

## **EDLD 601 Evaluation of Nonprofit Organizations**

### **- Retrospect Critique -**

Daniela C. Schröter

The following is a brief summary and critique of EDLD 601, Evaluation of nonprofit organizations taught in fall 2005 by Thomaz Chianca and Daniela Schröter. This class was an eight week two-credit seminar offered by the Extended University Programs to serve Master's of Arts programs in Public Administration. While there is no official description of the class in the Graduate Course Catalogue, Evaluation in nonprofit organizations should not be confused with EDLD 601-Workshop Seminar, which is offered in Educational Leadership.

#### ***Participants***

Evaluation of nonprofit organizations is required for some programs within Public Administration and an elective for others. There is no prerequisite for enrolling in the class. At the beginning of the semester, there were 17 students. The majority of these students focused on nonprofit or arts administration and one student was from the PhD program in Interdisciplinary Health Studies. One student only attended twice and later on withdrew from the course due to health problems. Most of the students had little or no experience with evaluation or research.

#### ***Content***

The course was based on Davidson's (2004) *Evaluation Methodology Basics* and Scriven's (2005) *Key Evaluation Checklist*. The syllabus (see S) was largely derived from Davidson's 2003 syllabus to EVAL600, Foundations in Evaluation. As such the class was intended to provide an introductory crash course to (i) the logic and methodology of evaluation, (ii) designing good evaluations, (iii) basic critical thinking, and (iv) the evaluation profession. By the end of the course students should have been able to (i) demonstrate a clear understanding of the nature and purpose of evaluation, and the distinctions between evaluation, descriptive research, and related terms, (ii) describe, distinguish among, and critically evaluate the usefulness and validity of selected approaches to evaluation (e.g., goal-free, theory-based, utilization-focused), and to identify the conditions under which each should be used, (iii) critically evaluate evaluations, (iv) design solid, mixed-method evaluations under various conditions and

constraints, (v) use a number of evaluation-specific methodologies, including needs assessment, the determination of criteria of merit, the conversion of descriptive findings into explicitly evaluative conclusions, and the synthesis of multiple pieces of evaluative information to draw overall conclusions.

Seven of the classes were primarily based on presentations by instructors or guest visitors (Toni Berkeley from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Chris Coryn, Michael Scriven, and Daniel Stufflebeam). The remaining classes focused on student presentations. Because the timeline of the course was rather tight, the course was more instructor-centered than desirable. There was little room for in-class exercises. If exercises were included in the class, they are embedded within the instructors' presentations or attached behind (See C1-C6, M).

Instructors made strong use of the GoWMU web-system, where instructors and students could post announcements, news, links, files, and messages, etc. The system allowed both students and instructors to post presentations and materials for download, and thus, functioned as a course shared drive.

## **Requirements**

Successful completion of the class was based on four primary requirements, listed, described, and critiqued below.

***In-class assignments and participation (20%):*** *You will be required to attend class and come prepared (with all the reading done) to actively participate in in-depth discussions. Just being there will not be enough. You will also be asked to hand in a few in-class assignments and group exercises. These may consist of pop quizzes about the readings, reflections and/or responses to book exercises and other exercises.*

As there was little time for delivering the course content, in-class assignments were limited. Pop-quizzes were not conducted as most homework was based on the readings, thus students had to read to do their homework. The instructors also found that the content of the course was rather challenging for most of the students, thus more time had to be scheduled for explanation and reassurance that concepts were understood.

***Homework Assignments (30%):*** *Homework assignments consist of 11 exercises from your textbook which will help you develop your evaluation plan. You can receive up to 10 points for each exercise. You are required to critically think through issues of your evaluand and/or apply some of the principles we have been learning. The assignments are designed to be preliminary slices of your project paper. Assignments will be graded for validity, clarity, and brevity. Assignments are to be sent to both instructors prior to*

*each class and a hard copy is to be brought to class for potential group discussion and exercise. Your assignment with the lowest grade will be dropped.*

Because students were challenged with the assignments, comprehensive feedback was provided as well as opportunities to resubmit homework. Some students revised their homework up to three times to approach an average of 8 points per homework. In hindsight, these assignments were too much; not only for the students but also for the instructors considering that this course was only a two-credit course and students had to submit up to three assignments per week. This was challenging for the instructors because they committed to the comprehensive feedback throughout the course.

***Oral presentation and metaevaluation (20%):*** *Each student will present his/her evaluation plan to the class and take the lead in the metaevaluation of one of his/her classmates. The presentation should take at least 10 minutes and should not exceed 15 minutes. The metaevaluation will include follow-up questions to the presenter and a brief critique of the presented plan. The metaevaluation should not exceed 10 minutes.*

The metaevaluation component was not implemented as planned due to time constraints. Instead students had to metaevaluate their own plans and bring the result to class. Student presentations varied tremendously in quality and suggest that little experience with presentations existed for a number of them.

***Evaluation plan project paper (30%):*** *You will be required to write an evaluation plan for a project or program (which must be approved by the instructor within the first two weeks of the course). You may work alone, or with one or two other classmates.*

None of the students decided to deliver group projects. While sample plans were provided to the students, some struggled to integrate the lessons from the class into the KEC framework. Students were required to submit a draft plan in the sixth week to get instructor feedback for their final product.

***Listserv participation (10%), Extracredit:*** *If you are not happy with your performance and want to improve your grade through extra credit you are invited to post up to three times throughout this course on the WMU listserv. You may either pose an interesting and/or challenging issue in evaluation or to your evaluand or respond to an ongoing thread. The listserv is the official listserv of the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in evaluation and is used for corresponding courses. Thus, you will have the opportunity to read postings from Dr. Michael Scriven, the director of the interdisciplinary Ph.D. program and most renowned evaluation theorist as well as his students. You may receive responses from them as well. To join the listserv, visit <http://evaluation.wmich.edu/archives/eval-wmu.html>. You will be asked to enter your name and e-mail address. If you experience any problems, please ask your instructors for help.*

Due to the tremendous workload and opportunity to resubmit assignments, none of the students decided to use the opportunity for extra credit, although it had been moved to the course listserv of EDLD 601.

## *Grading*

The grading was based on the following rubric:

<b>A</b>	<b>100-94%</b>	<b>Exceptional</b> , extraordinary work.
<b>BA</b>	<b>93-88%</b>	<b>Excellent</b> work. Lacks minor points and/or is less clearly or precisely presented than expected for an A.
<b>B</b>	<b>87-82%</b>	<b>Very good</b> work. Most points were hit and expressed relatively clearly and concisely. Few irrelevant points were presented, but no invalid one.
<b>CB</b>	<b>81-76%</b>	<b>Good</b> work. Many of the points were addressed, but some irrelevant and/or invalid points were listed, and several important ones missed. Clarity of presentation requires improvement.
<b>C</b>	<b>75-70%</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> work. On the right track, but many points were missing, while irrelevant or invalid ones were presented. Clarity of presentation requires extensive improvement.
<b>F</b>	<b>&lt;70%</b>	<b>Fail</b> . Made some attempt, but really missed the mark. Most points made were invalid, irrelevant, or trivial.

As described in the requirement section, the homework assignments and final plan were weighted stronger (30% each) than in-class participation and the presentation (20% each). This was decided upon complexity and time needed for completing the assignments. Homework was initially graded by both instructors to determine inter-rater reliability. Later on each instructor focused on a group of students due reduce time constraints. A data base was developed in MS Excel to track student performance. An excerpt of that table is displayed below.

Student & Topic	Homework 30%	Participation 20%	Presentation 20%	Final Plan 30%	Total Percent	Grade
A	26.1	18	16	25	85.1	B
B	25.8	20	16	25	86.8	B
C	24.9	18	18	27.5	88.4	BA
D	25.5	18	16	30	89.5	BA
E	29.0	18	19	26	92.0	BA
F	28.5	18	20	27	93.5	A
G	28.1	18	19	29	94.1	A
H	27.5	20	17	30	94.5	A

Each student received a final summary of their course performance. An example is illustrated below:

XXX:

It was a pleasure having you in our class. The table below provides your sub-grades in required components of the course as well as some additional feedback. Overall, your performance in this course was good.

Congratulations and all the best for your future work!

Thomaz & Daniela

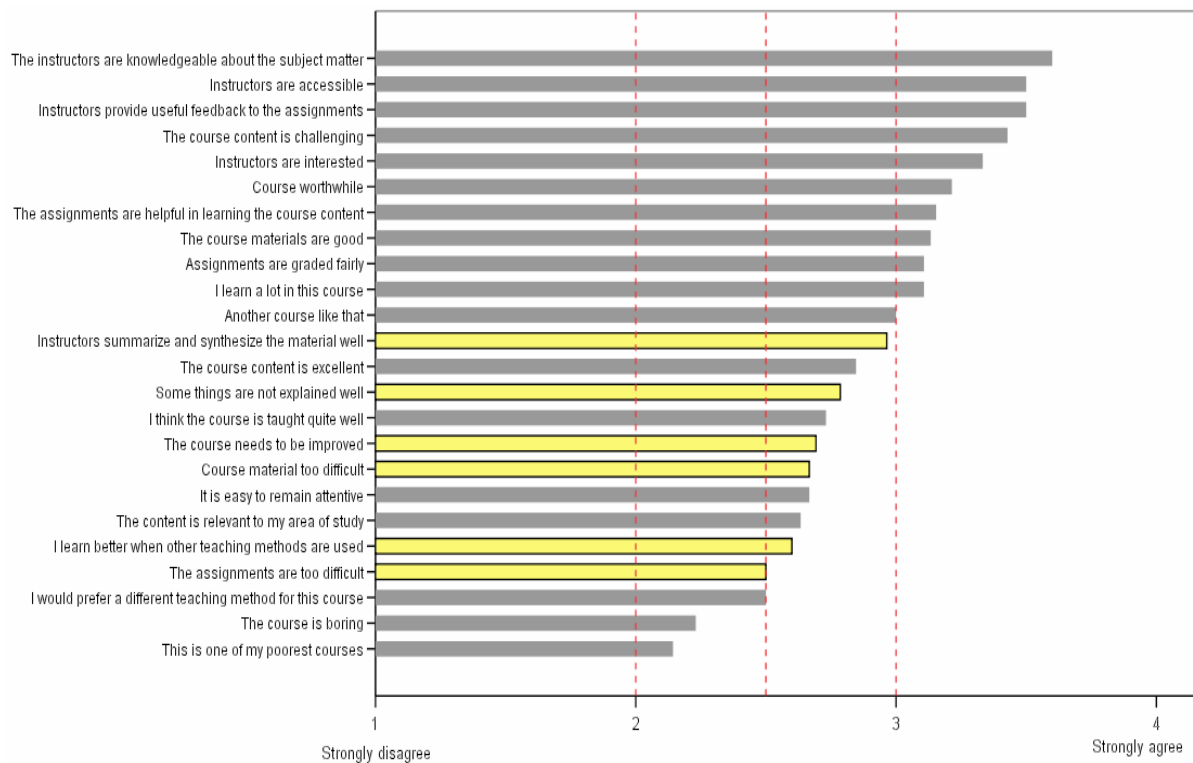
	<b>Percentage Achieved</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Rationale/Final Feedback</b>
<b><i>In-class participation</i></b> (20%)	18%	BA	You contributed some good questions to the class, but could have been a little more active in sharing some more of your experience.
<b><i>Homework Assignments/ Exercises</i></b> (30%)	29%	A-	You worked hard to achieve good results in your homework.
<b><i>Presentation</i></b> (20%)	19%	A	Your presentation was very good.
<b><i>Evaluation Plan</i></b> (30%)	26%	BA	Your plan improved significantly from the initial draft submitted. Good work!
<b><i>Total</i></b>	92%	BA	

### ***Student Feedback***

In mid-semester, students were asked to provide feedback to the course. A survey with Likert-type items (from 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree) and open-ended responses was provided by the instructors to assess how students perceived the course and how it could be improved. The open-ended responses (for example “I am just too stupid for this course”) were not very useful for implementing change. The summary of the other items is displayed on the next page, was provided to all students, and served for discussion in class.

Generally, we received the impression that students were somewhat overwhelmed with the course assignments and requirements, but also that they appreciated the course and did not mind working hard.

	Min	Max	M	SD
The instructors are knowledgeable about the subject matter	3.0	4.0	3.6	.51
Instructors are accessible	3.0	4.0	3.5	.52
Instructors provide useful feedback to the assignments	3.0	4.0	3.5	.52
The course content is challenging	2.0	4.0	3.4	.65
Instructors are interested	2.0	4.0	3.3	.72
Course worthwhile	2.0	4.0	3.2	.58
The assignments are helpful in learning the course content	2.0	4.0	3.2	.90
The course materials are good	2.0	4.0	3.1	.52
Assignments are graded fairly	1.0	4.0	3.1	.88
I learn a lot in this course	2.0	4.0	3.1	.79
Another course like that	2.0	4.0	3.0	.76
Instructors summarize and synthesize the material well	2.0	4.0	3.0	.57
The course content is excellent	2.0	4.0	2.8	.80
Some things are not explained well	2.0	4.0	2.8	.70
I think the course is taught quite well	1.0	4.0	2.7	.73
The course needs to be improved	2.0	4.0	2.7	.75
It is easy to remain attentive	1.0	4.0	2.7	.72
Course material too difficult	1.0	4.0	2.7	.98
The content is relevant to my area of study	1.0	4.0	2.6	.90
I learn better when other teaching methods are used	2.0	4.0	2.6	.63
I would prefer a different teaching method for this course	1.0	4.0	2.5	.82
The assignments are too difficult	1.0	4.0	2.5	1.02
The course is boring	1.0	4.0	2.2	.93
This is one of my poorest courses	1.0	4.0	2.1	1.10



## *Critique-Would I do it just the same?*

No! Although the course has been a great experience to teaching evaluation, it has also served as a learning experience.

### *1. Target group*

The target of the course should have been considered more clearly. Most students did not have any experience or background in evaluation or research specifically. As such, there was little or no baseline to build on and the content was challenging and highly advanced to most students in the group.

### *2. Content*

With respect to the target group I would not focus as much on doing evaluation but rather on what to look for in good proposals for evaluations. Instead of having students choosing their own evaluand I would provide cases to work on throughout the semester.

### *3. Requirements*

I would still require intensive reading, but instead of asking for all the homework assignments I would have more pop-up quizzes and brief exams to test reading, comprehension, and learning progress.