NM Evaluation Lab @ UNM Evaluation 2015-2016:

Focus Group, Interviews and Recommendations

Focus Group with Fellows

The experience was a valuable opportunity to apply classroom learnings to community work and it was very successful.

Teams that developed logic models felt they served the evaluation and organizations well.

Fellows desire more training and space for intentional relationship building. This should include how to address resistance to evaluation and communicating that evaluation is there to help and be useful (avoiding 'us' vs. 'them').

Fellows feel more confidence but most do not yet feel prepared to conduct evaluation independently - 'Knowing what we don't know,' but having the tools to seek guidance or training in needed areas. Now have a network of others from whom to seek advice.

Evaluation Lab experience just scratched the surface of what there is to know about evaluation but it provided a good start.

Workload heavy during the first half of year. Additions to the curriculum during the year made planning more challenging.

Fellows felt supported by their mentors but there was a lot of variability among mentor styles and level of involvement. Fellows liked when mentors were more involved in the beginning and then gave the teams more autonomy.

There is low support or commitment from some UNM departments.

Fellows felt a sense of comradery and appreciation for the diverse set of skills and resources their classmates brought to the program. Pairing of Graduate Students with Undergraduates was a mutually beneficial working relationship.

Overall diversity and variety of guest speakers contributed greatly to increased cultural humility of the group. Working with Spanish-speaking populations was an asset and a positive learning experience for practicing cultural humility.

Interviews with Organizations

A positive experience for all the organizations.

Organizations pointed to the benefit of having capacity of people assigned to the work, culture of quality improvement or evaluation, clear mandate from leadership, time to work collaboratively with the team from the Evaluation Lab.

There is vulnerability in allowing others to see your data. Developing relationships and trust is important. Must also trust evaluators when they interact with program recipients.

Appreciated students' openness to learning about the organizations and their responsiveness. Students were well prepared and professional.

Appreciated the collaborative and participatory nature of the experience.

Teams had complementary skills. The researchers were a big asset in addition to the students.

After the Workshop in April and learning how the evaluation work differed amongst the organizations, some organizations said they would have utilized the expertise of their team's mentor more.

Improved perception of UNM and its commitment to community. Some felt that the association with UNM was not as clear and this should be highlighted.

Results of evaluations have been useful and built capacity. Improving processes to collect better data and be more data driven.

Organizations now have improved language to talk about what they do and the impact of the organizations' programs.

Having an external evaluation is very valuable for seeking funding.

Logic models were very helpful.

Concerns about what the transition to a new team will mean. Do not want to skimp on relationship building but want to keep moving forward. There is also the benefit of new perspectives with new Fellows joining the team.

The work with the Evaluation Lab is helping to support movement toward more data sharing and collaboration among organizations in the community.

Recommendations

From Fellows' Perspective

Assess differences in strengths, skills, and cultural experiences early on to customize learning opportunities and assemble teams.

Split up required amongst the Fellows who would then present the readings rather than having everyone read all the readings. This would decrease the workload and save time by having their classmates teach the content of their assigned article. This went along with a desire for more Fellow presentations or teachings.

Offer more credits given the workload of the program (a lab or studio component, and 400-level credits).

Build in more teambuilding, collaboration, and feedback among Fellows.

Hold an event with students and organizations in the beginning of the year to dispel false ideas about evaluation, allow time to build relationships, and set a collaborative tone.

Have weekly meetings with mentors during the 2nd half of the year

Establish a Senior Fellow Program to provide continuity to the organizations.

Address a Professional Development or 'Next Step' process for Fellows to be better equipped to market the skills that they have learned and to apply for jobs. Help Fellows focus on developing their resumes geared toward evaluation jobs.

Focus on make participating departments more committed to the program. Build relationships and include more departments in the future.

From Organizations' Perspective

Create space for the organizations and Lab teams to start interacting earlier to build relationships and help Lab teams learn more about the organizations and what is needed.

Require entire team and organizational leadership to be present for first meetings to promote a shared understanding. Ideal to have leaders in the organization directly involved in the entire evaluation process.

Have logic models be a part of what is developed with each organization in the beginning and to establish clear objectives for each evaluation in the beginning.

Have one student continue to be part of the team as a coach or Senior Fellow.

Continue with the same organizations over time to have deeper impact. Offer database support (i.e., selecting, managing) to organizations.