



SCHOOL of
PUBLIC POLICY

Improving Programs through Evaluation-Based Performance Monitoring and Management

Preliminary syllabus

Rome, Italy
Winter 2025

Instructors

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Guest Instructors

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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 Rome. The meetings will include officials from the Bank of Italy, the European Court of Auditors, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Competition, the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance; the Italian Ministry of Education; and the Italian National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System (INVALSI).

Travel information

Telephone

Professor Besharov's cell phone number is +1-301-789-7784

Professor Call's cell phone number is +1-240-351-9866.

Both professors will arrive in Rome on the afternoon of the Sunday before the course begins. When students arrive in Rome, they should text both professors to let them know that they have arrived. The professors will alert students to any schedule changes through both text and email.

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 the Monday of the second week of the course.

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 the Monday following the second week of the course.

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 the last day of March 2025.

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/).

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