P., & Nordstrum, L. (2013) *Continuous Improvement in Education*. Stanford, CA: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Retrieved from <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/resources/publications/continuous-improvement-education/> (**web link**)

- Everyone reads Executive Summary, pp. 3-10 and pp. 22-27. You will be assigned to read one of the following cases before class:
- Case 1: School District of Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, pp. 11-14
- Case 2: Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland, pp. 14-17
- Case 3: Strive Partnership Cincinnati / Northern Kentucky, pp. 18-21

Task due before final project deadline: Have a conversation with the practitioners at your site about how they might use the evaluation plan you create. Get feedback from your partner organization on any materials drafted. You will be describing and reflecting on this conversation in your final memo for A-011B.