Course Description

Evidence-based programming and policy-making are now priorities for many non-profit organizations and public agencies, including organizations that work on energy, climate change, and natural resource management. At the heart of evidence-based decision-making are monitoring and evaluation systems, which focus on the prospective design of data collection procedures and evaluations to support decision-making. To generate datasets that are useful for decision-making, organizations often have to create plans to collect data in advance of implementing programs. Likewise, the ability to evaluate the impacts of programs depends in large part on the ways that programs are rolled out and the data collection systems that are in place, which requires advanced planning. This course provides an overview of the considerations and techniques involved in prospectively designing monitoring and evaluation systems within public and non-profit organizations to support decision-making and accountability. We will explore the advantages of advanced planning for monitoring and evaluation, as opposed to relying passively on available data.

Assignments

Participation: Your active participation is important for the success of this course. I expect that you will closely read all of the assigned articles and documents before coming to (virtual) class and that you will be prepared to engage in all discussions and activities.

Practicums: The course is organized into four units, each of which culminates with a practicum where you will be asked to practice the skills discussed in that unit. The detailed instructions for the practicums will be laid out in separate documents. For each practicum, you will be randomly assigned to groups of two individuals. We will spend the practicum sessions on active work, group Q&A, and lightning presentations. For each practicum, your group will turn in a written product. Short descriptions of each practicum are listed below.

- “Theory of Change” practicum: Pick a future-oriented program or strategy for an organization that is intended to have an impact on outcomes you care about. Sketch out and justify a detailed theory of change that links the input and activities of the organization to the targeted outcomes and impacts.
- “Measurement” practicum: Pick a future-oriented program or strategy for an organization that it intended to have an impact on outcomes you care about. Sketch out a detailed results framework for the program. Additionally, design a data collection instrument that will be used to measure the outcomes in your results framework.
- “Evaluation” practicum: Pick a program of interest that has yet to be implemented, but for which a full description or initial appraisal has been carefully documented. Design an
impact evaluation for this program that can be used to estimate the impacts of the program. The impact evaluation should address: (1) treatment; (2) randomization; (3) sample; (4) power; (5) contingencies; and (6) mechanisms.

- “Organizational Strategy” practicum: Design an organizational M&E strategy for an organization that you might like to work for. Identify the key questions that an M&E strategy could answer and discuss how you will utilize scarce resources for achieving the learning or accountability objectives of the organization.

### Student Evaluation

I want your focus in the course to be on learning and applying new skills. Therefore, we will use a method of student evaluation called **contract grading**. Contract grading is meant to both reduce the amount of stress/uncertainty surrounding grades and give students more agency in deciding which assignments they would like to complete. For more information regarding the theory/research behind contract grading, please see this [paper](#).

In practice, contract grading involves the following: First, the instructor presents bundles of assignments that correspond to discrete letter grades (see below). Second, students select the bundle of assignments that corresponds to the grade they would like to receive in the course. Third, students and the instructor will sign a contract noting this commitment (we will do this via a Google form). Fourth, students will complete each assignment within their contract to a satisfactory level prior to the end of the academic term.

An “A” contract consists of the following:
- Participation: no more than one unexcused absence, and active participation when present in class.
- Practicums: complete Theory of Change, Measurement, Evaluation, and Organizational Strategy practicums to a satisfactory level by the end of Week 10.

An “A-” contract consists of the following:
- Participation: no more than two unexcused absences, and active participation when present in class.
- Practicums: complete Theory of Change, Measurement, and Evaluation practicums to a satisfactory level by the end of Week 10.

A “B+” contract consists of the following:
- Participation: no more than three unexcused absences, and active participation when present in class.
- Practicums: complete Theory of Change and Measurement practicums to a satisfactory level by the end of Week 10.

A “B” contract consists of the following:
- Participation: no more than four unexcused absences, and active participation when present in class.
• Practicums: complete Theory of Change practicum to a satisfactory level by the end of Week 10.

A few important notes:

• Before the end of the term, each assignment will receive a grade of either Satisfactory (S) or Incomplete (I). Satisfactory grades will be awarded to assignments that are equivalent to or in excess of a B+ level (>89%). Incomplete grades will be awarded to assignments that fall below a B+ level (<89%). You will have the opportunity to revise any Incomplete assignment prior to the end of term, such that it receives a Satisfactory grade post-revision. Failure to revise Incomplete assignments by the end of term will result in a one-unit demotion of your chosen grading contract.
  ○ For example, imagine that you selected an A- contract that requires submitting assignments A, B, and C, and that you received a Satisfactory on assignments A and B but an Incomplete on assignment C. Revising assignment C so it meets the standards for Satisfactory would result in a final course grade of A-. Failing to revise assignment C would result in a final course grade of B+.

• There are no within-term deadlines for assignments in this course. All that is required is that you submit the assignments specified in your contract, completed to a Satisfactory level, by the end of Week 10. Failing to submit assignments completed to a Satisfactory level by the end of Week 10 will result in a one-unit demotion of your chosen grading contract.
  ○ It is in your best interest to complete and submit assignments once we have reviewed the requisite materials to complete them. This will allow you to have as much time as possible to make revisions to assignments that receive a grade of Incomplete.

Course Policies

Re-grades: I take student evaluation seriously and do not entertain requests to re-grade assignments unless I receive a formal, written request for a re-grade that compellingly documents a serious oversight on my part. A serious oversight on my part indicates that the entire assignment should receive further attention. Your score may go up or down if I decide that an assignment needs this kind of attention, so plan accordingly. That being said, I strongly encourage you to meet with me to discuss my feedback on your assignments.

Academic Honesty: I expect you to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty. This means only turning in work that is your own and properly citing all information and ideas that you draw from others. Any assignment that does not adhere to UCSB academic honesty guidelines will not receive credit and will be referred to campus judicial procedures. See: http://studentconduct.sa.ucsb.edu/academic-integrity

Course changes: It is possible that the order or content of the sessions will have to change. Pay attention to announcements and check back here often.
Reference Texts


Unit 1: Introduction

Session 1 (29-Mar) — Introduction & preliminaries


Session 2 (31-Mar) — Goals of M&E


Session 3 (5-Apr) — Theory of change


Session 4 (7-Apr) — Theory of change (practicum)

Examples of theories of change:

**Assignment:** Pick a future-oriented program or strategy for an organization that is intended to have an impact on outcomes you care about. Sketch out and justify a detailed theory of change that links the input and activities of the organization to the targeted outcomes and impacts.

### Unit 2: Measurement

**Session 5 (12-Apr) — Results framework & indicators**


**Example of indicator bank**


**Session 6 (14-Apr) — Interviews, surveys, and human subjects**


**Session 7 (19-Apr) - Sampling bias**


Session 8 (21-Apr) - Sampling techniques


Session 9 (26-Apr) — Measurement strategy (practicum)

Example results frameworks / measurement strategies
Green Climate Fund
CGIAR
Canada National Energy Board
Food and Agriculture Organization
California Water

Assignment: Pick a future-oriented program or strategy for an organization that it intended to have an impact on outcomes you care about. Sketch out a detailed results framework for the program. Additionally, design a data collection instrument that will be used to measure the outcomes in your results framework.

Template (Gates Foundation)

Unit 3: Impact Evaluation

Session 10 (28-Apr) — Causal inference and counterfactuals


Session 11 (3-May) — Randomized evaluations


Session 12 (5-May) — Design principles for randomized evaluations


Session 13 (10-May) - Power analysis


Session 14 (12-May) — Design challenges of randomized evaluations


Session 15 (17-May) — Mechanisms


Session 16 (19-May) — Quasi-experimental techniques


Session 17 (24-May) — Impact evaluation (practicum)

**Reading:** 3ie Impact Evaluation Database (read at least two impact evaluations of interest)

**Assignment:** Pick a program of interest that has yet to be implemented, but for which a full description or initial appraisal has been carefully documented. Design an impact evaluation for this program that can be used to estimate the impacts of the program. The impact evaluation should address: (1) treatment; (2) randomization; (3) sample; (4) power; (5) contingencies; and (6) mechanisms.

**Unit 4: Building Monitoring & Evaluation Systems**

Session 18 (26-May) — Formative, process and performance evaluations


USAID. (n.d.) Rapid Feedback MERL. Project Webpage.


Session 19 (31-May) — Developing organizational M&E strategies

Skim these strategies for real-world examples:


Session 20 (2-Jun) — Organizational M&E strategy (practicum)


**Assignment:** design an organizational M&E strategy for an organization that you might like to work for. Identify the key questions that an M&E strategy could answer and discuss how you will utilize scarce resources for achieving the learning or accountability objectives of the organization.

*Syllabus change log*