

# SW743: Critical Approaches to Evidence and Evaluation in Social Services and Communities

* **Thursday, May 5 to Thursday, June 16 (Mondays and Thursdays, synchronous and asynchronous sessions; see schedule below)**
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* **Office hours: By appointment (virtually)**
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# Course Overview

## Course Description:

Discourses of evidence-based practice increasingly permeate social services, and audit technologies abound. This course explores discourses of research and accountability as they relate to practice in social services and communities. It also prepares students to conduct critical evaluation a variety of settings. It supports students to examine the evaluation practices of a particular social service or community setting: to apply conceptual frameworks about evidence and accountability to the reporting requirements the agency engages and to the measures used to define success; and, drawing on literature in the field, to propose justice-focused improvements or alternatives.

## Course Objectives:

1. Understand how theories and knowledge systems shape understandings of evidence and evaluation
2. Develop awareness of the context in which evaluation occurs including organizational, social, cultural and political relations
3. Learn about evaluation methods for inclusive individual and community participation
4. Engage in practical application by using specific models and methods of evaluation
5. Reflect on how to use more conventional methods of evaluation for social justice ends
6. Examine ways to build organizational capacity for evaluative thinking and evaluation.

The basic assumptions of this course concur with the broader curriculum context set by the **School of Social Work's Statement of Philosophy**:

*As social workers, we operate in a society characterized by power imbalances that affect us all. These power imbalances are based on age, class, ethnicity, gender identity, geographic location, health, ability, race, sexual identity and income. We see personal troubles as inextricably linked to oppressive structures. We believe that social workers must be actively involved in the understanding and transformation of injustices in social institutions and in the struggles of people to maximize control over their own lives.*

## Course Format

This is an online course that will combine synchronous (classes in real-time over zoom) with asynchronous online engagement and discussion (using Avenue to Learn). Information will be presented through review of readings, class lectures, in-class and online discussions and exploring specific examples of evaluation templates and models. Each week will be framed as a Module that covers a particular topic with guiding questions and will be examined through assigned readings, in-class content, asynchronous learning and group engagement. The specific schedule for each week’s Module can be found below.

## Required Texts:

1. Journal articles and book chapters will be available through a link on A2L.
2. Other course material will also be made available through a link on A2L.

# Course Requirements/Assignments

## Requirements Overview and Deadlines

1. Participation (20%), throughout the course
2. Online Discussion Board – Posts and Responses (6% each week for Weeks 1 to 5; 30%)
3. Design an evaluation (50%), due June 23, 2022

## Requirement/Assignment Details

1. Participation (20%)
   * The course includes a combination of synchronous zoom sessions, online discussion posts and responses, and in-class participation through group discussion. Students are expected to come to the synchronous sessions having completed the assigned readings and prepared to ask questions and engage in discussion. Students are also encouraged to work on the final assignment throughout the course and to bring any questions about their emerging evaluation protocol to the class.
2. Online Discussion Board – Weekly Posts and Responses (30%)
   * One Original Question Post: In Weeks 1 to 5, students will pose an original question that expands on and deepens the content covered in the readings and/or the synchronous zoom session. The question should reflect a topic or issue that has emerged from reviewing the week’s module. For example, students can take up one of the guiding questions from the week’s module that is listed in the syllabus and pose another question that builds upon or expands that guiding question. Or, students can pose a question that emerges from the assigned readings. The original question post will be uploaded to the Avenue to Learn Discussion Board by the specific due date in weeks 1 to 5 (see dates below). Assigned readings or other relevant literature will be used to provide relevant background information to set-up the original question. The original question post will be up to 200 words in length and will include at least one reference following APA citation formatting.
   * One Response Post: In Weeks 1 to 5, students will respond to one original question post from another student in the course. The response post should offer an analysis or reflection of the question posed. For example, students may offer their interpretation or response to the question posed, or they may provide information or a resource for other students to view that deepens how we might understand the issue or question posed. The response post will be uploaded to the Avenue to Learn Discussion Board by the specific due date in weeks 1 to 5 (see dates below). Assigned readings or other relevant literature will be used to provide relevant background information in the response post. The response post will be up to 200 words in length and will include at least one reference following APA citation formatting.
   * One original question post and one response post is required in Weeks 1 to 5 for a total of 5 questions and 5 responses. Each question post is worth 3% and each response post is worth 3% for a total of 6% each week for Weeks 1 to 5, total 30%. The posts must be completed within the week. Posts will be evaluated for completion, depth of analysis and critical thinking, and integration of course material.
3. Design an evaluation (50%)
   * Students will select a social service program or community initiative with which they are familiar and design an evaluation. The evaluation should include: i) a description of the program or initiative mission, aims and expectations; ii) a description about how the program is situated in a wider organizational or sociopolitical context; iii) the evaluation purpose and goals; iv) evaluation method(s) and data collection approaches and processes; v) key stakeholders and community engagement strategies if applicable; vi) reporting back and application of the evaluation results to the program and/or organization. Students can frame their evaluation around one of the evaluation models reviewed in class, for example, creating a Theory of Change diagram. This paper should essentially be a proposal to conduct an evaluation of a social service program or community initiative and the steps and processes that will be undertaken to develop, implement, and complete the evaluation. This paper should be up to 20 pages in length (double spaced) and will be submitted to the Avenue to Learn dropbox on June 23, 2022. A full description of this assignment will be posted on Avenue to Learn. It is encouraged that students work on this evaluation proposal throughout the course and bring any questions or issues that are emerging as it is developing to the in-class discussions.

# Assignment Submission and Grading

## Form and Style

* Written assignments must be typed and double-spaced and submitted with a front page containing the title, student’s name, student number, and the date. Number all pages (except title page).
* Paper format must be in accordance with the current edition of American Psychological Association (APA) publication manual with particular attention paid to font size (Times-Roman 12), spacing (double spaced) and margins (minimum of 1 inch at the top, bottom, left and right of each page).
* Students are expected to make use of relevant professional and social science literature and other bodies of knowledge in their term assignments. When submitting, please keep a spare copy of your assignments.

## Avenue to Learn and Zoom

In this course, we will be using Avenue to Learn and Zoom. Avenue to Learn will be used as a repository for weekly course content and as a way to engage in the weekly online discussion posts that are required in Weeks 1 to 5. Zoom will be used for the synchronous classes on pre-determined dates (see schedule below). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss with the course instructor.

## Submitting Assignments & Grading

Please submit papers through the dropbox on Avenue to Learn by the due date. All work is due on the date stated in the course syllabus unless other arrangements have been made in advance with the instructor (e.g., medical or other reason). A late penalty of 2 percentage points per day will apply after the due date (weekends included).

## Privacy Protection

In accordance with regulations set out by the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act, the University will not allow return of graded materials by placing them in boxes in departmental offices or classrooms so that students may retrieve their papers themselves; tests and assignments must be returned directly to the student. Similarly, grades for assignments for courses may only be posted using the last five digits of the student number as the identifying data. The following possibilities exist for return of graded materials:

1. Direct return of materials to students in class;
2. Return of materials to students during office hours;
3. Students attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with assignments for return by mail;
4. Submit/grade/return papers electronically.

Arrangements for the return of assignments from the options above will be finalized during the first class.

## Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

# Student Responsibilities

* Students are expected to contribute to the creation of a respectful and constructive learning environment. Students should read material in preparation for the synchronous class, attend class on time and remain for the full duration of the class. A formal break will be provided in the middle of each synchronous class, students are expected to return from the break on time.
* Audio or video recording in the classroom without permission of the instructor is strictly prohibited.

## Attendance

Participation, attendance, and questions are essential in order to fully engage in the analysis of the readings. Furthermore, the expectation is that students will attend all synchronous sessions.

## Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty, please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicIntegrity.pdf)

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

* Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
* Improper collaboration in group work.
* Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations

## Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the *Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities* (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

## Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s *Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities* policy.

## Accessibility Statement

The School of Social Work recognizes that people learn and express their knowledge in different ways. We are committed to reducing barriers to accessibility in the classroom, and working towards classrooms that welcome diverse learners. If you have accessibility concerns or want to talk about your learning needs, please be in touch with the course instructor.

## Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office ***normally within 10 working days*** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

## E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, they may not reply.

## Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

# Course Weekly Topics and Readings

## Week 1 (Module 1): May 5-11, 2022 Thursday, May 5 – Synchronous on zoom; 5:30-7:30pm EST Question Post due May 9; Response Post due May 11

### Topic: **Introduction to Evaluation**

* Guiding Questions:
  + Why evaluate?
  + What is the sociopolitical context in which evaluation occurs?
  + How can social theories and knowledge systems guide evaluation planning and implementation?

### Readings:

* Donaldson, S., & Lipsey, M. (2006). Roles for Theory in Contemporary Evaluation Practice: Developing Practical Knowledge. In I.Shaw, J. Greene & M. Mark (eds), *Sage Handbook of Evaluation* (pp. 1-25)*.* London: Sage Publications.
* Carden, F. (2017). Building evaluation capacity to address problems of equity. In S. Sridharan, K. Zhao, & A. Nakaima (Eds.), Building Capacities to Evaluate Health Inequities: Some Lessons Learned from Evaluation Experiments in China, India and Chile. *New Directions for Evaluation, 154*, 115–125.
* Freeman, M. & Vasconcelos E. (2010). Critical Social Theory: Core Concepts, Inherent Tensions. *New Directions in Evaluation* 127, 7-19.
* Optional: Lynch-Cerullo, K., & Cooney, K. (2011). Moving from outputs to outcomes: A review of the evolution of performance measurement in the human service non-profit sector. *Administration in Social Work*, *35*(4), 364-388.

## Week 2 (Module 2): May 12-18, 2022 Thursday, May 12 – Synchronous on zoom; 5:30-7:30pm EST Question Post due May 16; Response Post due May 18

### Topic: **Evaluation Models and Approaches**

* Guiding questions:
  + What are some examples of evaluation models, approaches, and frameworks?
  + What ethical approvals and considerations are necessary in evaluation?

### Readings:

* DuBow, W. M., & Litzler, E. (2019). The development and use of a theory of change to align programs and evaluation in a complex, national initiative. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *40*(2), 231-248.
* LaFrance, J., Nichols, R., & Kirkhart, K. E. (2012). Culture writes the script: On the centrality of context in indigenous evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, *2012*(135), 59-74.
* Sullivan, C.M. (2018). Understanding How Domestic Violence Support Services Promote Survivor Well-Being: A Conceptual Model. *Journal of Family Violence 33*:121-131.
* Review examples of evaluation frameworks and approaches on Avenue to Learn.

## Week 3 (Module 3): May 19-29, 2022 Thursday, May 19 – Synchronous on zoom; 5:30-7:30pm EST Question Post due May 26; Response Post due May 29 \*\*Note: no class on Mon. May 23 due to Victoria Day

### Topic: **Community-Engaged Participatory and Arts-Based Approaches to Evaluation**

* Guiding questions:
  + What values and principles of community-based participatory action research are relevant to evaluation?
  + What are some participatory and creative approaches to evaluation? E.g. Experience-Based Co-Design, arts-based approaches, etc.

### Readings:

* What is Co-Design? Watch 5 minute video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=EfpYZLIoQqk&feature=emb_logo>.
* Wallace, B., Pauly, B., Perkin, K., & Ranfft, M. (2015). Shifting the evaluative gaze community-based program evaluation in the homeless sector. *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement*, *8*(1), 43-58.
* Donetto, S., Pierri, P., Tsianakas, V., & Robert, G. (2015). Experience-based co-design and healthcare improvement: realizing participatory design in the public sector. *The Design Journal*, *18*(2), 227-248.
* Moll, S., Wyndham-West, M., Mulvale, G., Park, S., Buettgen, A., Phoenix, M., ... & Bruce, E. (2020). Are you really doing ‘codesign’? Critical reflections when working with vulnerable populations. *BMJ open*, *10*(11), e038339.
* Simons, H., & McCormack, B. (2007). Integrating arts-based inquiry in evaluation methodology: Opportunities and challenges. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *13*(2), 292-311.

## Week 4 (Module 4): May 30-June 5, 2022 Monday, May 30 – Synchronous on zoom; 4:30-7:30pm EST Question Post due June 2; Response Post due June 5

### Topic: **Evidence and Measurement I**

* Guiding Questions:
  + What constitutes ‘quality’ in evaluation? Who decides?
  + How might the scope, objectives and aims of an evaluation be determined?
  + What are the strengths and limitations of quantitative and qualitative methods in evaluation?

### Readings:

* Stake, R. & Schwandt, T. (2006). On Discerning Quality in Evaluation. In I.Shaw, J. Greene & M. Mark (eds), *Sage Handbook of Evaluation* (404-418), London: Sage Publications. Available online at the library.
* Liket, K., Rey-Garcia, M. & Maas, K. (2014). Why Aren’t Evaluations Working and What to Do About It: A Framework for Negotiating Meaningful Evaluation in Non-profits. *American Journal of Evaluation 35*(2), 171-188.
* Sunderji, N., Ghavam-Rassoul, A., Ion, A., Lin, E. (2016). Driving improvements in the implementation of collaborative mental health care: A quality framework to guide measurement, improvement and research.
* Brisson, J., Pekelny, I., & Ungar, M. (2020). Methodological strategies for evaluating youth gang prevention programs. *Evaluation and program planning*, *79*, 101747.

## Week 5 (Module 5): June 6-12, 2022 Monday, June 6 – Synchronous on zoom; 4:30-7:30pm EST Question Post due June 9; Response Post due June 12

### Topic: **Evidence and Measurement II**

* Guiding Questions:
  + What are important indicators, measures, and outcomes in evaluation? For whom and who decides?
  + What are some practical, ethical, and logistical considerations in evaluation?

### Readings:

* Hayward, A., Wodtke, L., Craft, A., Robin, T., Smylie, J., McConkey, S., ... & Cidro, J. (2021). Addressing the need for indigenous and decolonized quantitative research methods in Canada. *SSM-Population Health*, *15*, 100899.
* Funderburk, J. S., & Shepardson, R. L. (2017). Real-world program evaluation of integrated behavioral health care: Improving scientific rigor. *Families, Systems, & Health*, *35*(2), 114.
* Firestone, M., Syrette, J., Jourdain, T., Recollet, V., & Smylie, J. (2019). “I feel safe just coming here because there are other Native brothers and sisters”: findings from a community-based evaluation of the Niiwin Wendaanimak Four Winds Wellness Program. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, *110*(4), 404-413.
* Aubry, T., Nelson, G., & Tsemberis, S. (2015). Housing first for people with severe mental illness who are homeless: a review of the research and findings from the at home—chez soi demonstration project. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, *60*(11), 467-474.

## Week 6 (Module 6): June 13-16, 2022 Monday, June 13 – Synchronous on zoom; 4:30-7:30pm EST No Question or Response post due this week

### Topic: **Evaluation Leadership, Facilitation and Building Organizational Capacity**

* Guiding questions:
  + How can organizations shift and adapt to integrate critical and participatory evaluation approaches?
  + How can organizational capacity to champion and conduct evaluation be enhanced?
  + What facilitation, communication and engagement skills may be effective in evaluation?
  + What are your reflections and take-aways about critical approaches to evidence and evaluation in social services and communities?
  + How might you apply these models, frameworks and approaches in your community engaged leadership and evaluation work?

### Readings:

* Runnels, V., Andrew, C., & Rae, J. (2017). Building Evaluation Culture and Capacity in a Community-Level Program: Lessons Learned from Evaluating Youth Futures. *Canadian Journal of Evaluation 32*(1), 122-130.
* Fierro, R. S. (2016). Enhancing facilitation skills: Dancing with dynamic tensions. In R. S.Fierro, A. Schwartz, & D. H. Smart (Eds.), *Evaluation and Facilitation. New Directions for Evaluation*, *149*, 31–42.
* LaVelle, J. (2020). Anticipating and Addressing Stakeholders’ Stereotypes of Evaluation. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation 35*(2), 230-239.