**McMaster University School of Social Work**



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

May 2- June 8, 2017, Tuesdays & Thursdays 4:00-7:00 p.m.

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# Social Work 743:

Critical Approaches to Evidence and Evaluation   
in Social Services and Communities

## Spring 2017

## Course Description

Discourses of evidence-based practice increasingly permeate social services, and audit technologies abound. This course explores both the doing and discourses of evaluation and accountability as they relate to critical practice in social services and communities. It supports students to examine the evaluation practices of a particular social service or community setting: to apply critical 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.

As this course supports the MSW in Critical Leadership, assignments are geared to working with a particular agency. Students taking the course as an elective can speak to the instructor about alternative arrangements if necessary.

## Course Objectives

* Understand how theory (critical theory, practice theory, social change theory, evaluation theory) shapes understandings of evidence and evaluation
* Develop awareness of the context in which evaluation occurs including organizational, social, cultural and political relations
* Learn about evaluation methods for inclusive individual and community participation
* Engage in practical application by using specific models and methods of evaluation
* Reflect on how to use more conventional methods of evaluation for social justice ends
* 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

Classes will be conducted as a seminar. Information will be presented through lectures, practical application of research methods and class discussion. To maximize learning and nourish the kind of critical critique and debate that the graduate program seeks to foster, everyone’s participation and preparation is important. Students are asked to be familiar with assigned readings and be ready to contribute to our ongoing seminar conversation. Information will be presented through review of readings, class discussion and exploring specific examples of evaluation templates.

Assignment Submission and Grading

## Submission Dates & Grading

1. Participation (10%)
2. Assignment : Develop program theory of change (30%) – due May 16, 2017
3. Assignment: Design an evaluation (45%) – due May 30, 2017
4. Assignment: Repurposing evaluation (15%) – due June 8, 2017

## 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 5 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.

## Course Modification Policy

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may changes the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

**Student Responsibilities and University Policies**

## 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 result 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 6 suspension or expulsion from the university. It is the student’s responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3 at http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity. The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained, (please note the using someone’s words without putting quotes around them, even if you cite them, is plagiarism);
2. Improper collaboration in group work; or
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic dishonesty also entails a student having someone sign in for them on a weekly course attendance sheet when they are absent from class and/or a student signing someone in who is known to be absent.

## Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility

Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca). For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicAccommodation-StudentsWithDisabilities.pdf>

## 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.

## 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, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion. Email Forwarding in MUGSI:

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/support/email/emailforward.html>

\*Forwarding will take effect 24-hours after students complete the process at the above link

(Approved at the Faculty of Social Sciences meeting on Tues. May 25, 2010)

## Required Texts

1. Shaw, I., Greene, J., & Mark, M. (2006). The Sage Handbook of Evaluation. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
2. Journal articles that are available through the McMaster library will be accessed electronically.
3. Other course material is available online and the url has been pasted in the course outline

## Assignments

1. Participation: 10%

The course will be a combination of presentations, discussions and exercises. To maximize learning and nourish the kind of critical critique and debate that the graduate program seeks to foster, everyone’s participation and preparation is important. Students are expected to come to class having read the assigned readings and prepared to ask questions and enter into discussion.

2. Develop a program theory of change: 30%

a.) Select a social service program or community initiative with which you are familiar. Describe this program in terms of the broader mission of the agency in which it is located, the specific aims of the program, the population served by the program and the expected results.

b.) Draw a ‘theory of change’ diagram specific to this program or initiative, for the purpose of setting up an evaluation. *(Remember that some programs have maintenance of well-being, not change as a primary goal).* Describe the long terms goals of the program, use backward mapping to identify pre-conditions, then identify outcomes and assumptions. Suggest indicators of program goals being met and identify interventions. Clarify the central program theory and assumptions behind the diagram. Make note of any uncertainties or challenges in identifying aims, outcomes and/or indicators. Include both the diagram of your change theory as well as text explaining the diagram.

This assignment should be approximately 7-9 pages long including the textual explanation and a one page diagram. The diagram can be presented in sections and addressed within the text or presented in its entirety in the text or as an appendix. If it is addressed in sections, please provide an entire diagram as an appendix.   
Due Date: May 16, 2017

1. Design an evaluation: 45%

This assignment involves you situating the program or initiative you discussed in Assignment 2 in its wider organizational context, and designing an evaluation for that program.

The evaluation design should answer the following questions:

* What is the purpose of the evaluation, including the scope and intent?
* Who is the primary audience(s)/recipient for the evaluation?
* What are some important organizational, social, cultural and political dimensions in the context for this evaluation?
* Who are the key stakeholders in the evaluation and what complex social relations do you anticipate? How will you include these stakeholders throughout the course of the evaluation? How will you address issues of differences in power among the stakeholders?
* Describe the program being evaluated and the theory of change which informs the program (you will incorporate the theory of change material you developed for the previous assignment)
* What specific evaluation method(s) would you use for this evaluation [drawing from course examples]
* What data would you collect from what sources? Provide a detailed description for one aspect of data collection (e.g. an interview guide, a survey, etc.) What complications do you anticipate in gathering data?
* How will you report the results of the evaluation and to what audiences?
* What processes would you recommend for organizational learning and integration of the results into the program?

This assignment should be approximately 17-20 pages. Due May 30, 2017

1. Repurposing evaluation for social justice aims: 15%

Review a conventional outcome evaluation design (e.g. the outcome evaluation framework for Toronto United Way organizations or Social Return on Investment model or one required by a funder of an organization to which you are connected; some examples are on the course website) and suggest ways at three different steps of the evaluation process (scope, aims, stakeholders, inputs, outputs, reporting back, etc.) you can move the design (even in small ways) towards greater participation and social justice perspectives.

* First, identify a conventional evaluation framework and summarize the basic framework for this approach to evaluation in one page.
* Second, drawing on your own practice experience and the material from the course, identify how you would define a more socially just evaluation process. This could involve both appreciation for particular dimensions of this approach and also critique of this approach. Suggest three ways at three different points in the evaluation where you can move the design (even in small ways) towards greater participation and social justice perspectives. Reflect on which of the steps you have identified shows the most promise for moving the evaluation in the direction you have outlined.

This assignment should be approximately 5-7 pages. Due June 8, 2017

**Expectations**  
Please ensure your cell phone is turned off before class begins. Please do not answer your cell phone or engage in texting during class. The classes in this course will be conducted in an open and respectful environment. It is expected that participation will be expressed in a constructive, respectful manner that contributes to learning.

Late Assignments will be penalized by a deduction of 2% per day. Extensions (for exceptional circumstances) must be arranged before the due date of an assignment.

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# Course Weekly Topics and Readings

## Week 1: May 2

### Topics:

* Introduction

### Readings:

* (2004) *Does your Project Make a Difference? A guide to evaluating environmental education projects and programs.* Department of Environment and Conservation, Sydney, New South Wales. Review pages 1-14

## Week 1: May 4

### Topics:

* Evaluation as a critical practice

### Readings:

* Freeman, M. & Vasconcelos E. (2010). Critical Social Theory: Core Concepts, Inherent Tensions. *New Directions in Evaluation* 127, 7-19.
* Taylor, David. (2006). Critical policy evaluation and the question of values: a psychosocial approach. *Critical Social Policy* 26(1), 243-267.
* LaFrance, J. & Nicholls, R. (2010). Reclaiming Evaluation: Defining an Indigenous Evaluation Framework. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation* 23(2), 13-31

## Week 2: May 9

### Topics:

* Evaluation and Practice Theory

### 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* (56-75), London: Sage Publications. (Chapter 2 from text)
* Centre for Theory of Change (2003) Scope: How much should a good theory account for?

<http://www.theoryofchange.org/wp-content/uploads/toco_library/pdf/scope.pdf>

* Evaluation Example: [theoryofchange.org](http://www.theoryofchange.org)

Read through the steps found under Theory of Change on the menu at the Center for Theory of Change.

Check out the facilitators handbook:

<http://www.theoryofchange.org/wp-content/uploads/toco_library/pdf/ToCFacilitatorSourcebook.pdf>

## Week 2: May 11

### Topics:

* Evaluation and Measurement I; or what counts as evidence?

### 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. (Chapter 18 from text)
* Greene, J. (1999). The Inequality of Performance Measurements. *Evaluation* 5(2), (160-172).
* Evaluation Example: Meagher, S. (2008). Measuring Success: Evaluation Strategies for Drop-In Centres. Toronto: *Public Interest Strategies and Communication*. Pp. 14-25 on Benefits of Drop in Centre.
* <https://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/shelter_support__housing_administration/files/pdf/measuringsuccessapril7.pdf>

## Week 3: May 16

### Topics:

* Evaluation and Measurement II; or what counts as evidence?

### Readings:

* 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.
* Evaluation Example: Chapters 1 & 2 in: Burns, S. & Cupitt, S. (2003). *Managing Outcomes; A Guide for Homelessness Organisations*. London: Charities Evaluation Services.
* <http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/Publications-Research/publications-free-downloads/managing-outcomes>

## Week 3: May 18

### Topics:

* Evaluation in Situations of Complexity

### Readings:

* Langlois, M., Blanchet-Cohen, N. & Beer, T. (2013). The Art of the Nudge: Five Practices for Developmental Evaluators. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation* 27(2), 39-59.
* Schwandt, T. & Burgon, H. (2006). Evaluation and the Study of Lived Experience. In I.Shaw, J. Greene & M. Mark (eds), *Sage Handbook of Evaluation* (99-117), London: Sage Publications. (Chapter 4 from text)
* Evaluation Example: Gamble, J.A.A. (2008). A Developmental Evaluation Primer. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. Pp. 1-25.
* <http://www.mcconnellfoundation.ca/de/resources/publication/a-developmental-evaluation-primer>

## Week 4: May 23

### Topics:

* Evaluation and Participation

### Readings:

* Cousins, B. & Whitmore, E. (1998). Framing Participatory Evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation* 80, 5-23.
* Johnston, A. (2010). Using Technology to Enhance Aboriginal Evaluations. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation* 23(2), 51-72.
* Evaluation Example: International HIV/AIDS Alliance. (2006). Tools Together Now: 100 participatory tools to mobilize communities for HIV/AIDS.
* See sections B, C, D & E.
* <http://www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/000/370/229-Tools-together-now_original.pdf?1405520036>

## Week 4: May 25

### Topics:

* Evaluation and Community

### Readings:

* Wallace, B., Pauly, B., Perkin, K.,& Ranftt, M. (2015). Shifting the Evaluative Gaze: Community Based Program Evaluation in the Homelessness Sector. *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* 8(1), 43-58.
* Whitmore, E., Guijt, I., Mertens, D., Imm, P., Chinman, M. & Wandersman, A. Embedding Improvements, Lived Experience, and Social Justice in Evaluation Practice. In I.Shaw, J. Greene & M. Mark (eds), *Sage Handbook of Evaluation* (340-359), London: Sage Publications. (Chapter 15 from text)
* Evaluation Example: Burns, S. & Cupitt, S. (2003). Managing Outcomes; A Guide for Homelessness Organisations. London: Charities Evaluation Services. (Chapters 3 & 4)
* <http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/Publications-Research/publications-free-downloads/managing-outcomes>

## Week 5: May 30

### Topics:

* Evaluation and Politics

### Readings:

* Karlsson Vestman, O & Conner, R. (2006). The Relationship Between Evaluation and Politics. In I.Shaw, J. Greene & M. Mark (eds), Sage Handbook of Evaluation (225-242), London: Sage Publications. (Chapter 10 from text)
* Picciotto, R. (2015). Democratic evaluation for the 21st century. Evaluation 21(2), 150-166.

## Week 5: June 1

### Topics:

* Evaluation and Social Relations

### Readings:

* Abma, T. (2006). The Social Relations of Evaluation. In I.Shaw, J. Greene & M. Mark (eds), *Sage Handbook of Evaluation* (184-199), London: Sage Publications. (Chapter 8 from text)
* Chouinard, J.A. (2014). Understanding relationship in culturally complex evaluation contexts. *Evaluation* 20(3), 332-347.

## Week 6: June 6

### Topics:

* Evaluation and Social Change

### Readings:

* Greene, J. (2006). Evaluation, Democracy and Social Change. In I.Shaw, J. Greene & M. Mark (eds), *Sage Handbook of Evaluation* (118-140), London: Sage Publications. (Chapter 5 from text)
* Fletcher, G. & Dyson, S. (2013). Evaluation as a work in progress: Stories of shared learning and development. *Evaluation* 19(4), 419-430.
* Evaluation Example: Davies, R. & Dart, J. (2005). The ‘Most Significant Change’ Technique: A Guide to Its Use. CARE International, United Kingdom. Chapters 1&2

<http://www.alnap.org/resource/8102.aspx>

## Week 6: June 8

### Topics:

* Building Capacity for Evaluation
* Maybe combine this and the next one and include an arts based session, then there is a good indigenous article

### Readings:

* Shaw, I., Mowbray, C. and Qureshi, H. (2006). Social Work and the Human Services. In I.Shaw, J. Greene & M. Mark (eds), *Sage Handbook of Evaluation* (486-511), London: Sage Publications. (Chapter 22 from text)
* Evaluation Example: Table 1, (p. 382) in: Buckley, J., Archibald,T., Hargreaves, M., & Trochim, W. (2015). Defining and Teaching Evaluative Thinking: Insights from Research on Critical Thinking. *American Journal of Evaluation* 36(3), 375-388.
* Evaluative Thinking for Better Outcomes: Four NGO Case Studies (review introduction, conclusion and the last two case studies.)
* <http://www.theclearinitiative.org/EvaluativeThinkingReport_FINAL_online.pdf>