

EVALUATION RESEARCH SPECIALIZATION

EVALUATION AS A FIELD OF STUDY

Evaluation is a diverse field of scholarship and practice that is informed by multiple disciplines and multiple methodological traditions and that is enacted in multiple domains of public policy and private pursuit. Evaluation engages the substance or subject matter of the program or policy being evaluated, as well as the institutional and political contexts within which the program or policy is embedded. Evaluators endeavor to understand the workings of the program/policy they are evaluating and to make judgments about its quality and effectiveness.

In education, evaluators contribute to understanding and assessing the quality and effectiveness of educational policies, curriculum innovations, teaching practices, training programs, teachers and administrators, and technology initiatives. Evaluators are thus located throughout our educational system - public and private, preK-12 and adult, formal and informal. Evaluation is similarly situated in other domains of human endeavor, including health, mental health, social welfare, and justice.

The evaluation research specialization is envisioned as an excellent complement to many other fields of study in education and other domains of social policy and human endeavor. Students who pursue the evaluation research specialization will develop sufficient knowledge and skills so that, upon research specialization completion, they will be able to defensibly and credibly conduct a small-scale evaluation or contribute meaningfully to a more ambitious evaluation. Toward this end, the evaluation research specialization advances the development of student competence in three primary areas:

1. Applied social science research and evaluation methodology;
2. evaluation theory; and,
3. evaluation practice.

More specifically, competence in evaluation importantly rests on methodological competence that is both broad and deep. Because good evaluation practice routinely includes a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, evaluators need basic competence in multiple social science methodologies. This includes understanding of large-scale experimental approaches to social inquiry, basic skills in survey methods, and firm grounding in interpretive, qualitative approaches to social inquiry. Thoughtful evaluation practice also rests on conceptual knowledge of the field, as represented in the evolution and diversification of evaluation theory, and experiential familiarity with the field practice of evaluation, as best captured in an actual evaluation project.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE EVALUATION RESEARCH SPECIALIZATION

Prerequisite

Prior to beginning the evaluation specialization, students should seek out opportunities to develop a general understanding of issues and methodologies in educational research. This can be accomplished in many ways - notably, through prior applied research experience or enrollment in an introductory methods course (CI / SPED 550, EPSY 573, HRE 580, EPS 515, or PHIL 475).

Coursework

An additional 16-24 hours of coursework (16 minimum) is then required for the evaluation specialization, as detailed below.

Evaluation project

The evaluation specialization also requires completion of an evaluation project in the field. This project may be completed in conjunction with course requirements, as an independent study, or as part of other research/field experiences in which students engage.

Plan

Recall that your Evaluation Research Specialization plan should include a completed RS form, signed by the advisor, and a brief written statement that addresses the following:

1. your objective or rationale for selecting and developing this specialization, how evaluation contributes to your academic and career aspirations;
2. the coursework and experience that will support the fulfillment of the evaluation RS requirements and a tentative timeline for completion; and,
3. a proposal for how you plan to fulfill the capstone project requirement.

Recall also that you are encouraged to submit this plan before completion of your third semester of doctoral coursework.

Final submission

When all requirements have been fulfilled, students should re-submit the RS form, again signed by their advisor, and a copy of their evaluation project.

COURSES FOR THE EVALUATION RESEARCH SPECIALIZATION

Because evaluation is a field that relies on methodologies from other social sciences, but also has its own body of theory and practice, development of evaluation competence minimally requires an investment of 16-24 hours of study (depending on students' prior academic and field experiences) and optimally involves more.

The sixteen required hours include 2 courses in methods, representing two different methodological traditions, 1 course in evaluation theory, and 1 course in evaluation practice. Currently approved courses for the evaluation specialization are listed below.

Methods (8 hours minimum)

Students should take at least two courses representing two of the following three sets of methodological traditions in order to develop basic competence in more than one approach to applied social science. Students who already have completed equivalent coursework may petition the evaluation research specialization committee for a waiver of some or all of these methods requirements.

(1) Set one: Quantitative, statistical analysis

Basic level courses:

EPSY 580 - Statistical Inference in Educ

EPSY 581 - Applied Regression Analysis

OR, PSYC 406 and 407

Intermediate-Advanced level courses:

EPSY 588 - Covar Struct and Factor Models

EPSY 584 - Multivar Anlys in Psych and Ed

EPSY 585 - Theories of Measurement I
EPSY 582 - Advanced Statistical Methods
[And see other courses in the Quantitative research specialization.]

(2) Set two: Qualitative methods

Basic level courses:

EPSY 577 - Foundations of Qual Methods; EPSY 578 - Qualitative Inquiry Methods
CI 509, Section AR - Qualitative Methods in Research

Intermediate-Advanced level courses:

EPSY 490, Section E - Case Study Res Methods
CI 507, Section QR - Conducting Qualitative Research
CI 509, Section AR - Action Research
CI 519 - Methods of Child Study

[And see other courses in the Qualitative research specialization.]

(3) Set three: Survey and quasi-experimental design

EPSY 574 - Quasi-Experimental Design
[Other courses to be identified.]

Evaluation Theory (4 hours minimum)

EPSY 470 - Intro to Evaluation Theory
EPSY 570 - Adv Theories of Ed Evaluation [more advanced level]

Evaluation Practice (4 hours minimum)

CI518/EPSY 572 - Evaluation of Edu Programs
EPSY 471 - Intro to Evaluation Methods
HRE 585 - Program Evaluation

RECOMMENDED COURSE SEQUENCES FOR THE EVALUATION RESEARCH SPECIALIZATION

Students are encouraged to complete their research specialization requirements within the first two years of doctoral study. The field project should be the culminating or final activity within the research specialization, so it should be conducted after students have developed some competence in methods and grounding in evaluation theory.

So, during the first year of graduate study, students pursuing the evaluation research specialization could concentrate on developing basic competence in at least two different methodologies. During the second year, students could take the evaluation theory and practice courses, completing the evaluation project as part of the practice course or during the subsequent summer or fall. Alternatively, students could take both methods and evaluation theory courses during their first year of study, again deferring the practical project until these requirements are completed.

Once again, it is strongly recommended that students go beyond the 4 course minimum requirement and continue to develop both their methodological competence, probably concentrating in one methodological tradition, and their knowledge of and experience with evaluation.

PROJECT REQUIREMENT FOR THE EVALUATION RESEARCH SPECIALIZATION

In addition to coursework, students are required to complete a supervised evaluation project in the field and to submit the final evaluation report from this project as evidence of competence in evaluation practice. This project could be conducted in conjunction with EPSY 471, HRE 585, or CI 518 in conjunction with other courses or as an independent internship or independent study.

The evaluation project should be conducted under the supervision of a qualified evaluation practitioner, either an instructor in one of the designated evaluation practice courses or a supervisor identified with the assistance and approval of the student's advisor. The project can be conducted in conjunction with an evaluation practice course or separately for academic credit or remuneration. If conducted separately, the project should be of the scope equivalent to at least 2 hours of credit.

The project should conform to accepted standards for professional evaluation practice, in particular, the Joint Committee's Standards for Evaluations of Educational Programs, Projects, and Materials.

A final report on this evaluation project should be submitted to the evaluation research specialization committee along with the appropriate paperwork. If the final report has joint authorship, a note from the student or the student's advisor or supervisor is needed indicating that each student had a primary role in project design, implementation and reporting.