**URP 524 - PROGRAM EVALUATION FOR URBAN PLANNING**

Fall 2025

Tuesday and Thursday, 8:30a.m. to 10a.m., 3136 Art and Architecture Building

Professor: Lesli Hoey (lhoey@umich.edu)

If you want a widely marketable hard skill – this is a key class. Non-profits (and NGOs, internationally), urban planning departments and other local and state government offices are all increasingly required to evaluate their work, yet planners and other professionals routinely have no training in evaluation. Evaluation is a robust professional field, complete with professional societies, annual conferences and numerous job opportunities.

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 yourself and other decision-makers accountable, and ultimately, incorporate more systematic learning into daily practice and future planning. At the same time, if not done well, evaluation can create tunnel vision, spark ethical dilemmas, reduce innovation, measure the wrong things or badly measure the right things, add bureaucratic hurdles, waste time, raise anxieties, and delay action.

This course aims to prepare you to be a more critical user of both process (formative) and impact (or outcome/summative) evaluations (i.e. to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of evaluation designs, to know how to work with evaluators you may hire, etc.) and to integrate (effective) evaluative 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; other courses on campus in SPH and the School of Public Policy offer these types of evaluation courses). Rather, this course places a heavy emphasis on learning how to incorporate evaluation into daily decision-making under budget, capacity, time, data, and political constraints. The course covers evaluation history, theories, limitations, designs, methods, and ethics, drawing from practice in the US and other country contexts. Prior knowledge and experience with qualitative and quantitative research methods are useful, but not required.

**Learning objectives**

Through discussions of readings, in-class exercises, peer review and presentations, speakers, and a final class assignment where you will develop a plan to evaluate a particular urban plan, program, project or policy (with a real or imagined client), at the conclusion of the course you should be able to:

1. Explain the purpose and limitations of evaluation, especially for urban planning and policy,
2. Describe the skills and competencies to become an effective program evaluator,
3. Identify designs and models appropriate for evaluating a variety of urban planning and policy topics,
4. Apply an equity lens to evaluation methods,
5. Prepare an evaluation design that incorporates appropriate timeframes, methods, staffing plans, and budgeting,
6. Demonstrate how to communicate evaluation findings strategically to diverse audiences through well-designed reports and effective infographics/data visualization, and
7. Communicate effectively with decision-makers, citizens and colleagues about the value of evaluation.