

Evaluating the evaluation school: a pilot community program evaluation certificate

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Community Program Evaluation Certificate Team

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Guest presentations in 2015/16 from community partners: Community Recreation for All, Jean Tweed Centre, Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto, Survey Research Unit of the Centre for Urban Health Solutions, and Well Living House.

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About the program

In September 2015, the Centre for Urban Health Solutions at St. Michael's Hospital teamed up with the TD Centre of Learning in Regent Park and the University of Toronto's Innis College to develop a certificate program in community program evaluation.

The certificate was designed to offer students a survey of the principles and processes associated with community program evaluation. We aspired to create a program with particular interest to community residents and frontline workers in the Regent Park area. We also tried to design the curriculum so that it could be applied to:

- 'Regular' program evaluation – organizations evaluating their own programs for their own knowledge and/or to report to funders.
- 'Rebel' program evaluation – communities who wish to evaluate area programs based on their own criteria for what success looks like.

Finally, we aspired to develop a certificate that was a positive experience for instructors and students. We also wanted students to shape the curriculum and learning environment. Some steps we took towards these goals included:

- Creating collective ground rules on day one to foster participation and a safer learning space.
- Placing a suggestion box at the front of the classroom. After each session, students were given blank pieces of paper to suggest improvements and issues for exploration. At the beginning of the following session, instructors would read out the suggestions, and report back on how they were going to respond.
- Sharing beautiful meals provided by the Regent Park Catering Collective (<http://rpcateringcollective.tcld.org>) at each session.
- Providing child care as needed.

The pilot ran as eight evening sessions (1.5 – 2 hours each) at the TD Centre of Learning in Regent Park in Fall 2015. Twenty-seven students graduated with the a community evaluation certificate from U of T, Innis College, and the Centre for Urban Health Solutions. Each student contributed to future versions of the community program evaluation course both through this evaluation and through their input throughout the sessions.

About this evaluation

This evaluation was conducted online, and sent via email to all those who participated in the pilot program after its completion. Nineteen out of 27 graduates completed the survey. Of those who responded to the survey:

- 85 per cent attended all or almost all of the sessions.
- 100 per cent felt comfortable or very comfortable participating and asking questions during the certificate course.
- 100 per cent would recommend the course to a friend.
- 90 per cent felt confident or very confident in their ability to design and carry out a simple evaluation at the end of the course (compared to 47 per cent at the beginning of the course).

What we learned

The course is running for a second time in Spring 2016. As a result of this evaluation, and ongoing feedback from students we have:

Made the following changes:

- Extended the certificate from eight to 10 weeks. We received clear feedback that more time was needed to explore specific topics and respond to questions.
- Included 'open sessions' in the course outline to respond to topics that require more exploration as the course evolves.
- Increased level of interactivity and group work. The original course included many interactive elements. These were flagged both by instructors (anecdotally) and participants (through the evaluation) as a key ingredient of success, and participants suggested that even more group work would be helpful in future. The possibility of in-class tests was also raised and will be explored.
- Limited class size to 30. Although initial plans were to increase class size to 40-45 people, evaluation feedback was clear that a smaller class size was preferable.

Carried forward the following elements:

- Focused presentations from people sharing experiences related to evaluation. Course instructors have extensive expertise in evaluation. Guest presenters were also brought in for topics like survey research, case studies and advocacy. "Really appreciated that the instructors were highly skilled and experienced evaluators, and that they brought in different instructors with specialized skill-sets throughout the course to complement their own."
- Emphasis on feedback, including through the ground rules exercise and suggestion box. 'Approachability' and 'friendliness' of instructors were mentioned in the evaluation as a positive aspect of the course, as was the use of the suggestion box.
- Group meals. "I enjoyed the food too, very good way of engaging with the community and building relations."

Additional input:

- More depth on specific topics including ethics, evaluation budgeting, communicating results, data collection, advocacy, and legal issues related to evaluations. While hopefully the open sessions can be used to address some of these topics, time constraints – even in the context of a 10-week course – made it difficult to include thorough explorations of all of the above.
- Course follow-up. Some evaluation respondents noted that follow-up in the form of a 'part 2,' more advanced course with the same cohort would be beneficial. Other suggestions for follow-up included setting up evaluation 'internships' for graduates at community organizations. An ongoing 'community of practice,' was also suggested by students near the end of the course. While there is not currently capacity to support the above, course partners will explore feasibility.

2017 Spring Community Program Evaluation Certificate Course Outline

Session 1. WELCOME, about the course, working together, intro to evaluation cycle

- Welcome
- What is evaluation?
 - Group discussion
 - Introduction to evaluation cycle
- Ground rules
 - Share first draft
 - Get group input
- About the course

Session 2. What is evaluation, types of evaluation, evaluation ethics

- Revisit the evaluation cycle
- 101 on different types of evaluation, and when to use them
- Research ethics 101

Session 3. Stakeholder mapping / trauma-informed evaluation

- Including stakeholders from the beginner
 - Interactive: stakeholder mapping based on sample program
 - Models for working with stakeholders
- Special guest presentation: trauma-informed evaluation

Session 4. Logic models and theories of change/ program-related advocacy

- What is a theory of change?
- What is a logic model?
- Reflecting your theory of change in your logic model
- Making logic models work for you
 - Interactive: logic models for sample program
- Special guest presentation from Community Recreation for All: program-related advocacy

Session 5. Evaluation design and questions

- Interactive: brainstorming evaluation questions for sample program
- Choosing evaluation questions and ways to measure progress
- Interactive: Matching evaluation questions to different types of data

Session 6. Recruitment and sampling and Methods 1

- Recruitment and sampling:
 - Who do I choose to talk to, and how to I approach them?
 - What is a 'representative sample' and how do I get it?
 - How many people do I need to survey/interview to see a trend?
 - What kind of demographic information should I collect?
- Overview: key informant/semi-structured interviews
 - Interactive: brainstorming key informants for sample program
- Overview: participant observation
- Overview: arts-based methods

Session 7. Methods 2: Focus groups and surveys

- Overview: developing and conducting focus groups
- Overview: developing and administering surveys
 - Interactive: developing a survey based on sample program
- Homework – provide quantitative data in advance of data analysis session

Session 8. Data analysis

- Homework presentations on quantitative data
- Analyzing survey data
- Qualitative data
 - Interactive: coding for themes

Session 9. Case study and applying evaluation results

- Case study (special guest presentation), developing community focused measures: Reclaiming and Indigenizing health services and evaluation research. Presentation will describe the development of a performance measurement system for Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto, while:
 - Working in a good way and respecting Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing and doing
 - Supporting Indigenous leadership and participation in research and evaluation
 - Choosing relevant, community-focused performance indicators and collecting data and designing evaluations on that basis
- Open session: for topic that needs further exploration

Session 10. Practical issues, open session, graduation ceremony

- Timelines, resources, budgeting and team building
- Open session:
 - Clarification re: course material
 - Questions around specific programs/evaluations
- Graduation ceremony!

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**Centre for Urban
Health Solutions**

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