Course Overview

What makes for a "successful" or “cost-effective” policy or program? To what extent are Honolulu’s community development plans resulting in more “livable” communities? How effective is mediation in dealing with complex land use and environmental disputes? To what extent do community-based reef management programs conserve reef resources over time? To answer these questions is to engage in evaluation, literally to assess the value or worth of public programs or policies.

Evaluation is a term that describes many types of judgment. Teachers evaluate students, consumers evaluate alternative auto purchases, managers evaluate employees, transportation planners evaluate alternative routes and types of rail systems for the Honolulu rapid transit program, foundations evaluate the projects they fund and agencies hire people to assess programs and projects. In each case, particular actions or alternatives are being assessed in terms of some explicit or implicit standards of worth or value.

Evaluation, as the term is used in this course, refers to a variety of research strategies used to provide information to make judgments about the effectiveness of public and private policies and programs. Because such judgments inform decisions about whether to continue (or expand or terminate or modify) a program, evaluative judgments frequently have extremely important implications for public policy.

Evalative research is both craft and art. There is no single "best" approach to evaluation. Rather, the successful evaluator is one who has a variety of methods and strategies that can be tailored to fit the needs and expectations of particular program officials and program clients. Any particular evalative strategy involves reconciling the demands for analytical rigor with those of cost, time and relevance to decision-makers and program officials.
This course is intended primarily as an introduction to the design and conduct of evaluative research. Lectures, discussions and exercises will focus on basic concepts and methods of evaluation. Course participants will be exposed to a variety of approaches to evaluation and will be expected to design and implement evaluative studies on their own. The political and organizational contexts in which evaluative studies are conducted and the strategies for enhancing the understanding and use of evaluative findings by policy makers will also be emphasized.

**Student Learning Objectives:**

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Understand the variety of purposes for which evaluations are conducted and how these purposes shape the design, implementation, interpretation and use of evaluation findings;
- Describe how to work with evaluation consumers to construct effective evaluative questions;
- Identify, gather and interpret persuasive forms of evidence, including both quantitative and qualitative data, to answer evaluative questions;
- Develop and apply appropriate experimental, quasi-experimental and non-experimental research designs for assessing the degree to which changes in key indicators of program change are associated with program activities;
- Design and execute all aspects of a research design for evaluating a plan, project or program.

**Course Requirements**

Student performance will be evaluated in terms of:

1. Weekly reflections on the topic and readings. Each student will prepare a 1-2 page summary for **eight** of the weekly sessions on the key conceptual themes and skills for that week—and be prepared to offer their reflections in class (about 25%). Papers are due at the beginning of each class.

2. Mid-term (25%).

3. Evaluative research design. Each student is expected to prepare a detailed design for an evaluation and to conduct a portion of the evaluation. The actual amount to be done is negotiable. The design should be explicit with regard to evaluative criteria, methodological issues and choice of research design. The report should be organized according to a prescribed format (50%).
Course Readings

Texts:


Electronic versions of articles will be provided.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction [August 23]

Week 2: Overview [August 30]

Weiss, Chapters 1-2.


Week 3: Holiday [Labor Day]

Week 4: Program Logic and Evaluation [September 13]

Weiss, Chapter 3.


Week 5: Evaluative Questions and Indicators [September 20]
Weiss, Chapters 4-6.


**Week 6:** *An Overview of Research Designs* [September 27]

Weiss, Chapters 7-8.


**Week 7:** *To be Announced* [October 4]

**Week 8** *Research Designs II* [October 11]

Weiss, Chapters 9-10.


**Week 9:** *Case Studies* [October 18]


**Week 10:** *Mid-term quiz* [October 25]

**Week 11:** *Introduction to Qualitative Methods* [November 1]

Weiss, Chapter 11.


**Week 12:** Qualitative Research: Producing Explanations [November 8]


**Week 13:** Evaluation Using Appreciative Inquiry and Culturally Competent Evaluation [November 15]


**Week 14:** Practical and Ethical Issues in Doing Evaluations [November 22]
Weiss, Chapters 12-14.


Week 15: Student Presentation of Research Designs [November 29]

Week 16: Student Presentations of Research Designs [December 6]

***Available on reserve in the DURP Document Center