

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
Department of Sociology
2019-2020

Sociology 9009A
Evidence Based Policy
Tuesdays: 1:30-4:30, SSC-5230

Instructor

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will be taught in three stages. First, we will explore current ideas and issues in evidence based decision and policy-making and the context for several contemporary debates. The second phase of the course will focus on technical knowledge for those seeking to influence public policy – such as evidence mapping, reviews and other tools. In the final weeks of the course the focus shifts towards application – applying skills learned to reach different audiences. Students will be expected to present their ideas and receive constructive, critical feedback.

TEXT

There is no text for this course.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will develop new and more detailed knowledge and perspectives on the vital role of quality research in informing public policy and debates. Outcomes include:

1. Enhanced knowledge of the public role of science and research
2. Acquiring a more detailed understanding of how scientists can and do influence policy.
3. Detailed understanding of key scientific concepts such as replication, reproduction, transparency, etc. and their importance in policy debates.
4. Ability to apply these concepts within the context of critical discussion and analysis.

EVALUATION

Short paper assignment: due October 15	30 marks
Marketing assignment: due November 12	30 marks
Blog assignment: due November 19 (poss. Extension of 1 week)	20 marks
Presentation: due November 19/26	10 marks
Participation: show up and engage	10 marks

Evidence base assessment assignment:

Pick a program or policy of interest to you and your work in the field. Then write an one page assessment of the evidence base – the body of research that is available – in support of that program. Your assessment should be able to answer the following questions:

1. Is the Program Based on Research?
2. Has the Program Been Independently Evaluated?
3. Was the Program Rigorously Tested?
4. Has the Program Evaluation Been Replicated?
5. Was the Program Tested in Canada?

Other criteria:

- only use journal articles found in the university's library databases (fully indexed, reputable sources that have an impact factor; do not use online journals from Google)
- focus on program evaluations
- keep your word count and use of jargon low.

To help you out, I am attaching the assessment form we use at CAN-SEBP to do evidence assessments. It's simple and easy to use ... and that's the key! This assignment is tasking you with being able to distill a volume of information (or lackof) to a layperson audience.

Other assignments:

To do the remaining assignments, you must pick an 'audience'. If you want to change 'minds', whose minds do you want to sway? Is your audience academics, communities, professional groups and/or governments. The clearer you are on exactly who your audience is, the easier this will all be.

Marketing assignment:

You will be tasked with creating or revamping three things: a LinkedIn account, a CV/resume and a Twitter account. You will tailor all three of these to attracting appropriate interest from your new audience – through pictures, posts, tweets, job titles, stories, etc. You will then print out each and submit to me with a 3 page (1 page per LinkedIn, CV and Twitter) explanation of how you chose your content/presentation style for each and why you think it will attract the interest of your target audience.

Presentation of ideas: blog

Today, a thoughtful commentary on social media, blog or other websites can generate a significant degree of interest. Remembering your selected audience, and the topic for which you would like to see some policy change, craft an one-page blog aimed at persuading readers. You may be as creative, thoughtful, data-driven, scientific as possible, but just keep the tone and content pitched at your audience.

Presentation of ideas: a talk

A significant amount of public policy work takes the form of talks – whether it be formal presentations, ‘pitches’, webinars, or off-the-cuff Q and A sessions, therefore knowing how to communicate with your audience is vital. Remembering your audience, you will take the ideas presented in your blog and present them to the class in-person or, if you prefer, via a video or in webinar format (I will leave the choice to you). If your intended audience is a community group, you should present accordingly. If it’s an academic audience, the same. Etc., etc. My expectation for this part of the assignment is that you will have absorbed the lessons on how to communicate complex content to different audiences and pitch your talk accordingly. Good news: you only have 10 minutes. Bad news: your classmates will be providing a (constructive) critique afterwards. Listen to what they say, as it could prove to be very valuable.

OUTLINE AND ASSIGNED READING

September 3: Course Introduction

Ideas

September 10: What does it Mean to be Evidence-Based?

September 17: You're catching a break, as I have to be away this week for work

September 24: Anti-science in policy and politics

October 1: Struggling against emotions, rhetoric and just plain bad ideas

October 8: Ways in which scientists can and do engender change

October 15: The Art of Dissent

Know how

October 22: Communicating for different audiences - blogs, tweets, news media, professional journals, academic papers, CVs, LinkedIn

October 29: You're catching another break, as I have to be away this week for work

November 5: Fall Reading Week

Skills

November 12: Evidence mapping and reviews, tools

November 19: Presentations 201

students present and receive constructive feedback - diff. audiences (academic, community, professional, government)

November 26: Presentations 202/Evaluation design

students present and receive constructive feedback - diff. audiences (academic, community, professional, government)

December 3: Class wrap up

Important Policies

Policies for Assignment Deadlines

Only serious and unforeseeable reasons will be accepted as grounds for being late for any assignments. The need for an extension must be discussed before the due date of the assignment (seminar, test, term paper) and documented through the appropriate channels.

A Note on Plagiarism

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence. See Scholastic Offences (below) for the link to Scholastic Discipline regulations.

Plagiarism Checking

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com: <http://www.turnitin.com>

Scholastic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/appeals_discipline/index.html

Accommodation

Only in exceptional circumstances may a student be provided special accommodation in the completion of a course requirement (i.e., exams, papers). To request a one-time accommodation (brief illness, family emergency), the student should inform the professor when they are able so accommodation can be made. Accommodation for an ongoing disability may be requested through Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at Western. SSD is a confidential service, working with students and their programs, normally their graduate chair, to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. The following website provides further information http://grad.uwo.ca/current_students/regulations/14.html

Students are encouraged to consult the program graduate chair if they would like to discuss whether this option would be appropriate for their situation.

Completion of Course Requirements

Course requirements must be completed by the end of the term in which the course is offered (Fall-December 31; Winter - December 30, Summer -August 31). Only in exceptional

circumstances may a student take additional time to complete the course requirements. In such a case, the student must first meet with the Graduate Chair to request permission to carry the incomplete. Medical documentation, where required, will be kept on file in the Sociology graduate program office. More details regarding incompletes are outlined in the Graduate Handbook:

http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate_handbook/course_information.html

Mental Health

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Health and Wellness Western for a complete list of options to obtain help: http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/

Health and Wellness

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. The Wellness Education Centre (lower level UCC) assists students in finding mental health and other related resources best suited to their needs: <http://se.uwo.ca/wec.html>

Western's School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' Living Well website provides tips for thriving at grad school and other helpful information:

http://grad.uwo.ca/current_students/living_well/index.html

Western provides several on-campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre:

<http://www.westernmustangs.ca/index.aspx?path=ims#>

Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Also, we encourage you to check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>

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Evidence Based Assessment example

Program Title:

Co-Response Team (CRT)

Program Blurb:

CRTs are a form of specialized police response to persons in crisis, with a goal of improving police interactions with such individuals and diverting them away from the criminal justice system. While the structure and composition of CRTs vary widely by jurisdictional needs and resources, CRTs are typically comprised of either: (1) an officer-mental health practitioner pair who work together on shift and respond to crises at the request of frontline officers; or (2) an on-call team that is based out of a local hospital or community-based service that also respond to crises at the request of frontline officers.

Assessment:

Is the Program Based on Research? **N**

It is unclear whether the origins of CRT are based on research.

Has the Program Been Independently Evaluated? **Y**

Certain aspects of CRTs have been independently evaluated in numerous jurisdictions, such as Canada, Australia/New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Findings from Canadian jurisdictions show that: CRT officers divert more persons in crisis to hospital than non-CRT officers, persons in crisis have positive interactions with CRT officers, CRTs spent less time at crises, persons in crisis have better engagement with outpatient services following an interaction with a CRT, and that CRTs are able to reduce unnecessary hospital transfers, among other findings.

Was the Program Rigorously Tested? **N**

To-date, CRTs have not been rigorously tested at levels 4 or 5 of the Maryland Scientific Evidence Scale.

Has the Program Evaluation Been Replicated? **Y**

Certain aspects of CRTs have been evaluated in numerous jurisdictions, such as Canada, Australia/New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Was the Program Tested in Canada? **N**

CRTs have been evaluated in some Canadian jurisdictions, such as Toronto (Lamanna et al., 2015; Kirst et al., 2014), Halifax (Kisley et al., 2010), and Hamilton (Fahim et al., 2016).

Comments/Cautions:

The evidence on CRTs is promising, but more research is needed across several outcomes (i.e., officer-level outcomes and program-level outcomes).

Suggested Readings:

Kisely, S., Campbell, L. A., Peddle, S., Hare, S., Pyche, M., Spicer, D., & Moore, B. (2010). A Controlled Before-and-After Evaluation of a Mobile Crisis Partnership Between Mental Health and Police Services in Nova Scotia. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 55(10), 662-668.

Lamanna, D., Kirst, M., Shapiro, G., Matheson, F., Nakhost, A., & Stergiopoulos, V. (2015).
Toronto Mobile Crisis Intervention Team (MCIT): Outcome Evaluation Report. Centre
for Research on Inner City Health and St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto.