

# URP 524: Program Evaluation for Urban Planning

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Non-profits, NGOs, government offices, and foundations are all increasingly required (or being called upon) to evaluate their work, yet planners and other professionals routinely have no training in evaluation. Evaluations allow you to learn from what worked and did not work in the past and to stop reinventing the wheel every time you develop a new plan, policy or program. They also allow you to demonstrate the actual – not expected – impact of planning, policies and programs on society, identify unintended consequences, adjust an intervention mid-way, hold ourselves and other decision-makers accountable for the public promises we make, and ultimately, incorporate more systematic learning into our daily practice. At the same time, if not done well, evaluation can create tunnel vision, create ethical dilemmas, reduce innovation, measure the wrong things, badly measure the right things, add to bureaucratic hurdles, waste time, raise anxieties, delay action, and other pitfalls. This course prepares you to be a more critical consumer of evaluations (i.e. to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of evaluations, to know how to work with evaluators you hire, etc.) and to integrate (effective) evaluative designs and thinking into your future work. It is not a statistics course nor does it focus heavily on the quantitative, “gold-standard” forms of evaluation (i.e. randomized control trials, experiments, or other evaluations that work with large data sets). Rather, the course places a heavy emphasis on learning how to incorporate evaluation into daily decision-making under budget, time, data, and political constraints. Prior knowledge and experience with qualitative and quantitative research methods are useful, but not required.

## Learning Goals:

Through readings, in-class exercises and hands-on projects, at the conclusion of the course you should be able to:

- Explain the purpose and limitations of evaluation, especially for urban planning and policy,
- Describe the skills and competencies to become an effective program evaluator,
- Identify designs and models appropriate for evaluating a variety of urban planning, community development and policy topics,
- Present and defend an evaluation design, process and strategies for ensuring utilization of the findings,
- Recognize components of a well-written and effective program evaluation report, and
- Communicate effectively with decision-makers, citizens and colleagues about evaluation.

## Course requirements:

Course assignments include reading responses, an evaluation methods workshop, and an evaluation design/proposal, peer review and presentation (the proposal includes a logic model, methods, gantt chart, and other core components of evaluation proposals, and depending on the student, can be for a real client).