

COURSE SYLLABUS

Fall 2011

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM**

EDRS 631
Program Evaluation
Robinson 218B

Charles L. Thomas, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

Office phone 703-993-3137
Office location 2006 West Bldg
Office Hours Mon. & Tue., 2:00-3:45 P. M.
 Other times by appointment
Email address cthomas@gmu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

- A. Prerequisites:
None, but EDRS 590 or equivalent recommended.

- B. Catalog Description: EDRS 631 Program Evaluation (3:3:0). Introduces students to perspectives of existing and emerging issues, theories, and models of program evaluation.

- C. Course Description: This course introduces the practical, theoretical, and ethical foundations of program evaluation. Although the context for examining relevant concepts, principles, and skills will be education, they apply to most program settings (e.g., state and federal agencies, community health, nonprofits, etc.). Program evaluation will be examined as a profession as well as a field of empirical inquiry.

NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY:

Classroom instruction includes lectures, small group and whole class discussions, and field studies. Students will engage in mini-evaluation case studies to acquire practical knowledge of essential evaluation practices. When available, guest speakers will enrich the course by sharing their experiences in program evaluation and giving students insight into the world of the professional evaluator.

STUDENT OUTCOMES:

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

1. Understand the nature of program evaluation and how it differs from social science research;
2. Apply standards of good practice and ethics in planning and conducting program evaluations;
3. Distinguish among the major models and methods of conducting program evaluation;
4. Understand the professional standards of the program evaluation profession; and
5. Understand the cultural and political implications of program evaluation.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS:

A. Course content and process will reflect the five following guiding principles for professional evaluators developed by the American Evaluation Association:

1. Systematic Inquiry: Evaluators conduct systematic, databased inquiries about whatever is being evaluated.
2. Competence: Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.
3. Integrity/Honesty: Evaluators ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.
4. Respect for People: Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of the respondents, program participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they interact.
5. Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare: Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare.¹

B. Students also will examine in depth the Program Evaluation Standards developed by the Joint Committee on Standards (1994). A summary of the Program Standards are appended to this syllabus.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK:

Rossi, P.H., Lipsey, M., & Freeman, H. E. (2004). Evaluation. A systemic approach (7th Edition). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994). The program evaluation standards (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

REQUIRED READINGS:

Annie E. Casey Foundation. Real life lessons learned and resources in building capacity for advocacy and policy evaluation among KIDS Count grantees. Retrieved at:

¹ Students should download the full text for the AEA Guiding Principles at:
<http://www.eval.org/EvaluationDocuments/aeaprin6.html>

- http://www.innonet.org/resources/files/AEA2008_AECF_and_ORS_10_Lessons.pdf
- Center for Education Integrating Science, Mathematics and Computing. (2009). Analysis tools. College of Sciences, Georgia Tech. Retrieved at : http://www.ceismc.gatech.edu/MM_Tools/analysis.html
- Innovation Network (2005). *Logic model workbook*. Retrieved August 5, 2008 at: www.innonet.org (Requires registration)
- Mertens, D.M. (1999). Inclusive evaluation: Implications of transformative theory for evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation*. 20; 1-15.
- McCawley, P. F. The logic model for program planning and evaluation. (2009). Retrieved at: <http://www.uiweb.uidaho.edu/extension/LogicModel.pdf>
- Norris, J. (2009). Foreign Language Program Evaluation Case Studies. Foreign Language Program Evaluation Project. National Foreign Language Resource Center. University of Hawaii at Manoa. Retrieved August 27, 2009 at: http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation/E_casestudy.htm#1
- Rouda, R. H. & Kusy, M. E. Needs assessment. The first step. Retrieved August 15, 2009 at http://alumnus.caltech.edu/~rouda/T2_NA.html
- Smith, N. (2002). An analysis of ethical challenges in evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation*. 23; 200-207.
- Thomas, C. L.
Understanding Logic Models. Found on Blackboard. Course Documents.
- Wolf, P. J. (2009). Lost opportunities: Lawmakers threaten D.C. scholarships despite evidence of benefits. Unabridged version of article published in *Education Next* 9:4, Fall 2009, pp. 48-56. Retrieved at: http://educationnext.org/files/ednext_20094_wolf_unabridged.pdf
- Transition to Teaching Grant Program: 2002 Cohort Case Studies. Found August 2, 2008 at: eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/recordDetail?accno=ED49163

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Stake, R. E. (2004). *Standards-based & responsive evaluation*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Stufflebeam, D.L. (2001). *Evaluation models*. *New Directions*, 89, 89.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT, AND EVALUATION CRITERIA:

A. Requirements

1) Research on an Evaluation Perspective

The course examines alternative perspectives and approaches to evaluation. Some of the major perspectives on program evaluation and major proponents are

- Responsive Evaluation (Robert E. Stake, 2004))
- Empowerment Evaluation (David Fetterman, 1994.)
- Mixed Methods Evaluation (Robert E. Stake, 2004; Greene & Ciracelli, 1997)
- Utilization-based Evaluation (Michael Patton, 1997)
- Participatory Evaluation (Jennifer Greene, 1996)
- Inclusive Evaluation (Donna Mertens, 1999). [Reference Section]

A Google search will direct you to the references to these proponents as well as more recent literature on them. Browse the literature and decide on a perspective of interest to you.

Develop a paper that addresses the following questions:

1. Who is (are) the major proponent(s)?
2. What is (are) the major proponent(s)'s definition of the perspective?
3. What is the justification argument advanced to warrant its value and use?
4. What limitations or weaknesses do critics find for the perspective?
5. What assessment methods (data collection) are advocated for the perspective?
6. Summary of a mini-case study of an evaluation study that used the perspective

The final section of the paper should provide reflections on the perspective, including

1. Your reasons for finding the perspective of personal interest
2. Your assessment of strengths vs. weaknesses related to the perspective
3. Your assessment of the likelihood of the benefits of this perspective for your professional area.

The paper should adhere to APA guidelines, including an abstract, citations and a reference section. Thoroughness in addressing the questions, clarity, and organization will be important considerations in the evaluation of the paper. *The paper should not exceed 10 pages in length.*

2) Development of a Logic Model

A logic model of an actual or contrived program will be developed to reflect the underlying or explicit assumptions about the relationships between program input, process and outputs.

3) Mini-case study

Students are required to prepare a mini evaluation mini-case study during the semester. The mini-case study may be associated with projects or programs on campus or a project of the students' own choosing. Students can select one of the following options for the mini-evaluation:²

- a. Needs Assessment: *Is there a need for the program?*
Students may seek to find evidence that the program is indeed meeting a social or institutional need.
- b. Evaluability Assessment: *Has the program sufficiently matured to the point that an evaluation is justified or possible?* For example, is there consensus among stakeholders regarding the purpose of the program?
- c. Program Theory: *What are the tacit assumptions expressed by program planners and staff about the connections between their actions and intended short-term and long-term outcomes?*
- d. Formative or Process Evaluation: *What is going on in the program, and how can staff improve program features?*

² See Appendix B for examples of study questions that can be selected for the mini-study.

- e. Proposed Summative Evaluation: *Has the program met its short-term outcome goals? Is it effective?*

The Mini-case study requires several steps

- a. Development of the evaluation problem or question(s) that included the evaluation target and context
 - b. Specifying the evaluation option (a – e above) accompanied by its general description with citation.
 - c. *Development of an assessment* tool or techniques to collect the relevant information. The most practical tool will be an interview schedule but other forms may be considered (for example, surveys); techniques include focus group interviewing or observations,
 - d. *Data Collection and analysis*
 - e. *Debriefing Report:* Students will provide a debriefing of their progress with the mini-case study through an oral presentation to the class and a 2-3 page paper to the Instructor for feedback.
 - f. *Active Participation in Progress Reporting:* As follow-up to classroom feedback to presenters, each student will post a summary of their suggestions and observations to the presenters on Blackboard by the next week following the presentations.
 - g. *Final Report* of the project is a report (10-15 pages) that summarizes the results of the mini-case study. It should be responsive to the feedback obtained from fellow students and the Instructor. Guidelines for the report will be posted on Blackboard.
- 4) Comprehensive Final Examination. At the end of the semester students should be able to write a cogent response to the question, “what is program evaluation?” While there will be no single unequivocal answer to this question, one should be able to address this from fundamental level of comprehension that includes informed understanding, based on the semester’s study:
- What is a general operational definition for program evaluation?
 - How does it differ from basic and applied research?
 - Why is it used? By whom?
 - Its social value?
 - How is it conducted?
 - What skills must you have to conduct it?

The exam is closed book and you may use notes.

B. Performance-Based Assessments

Grades will be based on performance as evidenced in the quality of work on the:

- 1) Research Paper
- 2) Conduct and performance in the mini-case study field work
- 3) Participation in providing feedback to classmates and briefing paper to Instructor related to progress
- 4) Logic modeling

5) Final Report on Mini-case study

C. Grading Criteria and Weights

1) Weights for the products are:

- a. Research Paper (20 %).
- b. Logic Model (10 %)
- c. Debriefing and Blackboard Participation (10%)
- d. Final Exam (20%)
- e. Final Report: (40%)

2) Points are cumulative and letter grades are based on the percentage of the maximum number of points (100) attained.

D. Grading Scale A = 95-100%; A - = 92-94%; B+ = 88 -91%; B = 84 – 87%; B- = 81-85%; C = 75-80%; D = 70-74%; F = < 70%

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS:

Student Expectations

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>].

Please note that:

- Plagiarism encompasses the following:
 1. Presenting as one's own the words, the work, or the opinions of someone else without proper acknowledgment.
 2. Borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment.(from Mason Honor Code online at <http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/plagiarism.htm>)
 - Paraphrasing involves taking someone else's ideas and putting them in your own words. When you paraphrase, you need to cite the source.
 - When material is copied word for word from a source, it is a direct quotation. You must use quotation marks (or block indent the text) and cite the source.
 - Electronic tools (e.g., SafeAssign) may be used to detect plagiarism if necessary.
 - Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are treated seriously and may result in disciplinary actions.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>].
 - Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/1301gen.html>].
 - Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
 - Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
 - Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

Campus Resources

- The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu/>].
- The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>].
- For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, Graduate School of Education, please visit our website [See <http://gse.gmu.edu/>].

CLASS SCHEDULE

| Date | Topic/Learning Experiences | Preparatory Readings and Assignments |
|-----------|---|--|
| August 30 | Orientation and Overview Introduction to Program Evaluation | <i>Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, Chapter 1 (RLF, 1)</i> <i>Norris, J. (2009).</i> <u>Discussion Preparation:</u> RLF, 2 Blackboard (Bb) Class Activity #1 |
| Sept 13 | Preparing To Conduct an Evaluation: What Type of Evaluation is Required? Evaluation Perspectives | RLF, 2 <i>Small Group/Whole class discussion on Bb Activity #1</i> <u>Discussion Preparation:</u> RLF, 3 Bb Class Activity #2 |
| Sept 20 | What are the Evaluation Targets & How Can We Hit Them? | RLF, 3 <i>Class discussion of Bb Class Activity #2</i> <u>Discussion Preparation:</u> RFL, 4 Rouda & Kusy (see References) |
| Sept 27 | What is the Justification for the Program's Existence? A Place to Start | <i>Class Discussion: RFL, 4; Rouda & Kusy</i> <u>Discussion Preparation:</u> RFL 5 Go to Georgia Tech Web Site & Download the Needs Assessment Matrix, Needs Assessment Decision Aid, Needs focus Group Protocol, and Needs Interview Protocol. Examine the protocols and note any questions you may have about them. |
| Oct 4 | Explain Yourself: Why Do You Do the Things You Do? Open Discussion on Research Paper Preparation | <i>Discuss RFL 5 & Needs Assessment Protocols.</i> <u>Discussion Preparation:</u> RFL, 6 Read McCawley (see References) & "Understanding Logic Models" (Blackboard) |
| Oct 18 | Program Process Evaluation & Monitoring Logic Model due | <i>Discuss RFL, 6</i> <i>Discuss McCawley & Understanding Logic Models</i> <u>Discussion Preparation:</u> RFL, 7 Blackboard (Bb) Class Activity #3 |
| Oct 25 | Assessing and Monitoring Program Impact | <i>Discussion of RFL, 7 & Class Activity #3</i> <u>Discussion Preparation: RFL,</u> |
| Nov 1 | Designing Evaluation Studies for Making Strong Inferences About Program Outcomes Research Paper Due with Oral Presentation | <i>Discussion of RFL, 8</i> <u>Discussion Preparation: RFL, 9</u> |

| Date | Topic/Learning Experiences | Preparatory Readings and Assignments |
|-------------|--|---|
| Nov 8 | Alternative Methods for Evaluating Program Impact Mini-Case Study Debriefing Paper Due | <i>Discussion of RFL, 9</i> <i>Fredericks et al article</i> <i>Innovation Network Workbook</i> <u><i>Discussion Preparation: RFL, 10</i></u> |
| Nov 15 | Analyzing Program Effects | <i>Discussion of RFL, 10</i> <u><i>Discussion Preparation: RLF 11 & 12</i></u> |
| Nov 22 | Measuring Efficiency & The Social Context of Evaluation | <i>Discussion of RFL 11 & 12</i> <u><i>Discussion Preparation: Program Standards & Principles (IV:18, pp 444-452)</i></u> <i>See also Syllabus, appendices B & C</i> <i>Thomas article</i> <i>Smith article</i> |
| Nov 29 | Ethical Standards of the Profession | <i>Discussion of Discussion Preparation Readings, Including Smith and Thomas</i> <u><i>Discussion Preparation: Program Evaluation Standards (PES), 1-80</i></u> |
| Dec 6 | Utility and Feasibility Standards Proprietary and Accuracy Standards | <i>Discussion of PES 1-80</i> <u><i>Discussion Preparation: Program Evaluation Standards (PES), 89-190</i></u> <i>PES, 89-190</i> |
| December 13 | Presentations & Submission of Mini-case study Reports | |

Appendix A. Evaluation Rubric for Mini-Case Study

| Quality Elements | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|--|--|---|---|--|
| Cover Page and Abstract | | | | | |
| Statement of the evaluation problem | Excellent statement of the research problem that includes identification of what is being evaluated and its context | Above Satisfactory statement of the research problem that includes identification of what is being evaluated and its context | Satisfactory statement of the research problem that includes identification of what is being evaluated and its context | Below Satisfactory statement of the research problem that <i>excludes</i> or <i>gives limited identification</i> of what is being evaluated or its context | Marginal statement of the research problem that <i>excludes identification</i> of what is being evaluated or its context |
| Specification of the type of evaluation | | | Satisfactory description is given of the type of evaluation used to address the problem that includes the general description and external citation | Below Satisfactory description is given of the type of evaluation used to address the problem due to <i>unclear</i> general description and external citation | Marginal description is given of the type of evaluation used to address the problem due to <i>omitted</i> general description and external citation |
| Description of development of the assessment tool or technique | Excellent description of the development of the requisite data collection tool or technique that includes a copy in the appendix if appropriate | Above Satisfactory description of the development of the requisite data collection tool or technique that includes a copy in the appendix if appropriate | Satisfactory description of the development of the requisite data collection tool or technique But does not include a copy in the appendix if appropriate | Below Satisfactory description of the development of the requisite data collection tool or technique due to significant lack of clarity or omissions | Marginal description of the development of the requisite data collection tool or technique due to significant lack of clarity and omissions |
| Description of data collection procedure and analysis method | Excellent description of the data collection and data analysis procedures | Above Satisfactory description of the data collection and data analysis procedures | Satisfactory description of the data collection and data analysis procedures but exhibits some unclear elements | Below Satisfactory description of the data collection and data analysis procedures that exhibits significantly unclear elements | Marginal description of the data collection and data analysis procedures that exhibits significantly unclear elements or omissions |
| Findings and conclusions | Excellent description of the findings and conclusions that are clearly confined to data collection methods | Above Satisfactory description of the findings and conclusions with one disconnect to data collection methods | Satisfactory description of the findings and conclusions but a few disconnects to data collection methods | Below Satisfactory description of the findings and conclusions but significant disconnects to data collection methods | Marginal description of the findings and conclusions with omissions and significant disconnects to data collection methods |
| Recommendations | Excellent statement of recommendations that are clearly connected to the evaluation problem, data analysis, and conclusions | Above Satisfactory statement of recommendation that are connected to the evaluation problem, data analysis, and conclusions with one or two areas lacking clarity | Satisfactory statement of recommendation that are connected to the evaluation problem, data analysis, and conclusions with more than two areas lacking clarity | Below Satisfactory statement of recommendations that are either not connected to the evaluation problem, data analysis, or conclusions and areas lacking clarity | Marginal statement of recommendation that are either not connected to the evaluation problem, data analysis, or conclusions with areas omitted or lacking clarity |

APPENDIX B

The Program Evaluation Standards

Summary of the Standards

VII. Utility Standards

The utility standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will serve the information needs of intended users.

U1 Stakeholder Identification--Persons involved in or affected by the evaluation should be identified, so that their needs can be addressed.

U2 Evaluator Credibility--The persons conducting the evaluation should be both trustworthy and competent to perform the evaluation, so that the evaluation findings achieve maximum credibility and acceptance.

U3 Information Scope and Selection--Information collected should be broadly selected to address pertinent questions about the program and be responsive to the needs and interests of clients and other specified stakeholders.

U4 Values Identification--The perspectives, procedures, and rationale used to interpret the findings should be carefully described, so that the bases for value judgments are clear.

U5 Report Clarity--Evaluation reports should clearly describe the program being evaluated, including its context, and the purposes, procedures, and findings of the evaluation, so that essential information is provided and easily understood.

U6 Report Timeliness and Dissemination--Significant interim findings and evaluation reports should be disseminated to intended users, so that they can be used in a timely fashion.

U7 Evaluation Impact--Evaluations should be planned, conducted, and reported in ways that encourage follow-through by stakeholders, so that the likelihood that the evaluation will be used is increased.

VIII. Feasibility Standards

The feasibility standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal.

F1 Practical Procedures--The evaluation procedures should be practical, to keep disruption to a minimum while needed information is obtained.

F2 Political Viability--The evaluation should be planned and conducted with anticipation of the different positions of various interest groups, so that their cooperation may be obtained, and so that possible attempts by any of these groups to curtail evaluation operations or to bias or misapply the results can be averted or counteracted.

F3 Cost Effectiveness--The evaluation should be efficient and produce information of sufficient value, so that the resources expended can be justified.

IX. Propriety Standards

The propriety standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will be conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results.

P1 Service Orientation--Evaluations should be designed to assist organizations to address and effectively serve the needs of the full range of targeted participants.

P2 Formal Agreements--Obligations of the formal parties to an evaluation (what is to be done, how, by whom, when) should be agreed to in writing, so that these parties are obligated to adhere to all conditions of the agreement or formally to renegotiate it.

P3 Rights of Human Subjects--Evaluations should be designed and conducted to respect and protect the rights and welfare of human subjects.

P4 Human Interactions--Evaluators should respect human dignity and worth in their interactions with other persons associated with an evaluation, so that participants are not threatened or harmed.

P5 Complete and Fair Assessment--The evaluation should be complete and fair in its examination and recording of strengths and weaknesses of the program being evaluated, so that strengths can be built upon and problem areas addressed.

P6 Disclosure of Findings--The formal parties to an evaluation should ensure that the full set of evaluation findings along with pertinent limitations are made accessible to the persons affected by the evaluation, and any others with expressed legal rights to receive the results.

P7 Conflict of Interest--Conflict of interest should be dealt with openly and honestly, so that it does not compromise the evaluation processes and results.

P8 Fiscal Responsibility--The evaluator's allocation and expenditure of resources should reflect sound accountability procedures and otherwise be prudent and ethically responsible, so that expenditures are accounted for and appropriate.

X. Accuracy Standards

The accuracy standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine worth or merit of the program being evaluated.

A1 Program Documentation--The program being evaluated should be described and documented clearly and accurately, so that the program is clearly identified.

A2 Context Analysis--The context in which the program exists should be examined in enough detail, so that its likely influences on the program can be identified.

A3 Described Purposes and Procedures--The purposes and procedures of the evaluation should be monitored and described in enough detail, so that they can be identified and assessed.

A4 Defensible Information Sources--The sources of information used in a program evaluation should be described in enough detail, so that the adequacy of the information can be assessed.

A5 Valid Information--The information gathering procedures should be chosen or developed and then implemented so that they will assure that the interpretation arrived at is valid for the intended use.

A6 Reliable Information--The information gathering procedures should be chosen or developed and then implemented so that they will assure that the information obtained is sufficiently reliable for the intended use.

A7 Systematic Information--The information collected, processed, and reported in an evaluation should be systematically reviewed and any errors found should be corrected.

A8 Analysis of Quantitative Information--Quantitative information in an evaluation should be appropriately and systematically analyzed so that evaluation questions are effectively answered.

A9 Analysis of Qualitative Information--Qualitative information in an evaluation should be appropriately and systematically analyzed so that evaluation questions are effectively answered.

A10 Justified Conclusions--The conclusions reached in an evaluation should be explicitly justified, so that stakeholders can assess them.

A11 Impartial Reporting--Reporting procedures should guard against distortion caused by personal feelings and biases of any party to the evaluation, so that evaluation reports fairly reflect the evaluation findings.

A12 Metaevaluation--The evaluation itself should be formatively and summatively evaluated against these and other pertinent standards, so that its conduct is appropriately guided and, on completion, stakeholders can closely examine its strengths and weaknesses.



Prepared by:

Mary E. Ramlow Phone: 616-387-5895
Fax: 616-387-5923
Email: Mary.Ramlow@wmich.edu

The Evaluation Center
401B Ellsworth Hall
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5178

APPENDIX C

Guiding Principles for Evaluators

A Report from the AEA Task Force on
Guiding Principles for Evaluators

Members of the Task Force

Dianna Newman, University of Albany/SUNY
Mary Ann Scheirer, Private Practice
William Shadish, Memphis State University (Chair),
w.shadish@mail.psyg.memphis.edu
Chris Wye, National Academy of Public Administration

I. Introduction

A. **Background:** In 1986, the Evaluation Network (ENet) and the Evaluation Research Society (ERS) merged to create the American Evaluation Association. ERS had previously adopted a set of standards for program evaluation (published in New Directions for Program Evaluation in 1982); and both organizations had lent support to work of other organizations about evaluation guidelines. However, none of these standards or guidelines was officially adopted by AEA, nor were any other ethics, standards, or guiding principles put into place. Over the ensuing years, the need for such guiding principles has been discussed by both the AEA Board and the AEA membership. Under the presidency of David Cordray in 1992, the AEA Board appointed a temporary committee chaired by Peter Rossi to examine whether AEA should address this matter in more detail. That committee issued a report to the AEA Board on November 4, 1992, recommending that AEA should pursue this matter further. The Board followed that recommendation, and on that date created a Task Force to develop a draft of guiding principles for evaluators. The AEA Board specifically instructed the Task Force to develop general guiding principles rather than specific standards of practice. This report summarizes the Task Force's response to the charge.

B. **Process:** Task Force members reviewed relevant documents from other professional societies, and then independently prepared and circulated drafts of material for use in this report. Initial and subsequent drafts (compiled by the Task Force chair) were discussed during conference calls, with revisions occurring after each call. Progress reports were presented at every AEA board meeting during 1993. In addition, a draft of the guidelines was mailed to all AEA members in September 1993 requesting feedback; and three symposia at the 1993 AEA annual conference were used to discuss and obtain further feedback. The Task Force considered all this feedback in a December 1993 conference call, and prepared a final draft in January 1994. This draft was presented and approved for membership vote at the January 1994 AEA board meeting.

C. **Resulting Principles:** Given the diversity of interests and employment settings represented on the Task Force, it is noteworthy that Task Force members reached substantial agreement about the following five principles. The order of these

principles does not imply priority among them; priority will vary by situation and evaluator role.

1. **Systematic Inquiry:** Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries about whatever is being evaluated.

2. **Competence:** Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.

3. **Integrity/Honesty:** Evaluators ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.

4. **Respect for People:** Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of the respondents, program participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they interact.

5. **Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare:** Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare.

These five principles are elaborated in Section III of this document.

D. **Recommendation for Continued Work:** The Task Force also recommends that the AEA Board establish and support a mechanism for the continued development and dissemination of these Guiding Principles.

II. Preface: Assumptions Concerning Development of Principles

A. Evaluation is a profession composed of persons with varying interests, potentially encompassing but not limited to the evaluation of programs, products, personnel, policy, performance, proposals, technology, research, theory, and even of evaluation itself. These principles are broadly intended to cover all kinds of evaluation.

B. Based on differences in training, experience, and work settings, the profession of evaluation encompasses diverse perceptions about the primary purpose of evaluation. These include but are not limited to the following: bettering products, personnel, programs, organizations, governments, consumers and the public interest; contributing to informed decision making and more enlightened change; precipitating needed change; empowering all stakeholders by collecting data from them and engaging them in the evaluation process; and experiencing the excitement of new insights. Despite that diversity, the common ground is that evaluators aspire to construct and provide the best possible information that might bear on the value of whatever is being evaluated. The principles are intended to foster that primary aim.

C. The intention of the Task Force was to articulate a set of principles that should guide the professional practice of evaluators, and that should inform evaluation clients and the general public about the principles they can expect to be upheld by professional evaluators. Of course, no statement of principles can anticipate all situations that arise in the practice of evaluation. However, principles are not just guidelines for reaction when something goes wrong or when a dilemma is found. Rather, principles should proactively guide the behaviors of professionals in everyday practice.

D. The purpose of documenting guiding principles is to foster continuing development of the profession of evaluation, and the socialization of its members. The principles are meant to stimulate discussion and to provide a language for dialogue about the proper practice and application of evaluation among members of the profession, sponsors of evaluation, and others interested in evaluation.

E. The five principles proposed in this document are not independent, but overlap in many ways. Conversely, sometimes these principles will conflict, so that evaluators will have to choose among them. At such times evaluators must use their own values and knowledge of the setting to determine the appropriate response. Whenever a course of action is unclear, evaluators should solicit the advice of fellow evaluators about how to resolve the problem before deciding how to proceed.

F. These principles are intended to replace any previous work on standards, principles, or ethics adopted by ERS or ENet, the two predecessor organizations to AEA. These principles are the official position of AEA on these matters.

G. Each principle is illustrated by a number of statements to amplify the meaning of the overarching principle, and to provide guidance for its application. These statements are illustrations. They are not meant to include all possible applications of that principle, or to be viewed as rules that provide the basis for sanctioning violators.

H. These principles are not intended to be or to replace standards supported by evaluators or by the other disciplines in which evaluators participate. Specifically, AEA supports the effort to develop standards for educational evaluation by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, of which AEA is a cosponsor.

I. These principles were developed in the context of Western cultures, particularly the United States, and so may reflect the experiences of that context. The relevance of these principles may vary across other cultures, and across subcultures within the United States.

J. These principles are part of an evolving process of self-examination by the profession, and should be revisited on a regular basis. Mechanisms might include officially-sponsored reviews of principles at annual meetings, and other forums for harvesting experience with the principles and their application. On a regular basis, but at least every five years from the date they initially take effect, these principles ought to be examined for possible review and revision. In order to maintain association-wide awareness and relevance, all AEA members are encouraged to participate in this process.

III. The Principles

A. Systematic Inquiry: Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries about whatever is being evaluated.

1. Evaluators should adhere to the highest appropriate technical standards in conducting their work, whether that work is quantitative or qualitative in nature, so as to increase the accuracy and credibility of the evaluative information they produce.

2. Evaluators should explore with the client the shortcomings and strengths both of the various evaluation questions it might be productive to ask, and the various approaches that might be used for answering those questions.

3. When presenting their work, evaluators should communicate their methods and approaches accurately and in sufficient detail to allow others to understand, interpret and critique their work. They should make clear the limitations of an evaluation and its results. Evaluators should discuss in a contextually appropriate way those values, assumptions, theories, methods, results, and analyses that significantly affect the interpretation of the evaluative findings. These statements apply to all aspects of the evaluation, from its initial conceptualization to the eventual use of findings.

B. Competence: Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.

1. Evaluators should possess (or, here and elsewhere as appropriate, ensure that the evaluation team possesses) the education, abilities, skills and experience appropriate to undertake the tasks proposed in the evaluation.

2. Evaluators should practice within the limits of their professional training and competence, and should decline to conduct evaluations that fall substantially outside those limits. When declining the commission or request is not feasible or appropriate, evaluators should make clear any significant limitations on the evaluation that might result. Evaluators should make every effort to gain the competence directly or through the assistance of others who possess the required expertise.

3. Evaluators should continually seek to maintain and improve their competencies, in order to provide the highest level of performance in their evaluations. This continuing professional development might include formal coursework and workshops, self-study, evaluations of one's own practice, and working with other evaluators to learn from their skills and expertise.

C. Integrity/Honesty: Evaluators ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.

1. Evaluators should negotiate honestly with clients and relevant stakeholders concerning the costs, tasks to be undertaken, limitations of methodology, scope of results likely to be obtained, and uses of data resulting from a specific evaluation. It is primarily the evaluator's responsibility to initiate discussion and clarification of these matters, not the client's.

2. Evaluators should record all changes made in the originally negotiated project plans, and the reasons why the changes were made. If those changes would significantly affect the scope and likely results of the evaluation, the evaluator should inform the client and other important stakeholders in a timely fashion (barring good reason to the contrary, before proceeding with further work) of the changes and their likely impact.

3. Evaluators should seek to determine, and where appropriate be explicit about, their own, their clients', and other stakeholders' interests concerning the conduct and outcomes of an evaluation (including financial, political and career interests).

4. Evaluators should disclose any roles or relationships they have concerning whatever is being evaluated that might pose a significant conflict of interest with their role as an evaluator. Any such conflict should be mentioned in reports of the evaluation results.

5. Evaluators should not misrepresent their procedures, data or findings. Within reasonable limits, they should attempt to prevent or correct any substantial misuses of their work by others.

6. If evaluators determine that certain procedures or activities seem likely to produce misleading evaluative information or conclusions, they have the responsibility to communicate their concerns, and the reasons for them, to the client (the one who funds or requests the evaluation). If discussions with the client do not resolve these concerns, so that a misleading evaluation is then implemented, the evaluator may legitimately decline to conduct the evaluation if that is feasible and appropriate. If not, the evaluator should consult colleagues or relevant stakeholders about other proper ways to proceed (options might include, but are not limited to, discussions at a higher level, a dissenting cover letter or appendix, or refusal to sign the final document).

7. Barring compelling reason to the contrary, evaluators should disclose all sources of financial support for an evaluation, and the source of the request for the evaluation.

D. Respect for People: Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of the respondents, program participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they interact.

1. Where applicable, evaluators must abide by current professional ethics and standards regarding risks, harms, and burdens that might be engendered to those participating in the evaluation; regarding informed consent for participation in evaluation; and regarding informing participants about the scope and limits of confidentiality. Examples of such standards include federal regulations about protection of human subjects, or the ethical principles of such associations as the American Anthropological Association, the American Educational Research Association, or the American Psychological Association. Although this principle is not intended to extend the applicability of such ethics and standards beyond their current scope, evaluators should abide by them where it is feasible and desirable to do so.

2. Because justified negative or critical conclusions from an evaluation must be explicitly stated, evaluations sometimes produce results that harm client or stakeholder interests. Under this circumstance, evaluators should seek to maximize the benefits and reduce any unnecessary harm that might occur, provided this will not compromise the integrity of the evaluation findings. Evaluators should carefully judge when the benefits from doing the evaluation or in performing certain evaluation procedures should be foregone because of the risks or harms. Where possible, these issues should be anticipated during the negotiation of the evaluation.

3. Knowing that evaluations often will negatively affect the interests of some stakeholders, evaluators should conduct the evaluation and communicate its results in a way that clearly respects the stakeholders' dignity and self-worth.

4. Where feasible, evaluators should attempt to foster the social equity of the evaluation, so that those who give to the evaluation can receive some benefits in return. For example, evaluators should seek to ensure that those who bear the burdens of contributing data and incurring any risks are doing so willingly, and that they have full knowledge of, and maximum feasible opportunity to obtain any benefits that may be produced from the evaluation. When it would not endanger the integrity of the evaluation, respondents or program participants should be informed if and how they can receive services to which they are otherwise entitled without participating in the evaluation.

5. Evaluators have the responsibility to identify and respect differences among participants, such as differences in their culture, religion, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and ethnicity, and to be mindful of potential implications of these differences when planning, conducting, analyzing, and reporting their evaluations.

E. Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare: Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare.

1. When planning and reporting evaluations, evaluators should consider including important perspectives and interests of the full range of stakeholders in the object being evaluated. Evaluators should carefully consider the justification when omitting important value perspectives or the views of important groups.

2. Evaluators should consider not only the immediate operations and outcomes of whatever is being evaluated, but also the broad assumptions, implications and potential side effects of it.

3. Freedom of information is essential in a democracy. Hence, barring compelling reason to the contrary, evaluators should allow all relevant stakeholders to have access to evaluative information, and should actively disseminate that information to stakeholders if resources allow. If different evaluation results are communicated in forms that are tailored to the interests of different stakeholders, those communications should ensure that each stakeholder group is aware of the existence of the other communications. Communications that are tailored to a given stakeholder should always include all important results that may bear on interests of that stakeholder. In all cases, evaluators should strive to present results as clearly and simply as accuracy allows so that clients and other stakeholders can easily understand the evaluation process and results.

4. Evaluators should maintain a balance between client needs and other needs. Evaluators necessarily have a special relationship with the client who funds or requests the evaluation. By virtue of that relationship, evaluators must strive to meet legitimate client needs whenever it is feasible and appropriate to do so. However, that relationship can also place evaluators in difficult dilemmas when client interests conflict with other interests, or when client interests conflict with the obligation of evaluators for systematic inquiry, competence, integrity, and respect for people. In these cases, evaluators should explicitly identify and discuss the conflicts with the client and relevant stakeholders, resolve them when possible, determine whether continued work on the evaluation is advisable if the conflicts cannot be resolved, and make clear any significant limitations on the evaluation that might result if the conflict is not resolved.

5. Evaluators have obligations that encompass the public interest and good. These obligations are especially important when evaluators are supported by publicly-generated funds; but clear threats to the public good should never be ignored in any evaluation. Because the public interest and good are rarely the same as the interests of any particular group (including those of the client or funding agency), evaluators will usually have to go beyond an analysis of particular stakeholder interests when considering the welfare of society as a whole.

APPENDIX C

FIELD STUDY OPTIONS

Students are required to conduct one field-based mini-evaluation study during the semester. The field-based study may be associated with the Professor's external evaluation projects or a project of the students' own choice. The mini-evaluation may involve addressing the answers to the subset of evaluation questions from the following options:

- A. **Needs Assessment:** *Is there a need for the program?* Students may seek to find evidence that the program is indeed meeting a social need. Can the resources and money involved be justified on the basis of meeting a social need? Methods of investigation include conducting literature searches, conducting focus group interviews, individual interviews, surveys, and content analysis of program documents.
- B. **Evaluability Assessment:** *Has the program sufficiently matured to the point that a formal evaluation is justified or possible?* For example, is everyone on the same page as to what the purpose of the program is? What are the objectives and expected outcomes of the program? Are they expressed in terms that are amenable to observation and measurement? Are there methods and tools available to reliably measure the objectives and expected outcomes? Do actual program actions, policies, and procedures correspond to intended plans? Students may select any subset of these questions (or others that they propose) to conduct their evaluability study.
- C. **Program Theory:** *What are the tacit assumptions expressed by program planners and staff about the connections between their actions and intended short-term and long-term outcomes? What external resources are assumed to be supportive of program actions, activities, and intended outcomes? What is the logic model that reflects these connections?*
- D. **Formative or Process Evaluation:** *What is going on in the program, and how can program features be improved? How can we substantiate that program activities are carried out as planned (program fidelity study)? Are there program elements not functioning as planned? Why? What can be done to overcome the barriers? Are program targets being met in the fashion and time frame that was planned?*
- E. **Proposed Summative Evaluation:** *What plan can be devised to assess whether the program has met its short-term outcome objectives?*