Course Description

This course will cover the theory and practice of evaluation as a method of assessing social work practice and strengthening clients, communities, and the social programs that serve them. It will also address the evaluation of promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation services. Students will learn to assess and apply evaluation methods from various perspectives, including scientific, ethical, multicultural, and social justice perspectives.

Course Content

This course will focus on the direct application of the analytical skills associated with developing and implementing evaluation designs that are appropriate for social work practice. Students will examine the theoretical foundations of the evaluation of social work practice with particular attention to populations at risk, including people of color, women, and gay and lesbian groups. Students will be introduced to models of evaluation derived from social science and social work theory and research. They will learn to apply these models as they develop skills in critically assessing evaluation methods and their fit within their social context.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and choose the type of evaluation that is appropriate to the context of the situation and the questions that need to be addressed.
2. Choose the design and methodology appropriate to conduct a needs assessment.
3. Identify the process of program specification in the evaluation process.
4. Plan and critique the measurement, design, sampling, and analytic issues in process and outcome evaluations.
5. Describe ways in which to monitor one’s own practice in social work.
6. Analyze issues of implementation and utilization in program evaluation.
7. Plan an evaluation of a social intervention.
8. Identify the ethical issues present in the performance of program evaluations.
9. Apply a collaborative, participatory, change-oriented process, in designing an evaluation.
10. Identify, assess and address ways in which gender, race, ethnicity, social class, age and other forms of social stratification and disenfranchisement influence evaluation processes and outcomes.

Course Design

The instructor will select required and recommended readings. In addition, the instructor will include a range of pedagogical methods, such as participatory discussions, written assignments, and experiential exercises related to course materials. Students will carry out appropriate evaluation tasks as assigned. Guest speakers may be invited to address special topics.

Relationship of the Course to Four Curricular Themes:

**Multiculturalism and Diversity:** Students will develop the capacity to identify ways in which gender, race, ethnicity, social class, age, and other forms of social stratification and disenfranchisement influence evaluation processes and outcomes. Because a collaborative, participatory process is critical to evaluation of social work interventions, attention to diversity is imperative for proper implementation of evaluation in social work contexts.

**Social Justice and Social Change:** Students will develop the capacity to analyze the impact and efficiency of services and policies as they relate to social change and social justice. They will learn to develop services and programs that could plausibly serve these functions. Participatory, collaborative, change-oriented evaluation processes can promote the achievement of social justice and change and therefore are emphasized in the class. Also important are an examination of the role of power in evaluation, and the development of knowledge, skills, and capacities that evaluation participants can mobilize to shift imbalances of power and resources.

**Promotion and Prevention:** Students will develop the capacity to develop and evaluate prevention and promotion programs designed to reduce risk of onset of problems and promote healthy development.

**Social Science:** Students will strengthen their capacity to use social science literature, both research-based and theoretical, to develop appropriate interventions and evaluations that are feasible, relevant, and scientifically sound.
Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values:

Ethical standards of social work practice (the NASW Code of Ethics) and evaluation practice (The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Program Evaluation Standards) will be used to review issues commonly confronted in evaluation.

Course Assignments and Expectations

Students are expected to complete all assigned reading assignments prior to the appropriate class and to use them as the basis for their written assignments and informed participation in class discussions. Students will submit work on schedule. Failure to meet these expectations may result in reduction in grades.

It is further expected that students will attend all classes unless legitimate and/or special reasons exist for absences or tardiness. Legitimate absences include those due to health problems that can be documented, unanticipated family emergencies, and observance of religious holy days. Any such absences or tardiness should be discussed directly with the course instructor, and students must make arrangements to complete class work that is missed. Students with more than two unexcused absences may risk failure.

Course expectations include completion of six assignments that will be weighted in the following manner along with class participation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Theory Memo</td>
<td>9/28/01</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement Critique</td>
<td>10/12/01</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Plan</td>
<td>10/26/01</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Observation</td>
<td>11/09/01</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Application</td>
<td>11/16/01</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>12/14/01</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although each assignment is equally weighted, each builds on the assignment that precedes it, so it is important for students to do well on the early assignments. Students are encouraged to contact me if they wish to discuss their ideas prior to submission or to discuss issues after their papers are returned to them.

All assignments will be discussed in detail in class prior to their due date. Assignments are due at the beginning of the designated class section — late papers will be accepted only at my discretion. All assignments must be typed, double spaced, and use appropriate referencing and bibliographic formats.

Each assignment should be written in the form of a memo to someone like your field instructor and should be no more than five pages in length. Obviously, you will need to be succinct. I also expect to see clear evidence that you have read the assigned materials.
Program Theory: Students will work with their field instructor to select an intervention within their agency for evaluation; if this is not possible please speak with me. Students will write a memo to their field instructor detailing how the intervention works; in Weiss terminology you will describe the program theory. Your memo should demonstrate that you have read some relevant literature, talked with people within the agency, and reviewed the program’s activities and/or data. Be sure to explicitly state what the intervention hopes to achieve and how this change is meant to occur. Provide some evidence that the intervention is needed. I assume that the reader of your memo will be familiar with what you are describing, so your primary goal in the memo is to make sure they agree with your understanding of the intervention. If appropriate, include any concerns you have about whether the intervention works the way it is intended to work.

Measurement Critique: Students will be asked to identify an instrument that they might use in the evaluation of the program described in the first assignment. They will then be asked to discuss the theory base used in the development of the instrument; the populations/samples upon whom the instrument was developed and/or standardized; the steps taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the measure; and the instrument’s directness, reactivity, sensitivity to change and ease of administration and completion.

Evaluation Plan: Students will be asked to describe an evaluation plan that they might use in the evaluation of the intervention described in the first assignment. Your memo should include what question(s) you will try to answer, a description of the research design and methods which will be used, some proposed measurements, and a sampling procedure (see page 72 of the Weiss text as well as that entire chapter). The memo should discuss the strengths and limitations of your proposal in each of these areas.

Intervention Observation: Students will observe the intervention they described in their first and third assignments and take copious notes. Students will then write a memo describing whether their observations were consistent with the program’s theory. Students should attach their notes to the back of their memo.

Article Application: Students will identify a relevant research article, read the article and apply what you learned to your agency’s practice. You should answer a series of questions: is there a clear program theory; what research design and methods were used in the study and were they appropriate for answering the research question posed; what are the strengths and weaknesses of the study; which, potential weaknesses were actually present in the study and what might the author(s) have done to improve the study. Most importantly, you should discuss the relevance of the evaluation or program to an intervention in your agency. Please attach a copy of the article to your memo. You will present your article and critique to the class November 16, 2001. Your presentation will not be graded, but will be part of your class participation grade.

Final Paper: Building upon and augmenting the work already done during the semester, and utilizing readings and classroom activities, students will be asked to present a final evaluation proposal. It will incorporate information from the program theory, measurement, evaluation plan and observation papers already completed. In addition, students will be asked to do a number of additional tasks, including an articulation of the major research questions, the assumptions of the
proposed study, the probable data collection strategy, as well as an analytic plan. Students should discuss the limitations of their proposed study, as well as to report on how they propose to work with program staff at each stage of the evaluation process. *You will present your final evaluation plan to the class December 7, 2001.* You should meet with me prior to December 7 to discuss your presentation. Your presentation will not be graded, but will be part of your class participation grade.

**Grading Criteria**

Each assignment should be written in the form of a memo to a very busy person and should be no more than five pages long. Each memo is worth up to 15 points as follows: 5 points for clear evidence of the use of course content, 5 points for addressing all of the elements in the assignments as they are described above, and 5 points for clarity of writing and presentation. Late assignments accepted by the instructor will be graded down one point for every day past the due date.

Final grades will be determined by converting your points into the 9.0 grading scale described in your UM SSW Student Guide. Issues of student attendance and tardiness will, if necessary, be factored into this score after this calculation has been completed.

**REQUIRED TEXTS/MATERIALS**


Available from Shaman Drum Bookshop, 313 South State Street, 662-7407. Their price is $36.60 plus tax. You may be able to find a used copy on the web.

Given that, at least initially, I thought this would be a small class, I decided not to order a course pack. I will ask you to print some articles off the web and some articles will be distributed in class. For the article application you will find and acquire your own copy of the article.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE**

**Session 1 – September 7, 2001**

*Introduction to the course including strengths, weaknesses, and expectations. Students will complete a needs assessment and an in-class exercise on developing program theory.*
Session 2 -- September 14, 2001

Why Evaluate?

Readings

Weiss Text, Chapters 1 and 2.


Sessions 3 and 4 – September 21 and September 28, 2001

Program Theory Memo due 9/28/01

Theory-based Evaluation and Needs Assessment

Readings

Weiss Text, Chapters 3, 4, and 5.


Examples of needs assessments will be identified based on class interests. I will distribute these articles to the class or explain how you can print them from the web. You will be expected to read these articles and be prepared to discuss them in class.

Session 5– October 5, 2001

Measurement

Readings

Weiss Text, Chapter 6.

Examples of measurement articles will be identified based on class interests. I will distribute these articles to the class or explain how you can print them from the web. You will be expected to read these articles and be prepared to discuss them in class.
Session 6 -- October 12, 2001
*Measurement Critique Memo due 10/12/01*

*Data Collection*

**Readings**

Weiss Text, Chapter 7.


Session 7 — October 19, 2001

*Design*

**Readings**

Weiss Text, Chapters 8 and 9.

Examples of research design articles will be identified based on class interests. I will distribute these articles to the class or explain how you can print them from the web. You will be expected to read these articles and be prepared to discuss them in class.

Session 8 - October 26, 2001
*Evaluation Plan Memo due 10/26/01*

*Efficiency Analysis*

**Readings**

Weiss Text, Chapter 10.

Examples of benefit-cost articles will be identified based on class interests. I will distribute these articles to the class or explain how you can print them from the web. You will be expected to read these articles and be prepared to discuss them in class.

Session 9 – November 2, 2001

*Qualitative Methods*

**Readings**

Weiss Text, Chapter 11.
Examples of qualitative articles will be identified based on class interests. I will distribute these articles to the class or explain how you can print them from the web. You will be expected to read these articles and be prepared to discuss them in class.

Session 10 – November 9, 2001
*Intervention Observation Memo due 11/09/01*

Analysis and Dissemination

Readings

Weiss Text, Chapters 12 and 13.


Session 11 – November 16, 2001
*Article Application Memo due 11/16/01*

Article Critique

Readings

You will select an article to critique with the advice of the instructor. Please bring the article to class.

Session 12 — November 30, 2001

*Evaluation Ethics and Review of Course Objectives and Curricular Themes*

Readings

Weiss Text, Chapter 14.


November 23, 2001- No Class due to Thanksgiving recess

Session 13 - December 7, 2001

*Student Presentations of Final Projects*

*December 14 — Final Paper Due*