



2018-2019 Results and Recommendations from Student Interviews
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May 31, 2019

Each year, the Evaluation Lab holds a student focus group in order to assess whether the Fellowship program is meeting its goal of supporting students to develop the knowledge, skills and tools they need to design and implement program evaluations that reflect organizations' values and missions. Students also complete a "pre" and "post" skills survey; a summary of the skills survey is provided separately.

Audrey Cooper, a 2018-2019 Senior Fellow and member of the Evaluation of the Evaluation Lab (Eval²) Team,¹ conducted a focus group with students on April 15, the Monday following the Annual Evaluation Lab Workshop on April 12.

Each student paired with another student for each set of questions and rotated per set. Students wrote down their individual replies, discussed with their partner in depth, and then sharing with the whole group. This protocol changed when students stated they felt comfortable sharing with the whole group instead of speaking in depth with a partner. Two students participated via Zoom and were partnered together.

The Eval² Team coded responses as a group. Audrey and Charla Henley then met several times to condense the codes and extract themes.

The seven tables below include the question, positive themes, ideas for improvement, quotes and recommendations for each topic.

(1) FALL SEMESTER: What worked? What would you do differently?	
Positive themes	Delta themes
Curriculum had a good pace with a solid foundation in evaluation and a variety of content in data analysis and literature review that prepared students to conduct evaluation. Guest speakers and site visits were highlights of the semester for students.	Students reported difficulty with the timeline because they found the coursework in addition to data collection and building relationships with the team and organization was overwhelming. Students who started their projects in the fall found that the Learning Community would have been beneficial to them in the first semester. Additionally, students found that evaluation learned in the abstract can be difficult to comprehend until they had the chance to apply it. Team leads and senior fellows need to provide clear guidance and communication as well as have substantial involvement with the team and knowledge of timelines and deadlines.
Quotes <i>"I felt like I learned a lot of stuff out of my comfort zone."</i> <i>"I would have liked to have done a mini evaluation where we practice everything like a focus group in class followed by coding the focus group together."</i> <i>"I would have liked to know what the time commitment would have been in the fall. It was a lot of work."</i>	
Recommendations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for students to apply principles of evaluation in a practice setting before applying them in the project. • Host a GIS Mapping guest speaker. Add didactic on finding grants for organizations relating to the evaluation. • Make time commitment to the course explicit. 	

¹ 2019-2020 Eval² Team members were: Sonia Bettez (Lab Associate Director), Melissa Binder (Lab Director), Audrey Cooper (Senior Fellow), Claudia Díaz Fuentes (Team Lead) and Felicity Fonseca (Fellow).

(2) SPRING SEMESTER / LEARNING COMMUNITY: What worked? What would you do differently? Anything else about the course?	
Positive Themes	Delta Themes
Learning through peer to peer feedback was the highlight. Students enjoyed the actual work of the project and how all the pieces came together in the Spring Semester.	Students felt that learning community assignments and expectations with regards to sharing work and giving feedback were vague. Students also felt that the timeline of the project did not align with the learning community, as many students had nearly completed their projects by the time the learning community started. Feedback was difficult to give, and the most valued feedback came from Evaluation Lab staff. Some students felt feedback was not useful.
<p style="text-align: center;">Quotes</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“Overall, I loved the class! It was super valuable to me! I really enjoyed being on the journey with everyone in the class.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“My evaluation team wasn't interested in the Learning Community feedback I received.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“I liked to be able to call in where ever I needed to be on zoom. It worked really well and helped me manage all my time to do all the work outside of class.”</i></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clarity on assignment and expectations in the learning community. • Provide feedback to the students on providing feedback to their peers. • Touch base with students more regularly to gauge usefulness of feedback they received. • Consider syncing the timeline of the Learning Community with the project timelines. • Give ample of notice around large assignments like poster creation. • Incorporate guest speakers and ECHO lectures into class time. • Devote time to report during class a group. 	

(3) What skills did you develop from being an Evaluation Lab Fellow?
How to: Conduct evaluation, create an evaluation plan, strategize, develop questions, design an evaluation, create a scope of work, create surveys, create data systems, code data, analyze qualitative/quantitative data, create data visualizations, create graphs, report results, create working relationships, create budgets, create a poster, write reports, present information to a group, create a focus group protocol, conduct a focus group, think critically, develop a program, work together as a team, and improve writing skills.
<p style="text-align: center;">Quotes</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“I think the process of thinking through what needs to be looked at was the most eye-opening for me.”</i></p>

(4) How are partner organizations embedding evaluation?

Students reported that most organizations are embedding evaluation through such means as including evaluation in internal personnel duties, creating buy-in amongst the staff, and using evaluation tools such as surveys and logic models. Students reported that other organizations have mixed buy-in from organization staff and board members and that embedding evaluation takes time. At least one organization has not showed signs of embedding evaluation.

Recommendations

"If possible, I would like to incorporate searching for grants in the evaluation plan and report. Nothing intensive but a quick search that allow student fellows the opportunity to search for possible monies and pass them along to organizations. This would build the odds of the organization following through with evaluation recommendations and allow students an opportunity to build this skill."

(5) Your Partner Organization:

What were the challenges of working with your organization? What were the benefits to you of working with your organization? Anything else about working with the organization?

Positive Themes

Overall, students reported positive experiences working with their organizations. Highlights included working with supportive and enthusiastic staff, learning about unfamiliar fields of work, and experiencing satisfaction from helping an organization. Some students would like to continue to work with their respective organizations in the future.

Delta Themes

Primarily, students experienced issues in the areas of scheduling meetings, lack of responsiveness from organizations, and lack of clarity and sometimes moving goals regarding the Scope of Work. There were also issues when a fellow or team lead was an employee of the organization due to power dynamics and lack of representation from non-Evaluation Lab associated staff.

Quotes

"[Working with the organization] helped us in big picture thinking and strategic planning."

"We all bonded rather than just being people working on some project."

"I really gained a lot from the process and strengthened my interest in NM policy."

Recommendations

- Students could use more coaching around when to ask for help from Team Leads and Evaluation Lab Staff in navigating difficult dynamics when issues with an organization arise.
- Trend: Evaluation Lab ought to look at the relationships and experiences of fellows, senior fellows, and Evaluation Lab staff working in an organization over the course of several years and dig deeper into how to help those people have the support they need to participate in the Evaluation Lab.

**(6) The UNM Team (Fellows, Senior Fellows & Team Leads):
What worked? What was challenging? What would you do differently? Anything else?**

Positive Themes	Delta Themes
Many students reported positive experiences with Team Leads describing them as strong guides, prioritizing students, effective communicators, hardworking, and on-task. Most students reported feeling like their teams were strong, efficient, communicative, and complementary in skill sets. Some students formed friendships and felt that teams were well matched to the organizations.	Students reported coordinating schedules as a primary issue especially for students who had to drive long distances for meetings. Some students reported that working with fellows, team leads, and senior fellows was difficult due to poor communication, lack of engagement, and rushed deadlines. Also, team leads who already had strong relationships with organizations did not bring students up to speed before diving into the project.

Quotations

“We were effective, [good] at communicating, delegating work and coming up with a consensus on important decisions.”

“[It was difficult] figuring out how to work as a group: Group dynamics, assigning tasks, taking responsibility, not leaving things to the last minute.”

- Recommendations**
- The EvalLab should devote time to coaching students and Evaluation Lab staff through difficult situations that arise from lack of clarity and communication as well as expectations from the students and staff.
 - Address issues sooner than later.
 - Regular team check-ins outside of organization meetings would be helpful, too.

(7) The Workshop – what worked? What would you do differently?

Positive Themes	Delta Themes
Students reported that the workshop was a great experience which fostered confidence. Students expressed appreciation for increasing presentation and poster making skills albeit acknowledging that these were challenging. Additionally, students felt that the workshop was well planned and well executed with especial enjoyment of the panel discussion and networking opportunities.	Students would have liked a greater number of presentations of shorter duration with more breaks in between. Also, students would have preferred the presentations to be more interactive and less didactic, possibly rotating small groups through activities run by the students. The icebreaker was disorganized. There was too much sitting especially after lunch. The speakers needed a microphone. Students would have liked a more engaging keynote speaker who spoke for less time. Students were adamant that they ought to be able to see their fellow students’ poster presentations. Logistically, students’ roles could have been sorted out more clearly ahead of time and registration was far too crowded.

- Recommendations**
- Allow students to see each other’s poster presentations by splitting the poster viewing to half before lunch and half after lunch.
 - Avoid feeding participants a large meal followed by lots of sitting.
 - Create more engaging sessions.
 - Consider better coordination of icebreaker or scrapping silent icebreaker altogether.
 - Consider having a huddle with all the students and staff the morning of the workshop to review roles and responsibilities and allow time for questions.
 - Provide microphones for speakers.

The Evaluation Lab is meeting the goal of improving evaluation capacity through student-conducted evaluation in local non-profits in New Mexico.

The Evaluation Lab is largely meeting the goal of embedding evaluation within the organizations as evidenced by their continued progress toward including evaluation in staff duties, strong buy-in amongst staff, and the regular use of logic models and evaluation planning tools.

The Evaluation Lab was effective in developing students' evaluation skills through classroom activities, as teams with other students, team leads, and organizations. There are areas for improvement such as helping teams communicate more effectively amongst themselves as well as looking into the dynamics when fellows and team leads are members of the organization staff.