



What Makes a Great Graduate Program in Evaluation? Content, design, and systemic issues

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Jane Davidson, Western Michigan University
Deborah Wasserman, Ohio State University



Overview

- The needs assessment
 - What knowledge, skills, competencies, and other attributes do evaluators need?

- Features of a great program
 - Content & design
 - Context & systemic issues
 - People (faculty & students)



What skills do evaluators need?

- To identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed, we asked:
 - People who hire evaluators
 - Experienced evaluation practitioners
 - Leading evaluation experts

- The main questions:
 - What distinguishes the very best evaluators you have worked with from other evaluators?
 - What knowledge, skills, qualities, etc are hardest to find in evaluators?

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Needs assessment results

- The results fell into five main categories:
 - Content and context knowledge
 - Research and analysis skills
 - Evaluation knowledge and skills
 - Consulting skills
 - Other qualities and aptitudes

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Content & context knowledge

- Content knowledge
 - Knowing about the specific intervention, program, policy, etc
 - Knowing about the content area in general, e.g.
 - Education
 - Health
 - International development
 - Organizational psychology
 - Criminology
- Context knowledge
 - Understanding the business/sector/country
 - Examples:
 - Political context
 - Culture and resource issues in specific communities (e.g., developing countries)
 - Business strategy/the bottom line

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Research skills

- Research design and conceptualization
 - What do we need to know? → How can we find that out?
 - What is practical to do within available budget and timeline?
 - What are the trade-offs among design options?
- Data analysis
 - Qualitative (focus groups, interviews, observation, etc)
 - Quantitative (t-test, ANOVA, regression, path analysis, etc)
 - Blending qualitative and quantitative information

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Evaluation knowledge & skills

- Knowledge of multiple evaluation approaches, e.g.
 - Goal-based
 - Needs-based
 - Participatory/ utilization-focused
 - Theory-based
 - etc
- Large toolkit of evaluation skills, e.g.
 - Evaluation techniques developed in multiple disciplines (not just the “home” discipline)
 - Training specifically in evaluation, not just research (e.g., needs assessment, logic modeling, synthesizing multiple results, etc)

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Consulting skills

- Communication skills
 - Communication with people from different backgrounds, and at different levels
 - Written communication skills (clear & concise)
- Political skills
 - Awareness of political agendas
 - Integrity
 - Objectivity; not easily influenced or pressured
- Practical/pragmatic approach
 - Working within time and budget limits

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Other qualities of great evaluators

- A quick study—up to speed fast on virtually anything
- Able to think well on one's feet
- Common sense
- Able to see the "big picture"
- Flexible/adaptable
- Self-starter; excellent at multi-tasking
- Works well under time pressure
- Open to diverse perspectives; willing to learn
- Social presence/confidence, but not arrogance
- Sense of humor and patience

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Qualities of a great program

CONTENT

- Academic/practical balance
- Covers a diverse range of evaluation approaches
- Evaluation, consulting, & managerial skills
- Multidisciplinary approach
- Qualitative & quantitative methods covered well
- Covers a broad range of evaluands (not just the familiar)

DESIGN

- Students & advisors select each other
- Program adapts to individual student needs
- Students specialize in a cognate of their choice
- Opportunities to work on multiple, real-world evaluation projects

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Qualities of a great program

CONTEXT

- Based in a setting where there is extensive evaluation activity going on (and money-earning opportunities!)
- Earning and experiential opportunities allow timely completion

SYSTEMIC ISSUES

- Not restricted in scope by being based in a specific department (esp. if a narrowly focused one)
- Strong links with external organizations, and with evaluation practitioners

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Qualities of a great program

FACULTY

- Strong, innovative leaders in evaluation
- Have broad-based real-world evaluation experience, and can convey “know-how”
- Have in-depth knowledge of evaluation theory and methodology

STUDENTS

- Sharp/quick thinking
- Quick acting/“on the ball”
- Open-minded/seek out diverse perspectives and viewpoints—and criticism!
- Really want to learn something new
- Enjoy the challenge of spending time outside their comfort zones

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