

PPHA 34820
Evaluating Interventions and Public Policies: Tools and Applications
Fall 2025

Prof.: Alicia Menendez
menendez@uchicago.edu

TA: TBA

Tuesdays and Thursdays 5:00 -6:20 pm
Keller 0007

Course Description:

This course focuses on the real-world application of evaluation methods in public policy, emphasizing how to design, implement, and use evaluations to improve programs and inform decision-making. The aim is to think critically and practically about why we evaluate and how to do it well.

Students will learn how to formulate evaluation questions, build or analyze a theory of change, and design evaluations using appropriate methods, from experimental to observational approaches. Understanding the mechanisms behind observed outcomes is crucial for formulating effective and sustainable policies. Therefore, the course will also explore how to integrate qualitative and quantitative data, assess implementation fidelity, and consider cost-efficiency or cost-effectiveness when possible. Ethical, political, and contextual challenges in evaluation will be addressed throughout. The course also introduces how to evaluate complex or system-level interventions, and issues related to scalability and sustainability.

Course activities are grounded in examples from low-, middle-, and high-income country settings, and students will work throughout the term on an applied project to design a full evaluation plan for a policy or program.

Learning Objectives

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

- Understand the purposes and types of evaluation used in public policy and program design.
- Formulate evaluation questions and develop or analyze theories of change.
- Design evaluations using appropriate approaches based on policy questions and context.
- Assess implementation fidelity and use evaluation to support learning and adaptation.
- Measure and analyze program costs, including cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
- Anticipate ethical, political, and contextual challenges in evaluation practice.
- Critically reflect on the scalability, sustainability, and use of evaluation findings in real-world decision-making.

Grading

Final grades are based on a series of group assignments that build progressively toward a complete evaluation proposal. These include short written components, a final proposal, an in-class presentation, and peer feedback. All assignments are due on the dates indicated below in the schedule, and before class. No late assignments will be received.

Class participation reflects students' engagement throughout the course. Students are expected to attend class regularly, contribute thoughtfully to discussions, and engage actively during in-class activities. Participation will be assessed based on preparation, quality of contributions, and collaboration.

The final proposal is weighted most heavily and should reflect the cumulative learning from earlier assignments.

Assignments	45%
Final Proposal	30%
Proposal Presentation	10%
Peer Review	5%
Participation	10%

Attendance. Regular in-person class attendance is required as a condition for receiving course credit. Starting on week 2 we will take attendance. There will be times when a student is unable to attend a class meeting in person due to an illness or other personal emergency. In these cases, the student should inform the course instructor and/or head TA of their absence. Students whose combined absences total two weeks' worth of class time or more should consult with the Harris Dean of Students. In most cases, it will be necessary for the student to withdraw from the course or request an incomplete ("I" grade).

Tentative Course Outline

Class	Date	Topic	Assignment
1	9/30	Introduction Evaluating Interventions and Public Policies & Why to Evaluate	
2	10/2	Types of Evaluation: What Are We Trying to Learn, and How?	
3	10/7	Understanding Context & Readiness: Needs Assessment, Formative Research, and Developmental Evaluation	
4	10/9	Framing Questions and Building a Theory of Change	
5	10/14	Evaluation Types During and After Implementation Monitoring, Process, Impact & Beyond	1
6	10/16	Impact Evaluation Designs. Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Approaches	
7	10/21	Impact Evaluation Designs. Non-compliance, attrition, spillovers and limitations	2
8	10/23	Mixed Methods I. When, Why and How to Combine Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches	
9	10/28	Mixed Methods II. Implementation Matters. Learning, Adapting, and Collaborating through Evaluation	3
10	10/30	Quantitative & Qualitative Data Collection Tools and Sampling	
11	11/4	Innovations in Evaluation — Big Data, Tech, and New Frontiers	
12	11/6	Ethics, Informed Consent & Challenges in Fieldwork	4
13	11/11	Recording and Reporting Costs for Evaluations	
14	11/13	Analyzing Costs: Cost-Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness & Benefit	5
15	11/18	Understanding Complexity in Evaluation: Concepts, Challenges, and Entry Points	

Class	Date	Topic	Assignment
16	11/20	From Intervention to Policy — Scaling, Sustainability, and Evidence Uptake	6
Thanksgiving Week – NO CLASSES			
17	12/2	Student Presentations	7&8
18	12/4	Student Presentations	7&8

Assignments

All assignments are **group-based** and designed to help students gradually build a robust, coherent evaluation plan. Each deliverable contributes to the final grade and will receive targeted feedback to guide further development.

#	Assignment	Short Description	Due	Weight
1	Policy/Program Summary & Evaluation Questions	Identify the policy or program to evaluate. Describe its context, rationale, and objectives. Formulate 2–3 clear evaluation questions. <i>(2 pages max.)</i>	Class 5	10%
2	Theory of Change	Create a Theory of Change diagram that outlines key inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and assumptions. <i>(1 page + diagram)</i>	Class 7	10%
3	Evaluation Type	Justify the choice of evaluation type (impact, process, mixed, etc.) in a brief narrative. <i>(2 pages max.)</i>	Class 9	10%
4	Data & Methods Plan	Describe the proposed evaluation approach, including quantitative and/or qualitative methods, sample design, timing, and data sources. <i>(2 pages max.)</i>	Class 12	10%
5	Cost & Ethics	Briefly explain what type of cost analyses will be conducted if any. Identify key ethical considerations (e.g., consent, risks) and how you'd address them. <i>(2 pages max.)</i>	Class 14	5%
6	Final Proposal	Submit the full written proposal <i>(10 pages max. not including references)</i>	Class 16	30%
7	Proposal Presentation	Short proposal presentation	Class 17&18	10%
8	Peer Review	Review and give feedback on another group's work after the presentation	Class 17&18	5%

Readings and Resources

All readings and resources will be available on the Canvas course website.

Class 1. Tuesday, September 30th. Introduction. Evaluating Interventions and Public Policies. Why Evaluate?

American Evaluation Association. What is Evaluation?

Petrosino, A., Turpin-Petrosino, C., Hollis-Peel, M.E., Lavenberg, J.G. (2013) 'Scared Straight' and other juvenile awareness programs for preventing juvenile delinquency. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2013, Issue 4. Art. No.: CD002796. DOI:10.1002/14651858.CD002796.pub2

Class 2. Thursday, October 2nd. Types of Evaluation: What Are We Trying to Learn, and How?

Class 3. Tuesday, October 7th. Understanding Context & Readiness: Needs Assessment, Formative Research, and Developmental Evaluation

Islam, R., Bredikhina, O. A., Irfan, M. S., Jannat, K. T., & Jones, S. (2022). Transportation Needs Assessment for Rural Communities: A Case of Pickens County, Alabama. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2210.07079*.

Morgan, C. et al. (2019) Collaborative community checklists for immunisation: a feasibility and acceptability study in rural Myanmar. Formative Evaluation Report. 3IE International Initiative for Impact Evaluation. <https://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/FE-TW10.1117-Community-checklists-immunisation-Myanmar-web.pdf>

Class 4. Thursday October 9th. Framing Questions and Building a Theory of Change

Rogers, P. (2014). Theory of Change, Methodological Briefs: Impact Evaluation 2, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.

White, H. (2009) Theory-Based Impact Evaluation: Principles and Practice. International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, 3ie. WP 3.

Class 5. Tuesday October 14th. Evaluation Types During and After Implementation Monitoring, Process, Impact & Beyond

Sclar, G. et al., (2022) "Mixed Methods Process Evaluation of a Sanitation Behavior Change Intervention in Rural Odisha, India," *Global Implementation Research and Applications* 2:67–84 <link.springer.comlink.springer.com>.

*Arapovic-Johansson, B., Jensen, I., Wåhlin, C., Björklund, C., & Kwak, L. (2020) Process Evaluation of a Participative Organizational Intervention as a Stress Preventive Intervention for Employees in Swedish Primary Health Care. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(19), 7285. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17197285>

Downes A, Novicki E, Howard J. (2019) Using the Contribution Analysis Approach to Evaluate Science Impact: A Case Study of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. *Am J Eval*. 2019 Jun;40(2):177-189. doi: 10.1177/1098214018767046. Epub 2018 Apr 29. PMID: 30518992; PMCID: PMC6275099.

Class 6. Thursday October 16th. Impact Evaluation Designs. Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Approaches

Finkelstein, A., Taubman S., Wright B., Bernstein M., Gruber J., Newhouse J.P., Allen H., Baicker K., Oregon Health Study Group (2012) The Oregon Health Insurance Experiment: Evidence from the First Year. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Volume 127, Issue 3, August 2012, Pages 1057–1106, <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjs020>

*Haushofer, J. and J. Shapiro (2016), The Short-term Impact of Unconditional Cash Transfers to the Poor: Experimental Evidence from Kenya, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Volume 131, Issue 4, November 2016, Pages 1973–2042, <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjw025> (RCT with multiple variations)

Mendola, M. and F. Simtowe (2015) The Welfare Impact of Land Redistribution: Evidence from a Quasi-Experimental Initiative in Malawi. *World Development* 72, 53–69.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.02.010>

Class 7. Tuesday, October 21st. Impact Evaluation Designs. Non-compliance, attrition, spillovers. Limitations

Deaton, A. and N. Cartwright (2016), “Understanding and misunderstanding randomized controlled trials”, NBER Working Paper No. 22595. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w22595>

Class 8. Thursday, October 23rd. Mixed Methods I. Why and How to Combine Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

Menendez, A., U. Hoadley, U., and Soloyeva, A. (2025) Understanding Improvements in Reading Performance in Liberia: The Centrality of Text. (under review)

*Angrist, N. and Meager, R. (2023) Implementation Matters: Generalizing Treatment Effects in Education What Works Hub for Global Education Working Paper 054.
<https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-12/BSG-WP-2023-054%20Implementation%20Matters%20v3.pdf>

Class 9. Tuesday, October 28th. Mixed Methods II. Implementation Matters. Learning, Adapting, and Collaborating through Evaluation

NORC (2019) Impact Evaluation Feasibility Assessment of the Land for Prosperity (LfP) Activity: Final Report. Communications, Evidence and Learning (CEL) Project. Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development.

Class 10. Thursday, October 30th. Quantitative & Qualitative Data Collection Tools and Sampling

US Census Bureau Community Household Survey <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/methodology/questionnaires/2025/quest25.pdf>

EGRA Liberia Student Early Grade Reading Assessment - Read Liberia Impact Evaluation.

*Bettinger, E., O. Gurantz, L. Kawano, B. Sacerdote, and M. Stevens. 2019. "The Long-Run Impacts of Financial Aid: Evidence from California's Cal Grant." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 11 (1): 64–94. (RDD + administrative data)

*Angrist, J., E. Bettinger, and M. Kremer. 2006. "Long-Term Educational Consequences of Secondary School Vouchers: Evidence from Administrative Records in Colombia." *American Economic Review* 96 (3): 847–862. DOI: 10.1257/aer.96.3.847 (RCT + administrative data)

Class 11. Tuesday, November 4th. Innovations in Evaluation. Big Data, Tech, and New Frontiers

Fiorio, L. (2025, May 19). How NORC Developed a More Accurate & Affordable Survey Sampling Method Using Satellite Imagery. Retrieved from <https://www.norc.org/research/library/accurate-affordable-survey-sampling-method-satellite-imagery.html>

Jayachandran, S., Biradavolu, M., & Cooper, J. (2023). Using machine learning and qualitative interviews to design a five-question survey module for women’s agency. *World Development*, 161, 106076.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106076> (Skim, focus on purpose, approach, findings and check summary at <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/blog/3-3-21/five-question-womens-agency-index-created-using-machine-learning-and-qualitative>)

Class 12. Thursday, November 6th. Ethics, Informed Consent & Challenges in Fieldwork

NORC. (2018) Waache Wasome Risk and Response Guide.

Class 13. Tuesday, November 11th. Recording and Reporting Costs for Evaluation

Menendez, A. (2025) Cost Recording Guide. Prepared for US Department of State, Program to End Modern Slavery, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. NORC at The University of Chicago. **(Under review, please do not circulate)**.

Class 14. Thursday, November 13th Analyzing Costs: Cost-Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness & Benefit

Walls, E., C. Tulloch, and C. Harris-Van Keuren. (2020). Cost Analysis Guidance for USAID-Funded Education Activities. Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development.

Class 15. Tuesday, November 18th. Understanding Complexity in Evaluation: Concepts, Challenges, and Entry Points

Class 16. Thursday, November 20th. From Intervention to Policy. Scaling, Sustainability, and Evidence Uptake

World Bank (2024) Community Driven Development in Indonesia,
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/indonesia/brief/community-driven-development-in-indonesia>

General Resources Available to Students

- [Harris Academic Support Programs and Handbook](#)
- [Student Wellness](#)
- [University Learning Resources](#)

Harris School and University of Chicago Policies

- [Harris School Policies](#)
- [University General Policies](#)
- [University Academic Polices](#)
- Policies on audio and video [recordings](#) and [deletion](#).