



SCHOOL of  
PUBLIC POLICY

# **Improving Programs through Evaluation-Based Performance Monitoring and Management**

*Preliminary syllabus*

Milan and Rome, Italy  
January 9–20, 2023

## ***Instructors***

Douglas J. Besharov  
Douglas M. Call  
Gian Paolo Barbetta

## ***Guest Instructors***

Burt Barnow  
Patrizia Falzetti  
Naomi Goldstein  
Aline Pennisi  
Jeffrey Smith  
Daniele Vidoni  
Martin Weber  
Michele Zagordo

Even the best designed program can falter from poor implementation or management. Consequently, governments, multinational organizations, NGOs, and funders seek to improve program operations—using the tools of program evaluation to monitor program activities, outcomes, and costs. The most important tools they use include counterfactual identification, performance targets, and comparative effectiveness evaluations.

This, in turn, creates a demand for staff able to apply and interpret the tools of evaluation-based program monitoring. The course seeks to advance the skills and careers of participants by

helping them understand and use these those tools in real-world settings. Students will learn how to:

*Apply common performance measurement frameworks (including logic models, the Balanced Scorecard, and the SMART method);*

*Use logic models to identify and operationalize key elements of performance indicators;*

*Collect and analyze data performance data for program monitoring;*

*Use counterfactuals, performance targets, and comparative effectiveness to gauge performance;*

*Estimate program costs (including total costs, cost-efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and cost-benefit analysis);*

*Develop and apply criteria to create new performance measurements or to assess and improve existing performance measures;*

*Anticipate potential pitfalls of performance measurement (such as cream skimming and goal displacement); and*

*Apply the resulting data to improve performance through management techniques and program adjustments and restructuring.*

In addition to course instruction, the class will also visit senior officials of relevant Italian government offices, international organizations, and NGOs in Milan and Rome. The Rome meetings will include:

- Bank of Italy;
- Italian Court of Auditors (invited);
- Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance;
- Italian National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System (INVALSI); and
- Italian Senate

### **Classroom procedures**

All students are expected to come to class prepared, having read and digested the readings. (Supplemental readings are optional.) If some unavoidable circumstance prevents you from being prepared, please inform the instructors. If you have not done so before class begins, we will assume that you are affirming that you are fully prepared to participate in that day's class discussion.

## Assignments

**Program selection.** Students will select a program for which they will prepare a logic model and set of performance measures (see below). This can be an existing program or a proposed program. (Students may also select a program that is suggested by the instructors.) In 1–2 paragraphs, students will provide an overview of the program, including its purpose, size (both in terms of number of people served and budget), and the government agency or organization that administers the program. The assignment will be due to the instructors on **Monday, January 16 by 5:00 p.m.**

**Logic model.** Using the template provided in the course, students will prepare a logic model of the program that they have selected. The assignment will be due to the instructors on **Monday, January 30 by 5:00 p.m.**

**Program performance measures.** Using their logic models as a guide, students will prepare a set of performance measures for their previously selected programs. This will include the definition of the performance measures, how data will be collected for the performance measures, and, for outcome measures, the method for identifying counterfactuals that will be used for each of the measures. Students will then evaluate each of the performance measures using criteria discussed in the course. If the program already has performance measures, students will use criteria to evaluate the current set of performance measures and propose modifications, deletions, or additions. The assignment will be due to the instructors on **Friday, March 31, 2023.**

## Grading

Program selection	10%
Class participation	25%
Logic model	20%
Program performance measures	45%

All late assignments will receive a deduction of *one-third* a letter grade for each day that the assignment is late, unless permission is granted by the instructor.

## Assigned readings

The course will use two textbooks:

Douglas J. Besharov, Karen J. Baehler, and Jacob Alex Klerman, eds., *Improving Public Services: International Experiences in Using Evaluation Tools to Measure Program Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

James J. Heckman, Carolyn J. Heinrich, Pascal Courty, Gerald Marschke, and Jeffrey Smith, eds., *The Performance of Performance Standards* (Kalamazoo, MI:

Upjohn Institute, 2011). (This book is available for free at the Upjohn Institute website: [https://research.upjohn.org/up\\_press/209/](https://research.upjohn.org/up_press/209/)).

All other assigned readings are available on Canvas (elms.umd.edu).

## CLASS MEETINGS AND TOPICS

*Note:* The course will meet daily (tentatively 9:00–13:00) on weekdays from 9–20 January. The week of 9–13 January, the course will meet in Milan at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. The week of 16–20 January, the course will meet in Rome (at various locations).

### *Milan*

**Monday, January 9. Introduction to the course; Logic models and their use in performance measurement.**

**Tuesday, January 10. The use of counterfactuals in performance monitoring.**

**Wednesday, January 11. Using outcome measures to predict long-term impacts; Pitfalls of performance monitoring systems.**

*Guest lecturer:* Jeffrey Smith, University of Wisconsin.

**Thursday, January 12. Cost, cost-efficiency, and cost-effectiveness measures and calculating costs.**

*Guest lecturer:* Burt Barnow, George Washington University.

**Friday, January 13. Calculating benefits and the use of cost-benefit analysis in performance monitoring.**

*Guest lecturer:* Burt Barnow, George Washington University.

### *Rome*

(Dates tentative)

**Monday, January 16. Performance monitoring frameworks and data collection.**

**Tuesday, January 17. Site visit to INVALSI and Italian Senate.**

*Guest lecturers:* Patrizia Falzetti, Head, Statistics Department, INVALSI; and Daniele Vidoni, Policy Officer, European Commission Directorate-General for Competition

**Wednesday, January 18. Site visit to Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance and Italian Court of Auditors**

*Guest lecturers:* Aline Pennisi, Central Budget Authority, Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance; Daniele Vidoni (see above), Martin Weber, Director, European Court of Auditors; and Michele Zagordo, Strategy, Foresight, Planning, Performance Management Officer, Directorate of the Presidency, European Court of Auditors (ECA).

**Thursday, January 19. Develop and apply criteria to create new performance measures or to assess and improve existing performance measures; Applying evidence to decisionmaking, assessing the credibility of evidence, and the various uses of evidence.**

*Guest lecturer:* Naomi Goldstein, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning, Research, and Evaluation; Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services (ret.).

**Friday, January 20. Rapid cycle experimentation, behavioral economics, and building a learning/evidence culture**

*Guest lecturer:* Naomi Goldstein (see above)