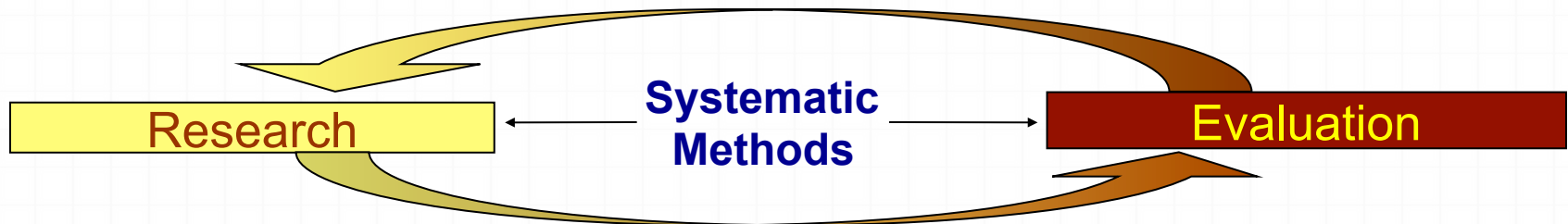# Evaluation Research

ScWk 240 – Week 14 Slides

Note:

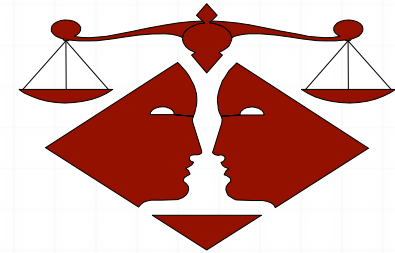Some of the material on these slides is derived from the Centers for Disease Control

Definitions

❑ Evaluation research, sometimes called *program evaluation*, refers to a research <u>purpose</u> rather than a specific <u>method</u>.

❑ This purpose is to evaluate the <u>impact </u>of social interventions such as new treatment methods, innovations in services, and a host of others.

❑ Evaluation research is a form of <u>applied</u> research—it is intended to have some real-world effect.

❑ Many methods, like surveys and experiments can be used in evaluation research.

❑ In recent years, the field of evaluation research has become an increasingly popular and active research specialty, as reflected in textbooks, courses, and projects.

Research vs. Evaluation

Research ⟷ **Systematic Methods** ⟷ Evaluation

Research
- Production of generalizable knowledge
- Researcher-derived questions
- Paradigm stance
- More controlled setting
- Clearer role
- Often published
- Clearer allegiance

Evaluation
- Knowledge intended for use
- Program- or funder-derived questions
- Judgmental quality
- Action setting
- Role conflicts more likely
- Often not published
- Multiple allegiances

"Research seeks to *prove*, evaluation seeks to *improve*..."

M.Q. Patton

Surveillance & Monitoring vs. Program Evaluation

Surveillance - tracks diseases, problems, or risky behaviors

Monitoring - tracks changes in program outcomes over time

Evaluation - seeks to understand specifically why these changes occur

Topics Appropriate to Evaluation Research

◆ **Evaluation research is appropriate whenever some social intervention occurs or is planned.**

◆ **<u>Social intervention</u> is an action taken within a social context for the purpose of producing some intended result.**

◆ **In its simplest sense, *evaluation research* is the process of determining whether a social intervention has produced the intended result.**

◆ **The topics appropriate for evaluation research are limitless.**

◆ **The questions appropriate for evaluation research are of great practical significance: jobs, programs, and investments as well as values and beliefs.**

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What Can be Evaluated?

- **Direct service interventions**

- **Community mobilization efforts**

- **Research initiatives**

- **Surveillance & monitoring systems**

- **Policy development activities**

- **Problem/crisis investigations**

- Client Assessments

- Communication systems

- Infrastructure-building

- Training and educational services & staff qualifications
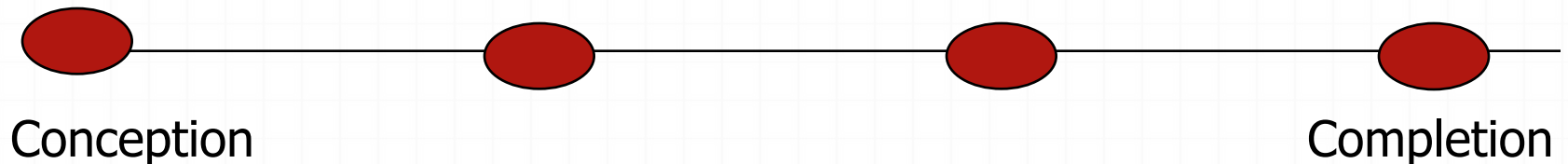
- Administrative systems

When to Conduct Evaluation?

Planning a NEW program	**Assessing a DEVELOPING program**	**Assessing a STABLE/MATURE Program**	**Assessing a Program that has ENDED**

Conception   Completion

The stage of program development influences the reason for program evaluation.

Why Evaluate Programs?

◆ **To gain insight about a program and its operations – to see where we are going and where we are coming from, and to find out what works and what doesn't**

◆ **To improve practice – to modify or adapt practice to enhance the success of activities**

◆ **To assess effects – to see how well we are meeting objectives and goals, how the program benefits the community, and to provide evidence of effectiveness**

◆ **To build capacity - increase funding, enhance skills, strengthen accountability**

Steps in Program Evaluation

Step 1: Engage the Stakeholders

Step 2: Describe the Program

Step 3: Focus the Evaluation Design

Step 4: Gather Credible Evidence

Step 5: Justify Conclusions

Step 6: Ensure Use & Share Lessons Learned

Identifying Stakeholders

Who are the stakeholders?
- ✓ **Persons involved in program operations**
- ✓ **Persons served or affected by the program**
- ✓ **Intended users of evaluation findings**

What is their interest in the program?
- ✓ **Do they support the program?**
- ✓ **Are they skeptical about or antagonistic toward the program?**

Identifying Stakeholders

❖ **Persons Involved in Program Operations**

➤ Staff and Partners

❖ **Persons affected or served by the program**

➤ Clients, their families and social networks, providers and community groups

❖ **Intended users of the evaluation findings**

➤ Policy makers, managers, administrators, advocates, funders, and others

❖ **Be Sure to Include <u>both</u> Supporters and Skeptics!**

Engaging Stakeholders

Stakeholders should be involved in...

- ✓ **Describing program activities, context, and priorities**
- ✓ **Defining problems**
- ✓ **Selecting evaluation questions and methods**
- ✓ **Serving as data sources**
- ✓ **Defining what constitutes the "proof" of success**
- ✓ **Interpreting findings**
- ✓ **Disseminating information**
- ✓ **Implementing results**

Working with Stakeholders

Identify stakeholders for your program

- ✓ Those involved in program operations
- ✓ Persons served or affected by the program
- ✓ Intended users of evaluation findings

Think about which ones you need most for…

- ✓ Credibility
- ✓ Implementation
- ✓ Advocacy
- ✓ Funding

List ways to keep them engaged

Formulating the Problem: Issues of Measurement

◆ **Problem: What is the purpose of the intervention to be evaluated?**

◆ **This question often produces vague results.**

◆ **A common problem is measuring the "unmeasurable."**

◆ **Evaluation research is a matter of finding out whether something is there or not there, whether something happened or did not happen.**

◆ **To conduct evaluation research, we must be able to operationalize, observe, and measure.**

What is the outcome, or the *response variable?*

❑ **If a social program is intended to accomplish something, we must be able to <u>measure</u> that something.**

❑ **It is essential to achieve agreements on definitions <u>in advance</u>.**

❑ **In some cases you may find that the definitions of a problem and a sufficient solution are defined by law or by agency regulations; if so you must be aware of such specifications and accommodate them.**

Operationalizing Success/Failure

◆ **Potentially one of the most taxing aspects of evaluation research is determining whether the program under review succeeded or failed.**

◆ **Definitions of "success" and "failure" can be rather difficult, and these are usually not binary, but on a scale.**

Cost-Benefit Analysis

How much does the program cost in relation to what it returns in benefits?

- ✓ **If the benefits outweigh the cost, keep the program going.**
- ✓ **If the reverse, change it or ʻjunk itʼ.**
- ✓ **Unfortunately this is not an appropriate analysis to make if thinking only in terms of money.**

Ultimately, the criteria of success and failure are often a matter of agreement.

The people responsible for the program may commit themselves in advance to a particular outcome that will be regarded as an indication of success.

Measurement in Evaluation

❖ **Researchers must take measurement quite seriously in evaluation research, carefully determining all the variables to be measured and getting appropriate measures for each.**

❖ **Such decisions are often not purely scientific ones.**

❖ **Evaluation researchers often must work out their measurement strategy with the people responsible for the program being evaluated.**

❖ **There is also a significant political aspect.**

Additional Issues and Implications

The Social Context

- ✓ **Evaluation research has a special propensity for running into problems.**
- ✓ **Logistical problems**
- ✓ **Ethical problems**

Three important reasons why the implications of the evaluation research results are not always put into practice.

- ✓**The implications may not always be presented in a way that the non-researchers can understand.**

- ✓**Evaluation results sometimes contradict deeply held beliefs**

- ✓**Vested interests in the programs assert their influence**