



**Counseling & School Psychology
Program Evaluations:**

**Guide for students, university-based advisors, and
field-based cooperating professionals**

2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

I.	Overview.....	Page 3
II.	Required Coursework for Students.....	Page 3
III.	Other Expectations of Students.....	Page 3
IV.	Expectations of Faculty Advisors.....	Page 5
V.	Expectations of Cooperating Professional Advisors.....	Page 6
VI.	Case Study Using the Objectives-Based Approach.....	Page 6
VII.	References.....	Page 9

I. OVERVIEW:

All graduate students in the UWRP Department of Counseling & School Psychology (CSP) must complete an applied program evaluation project with a collaborating school district or other professional agency approved by the faculty. The program evaluation must be done while the student is enrolled in the school counseling or school psychology program and must be completed prior to program completion. A program evaluation is unique and different from traditional research. A program evaluation is similar to action research in that the focus is on improving one local environment. The CSP program evaluation requirement will involve the student(s) collecting data about a specific program or process within a school or other cooperating agency and providing feedback to the school upon completion. All completed program evaluation results must be presented to the cooperating school district or agency (i.e., a brief verbal presentation and a completed program evaluation report). With faculty guidance and cooperating agency approval, some projects may be submitted for professional presentation or publication. However, the primary focus will be on providing the collaborating school district with “consumable” results (see: Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Spaulding, 2014).

II. REQUIRED COURSEWORK FOR STUDENTS:

All students in the department will take *SPSY 795 Research & Program Evaluation* (3 credits), which is usually offered during the fall semester and during the summer. School psychology students must take the *SPSY 795* during the second year of the M.S.E. program in preparation for completing the applied program evaluation project during the third year of the program. School psychology students must register for *SPSY 798 Independent Research* (1 Credit) during the semester in which the applied program evaluation project begins. All school psychology students will complete a project independently or in small groups of no more than two students. Counseling students must complete *SPSY 795* within their first year of the program, and *COUN 798* during the semester directly after *SPSY 795*. Counseling students may work within small groups, no larger than four.

III. OTHER EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS:

SPSY 795 students will learn the skills and knowledge necessary to complete a program evaluation project (e.g., creation of research questions, quantitative and qualitative methods, data analysis options, etc.). Additionally, *SPSY 795* students will learn various program evaluation strategies, including the Objectives-Based Program Evaluation Approach. In order for students to learn this approach, it will be modeled during an in-class program evaluation project. Students will collect and analyze data and present results during the semester. This same approach will be expected for the field-based program evaluation. The Objectives-Based Approach and related department requirements include the following sequential steps:

- The student(s) must develop a research question(s) with the assistance of the university-based advisor and the field-based collaborating professional. Students are encouraged to seek out the collaborating professional prior to beginning the field-placement or after being assigned to conduct the program evaluation with another professional agency. The research question will be developed to answer a specific question about a program, structure, or process within the school, district, or agency. Data will only be collected from that single agency.

- The student(s) must choose one or more applicable objectives from the Objectives-Based approach (Spaulding, 2014). While eight objectives are possible (see Spaulding, Table 3.1, p. 65), the student(s) will, in most cases, determine a limited number of objectives.
- The choice of objectives will depend on how well each matches the research questions and logistical realities. Determination of objectives often requires significant discussion with the university advisor and the agency cooperating professional. Spaulding's eight potential objectives include:
 - *Capacity and intent*
 - *Validation*
 - *Activities and fidelity of delivery*
 - *Participant satisfaction with activities*
 - *Outputs of activities*
 - *Intermediate outcomes*
 - *End outcomes*
 - *Sustainability*
- The student(s) develops a brief program evaluation proposal. The length of student proposals will vary, but excellent proposals always emphasize the following points in a detailed, careful, and thoughtful manner:
 - A summary of related literature and school-specific background information on the topic.
 - A clearly stated purpose, measureable research questions, hypotheses, and clear variables involved.
 - Proposed participants, procedures, materials, measures, and data analysis procedures.
 - At least THREE distinct data collection methods must be included to answer each research question. This will typically involve a blend of quantitative and qualitative methods. Regarding quantitative procedures, descriptive statistics may be sufficient in some cases. Inferential data analysis processes (e.g., t-tests, correlations, etc.) may be considered, but are not required. Qualitative approaches will often involve interviews, open-ended survey responses, or observation notes. Students are encouraged to use the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) approach learned in SPSY 795 (i.e., a team discussion/agreement process and use of a theme auditor).
 - Excellent writing mechanics are expected (spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, vocabulary, grammar)
- Completion of an IRB protocol may be necessary, depending on the topic, participants, and/or research questions. All IRB protocols must be submitted to the UWRF IRB (Molly VanWagner at molly.van-wagner@uwrf.edu or 715-425-3195). All data collection methods must be included in the IRB (e.g., scales, surveys, interview questions, etc. must be finalized and attached to the IRB protocol). All primary student investigators and faculty advisors must complete required on-line IRB training modules, resulting in a CITI-approved certificate. Additional IRB details can be found at: <http://www.uwrf.edu/GrantsAndResearch/IRB.cfm>. District approval may be required as well.
- Upon IRB and district approval, the student(s) may begin collecting data.

- Upon completion of data collection, the student(s) will analyze the data from the three different sources. The student(s) will work toward data “triangulation” (See Spaulding, p. 31). Triangulation will involve determining any convergence of notable results from the three data sources.
- Upon completion of the data analysis, the student(s) will complete a written evaluation of the results. The report should be written in a reader-friendly and “consumable” format rather than a traditional thesis-style report. As a starting point, student(s) are encouraged to utilize the written evaluation structure offered by Spaulding (2014, pp. 31-25).
- Upon completion of the written evaluation (and formal approval by the university-based advisor), the student(s) will communicate with school or district stakeholders to schedule an opportunity to present the results. Presentation of results may be brief (e.g., 20-30 minutes). Inclusion of the university-based advisor during the presentation is required. User-friendly handouts and/or other visual aids are highly encouraged.
- As an option, with input from the university-based advisor and the cooperating agency, the student(s) may submit the completed program evaluation for formal presentation or publication, being sure to maintain proper confidentiality of the school district or cooperating agency. UWRF program evaluation projects have been accepted at numerous local, state, and national outlets. Acceptance for publication or presentation is not required to complete the course.
- Students must follow a department timeline of due dates, as provided in COUN/SPSY 798. A course syllabus will be provided with additional specific details.

IV. EXPECTATIONS OF FACULTY ADVISORS:

All Counseling & School Psychology faculty members will participate in various aspects of the program evaluation process. One or more faculty members may teach SPSY 795 and all faculty members will advise projects. Additional faculty advisor expectations are as follows:

- Advisor/Advisee pairings will be assigned by the department chair and/or the individual program directors from counseling and school psychology (with division of labor and faculty load in mind).
- All CSP faculty members will be listed as the instructor of record for a COUN 798 or SPSY 798 course each semester. Those courses are considered independent study in nature and do not usually involve in-person class sessions. Instead, advisors typically work directly with students on proposal planning, data collection, data analysis, and dissemination of the finished product. This usually involves periodic meetings with students and collaborating professionals as well as review of written work.
- Based on the advisor assignment, the students will know for which 798 course to register.
- All program evaluations will have a reasonable scope (i.e., will answer a limited set of research questions, designed to be completed within a one- to two-semester timeline; data collected from one school, district, or agency - no large data sets).
- Program evaluations may require university Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and, possibly, approval through a district research approval board. However, some projects may be viewed as data-based decision making within the “every day”

parameters of educational practice (and therefore not considered “research”). Advisors must assist the student(s) with determining needs related to this issue.

- Faculty advisors must be familiar with the Objectives-Based program evaluation approach (see Spaulding, 2014, Chapters 1 & 3). See student expectations for additional details on this approach.

V. EXPECTATIONS OF COOPERATING PROFESSIONAL ADVISORS:

All cooperating professionals must be an employee of the school district or other professional agency in which the program evaluation is taking place. The cooperating professional may be a field-based practicum or internship supervisor, school administrator, other pupil services professional, or employee of another professional agency. While students may receive help from numerous school employees during the completion of the program evaluation but one primary cooperating professional advisor must be identified. Additional cooperating professional expectations are as follows:

- Cooperating professional advisors will provide input on program evaluation idea development (i.e., assist with the brainstorming of appropriate, needed, and valuable projects).
- Given school and district insight, the cooperating professional helps the student maintain a reasonable scope for the program evaluation, and approves an idea that has a high probability of being completed (one to two semesters from proposal to completion).
- Cooperating professionals provide insight into school district processes (e.g., if district research approval is necessary, important stakeholders with whom to connect).
- Cooperating professionals assist with connecting students to potential participants for data collection (e.g., teachers, administrators, parents, students) and/or existing archival data, as approved and deemed appropriate.
- While cooperating professionals are encouraged to maintain awareness of project progress, the student(s) is responsible for following all timelines, data collection, data analysis, and all written products associated with the program evaluation, as outlined in the SPSY/COUN 798 syllabus.
- Cooperating professionals must be familiar with the Objectives-Based program evaluation approach (see Spaulding, 2014, Chapters 1 & 3). See student expectations for additional details on this approach.

VI. CASE STUDY USING OBJECTIVES-BASED APPROACH:

Sally, a student in the Department of Counseling & School Psychology, began completing her practicum placement in a local school district at the beginning of the fall semester. During a supervision session with her field-based supervisor (“collaborating advisor”), it was noted the district had just completed a crisis plan revision, a process that had taken about one year. Being familiar with best practices in school crisis plan development, Sally indicated an interest in choosing a “crisis plan review” as a potential topic for her required program evaluation. Her field-based collaborating advisor agreed it could be a worthy and realistic project to complete over one or two semesters. Following additional discussion with school district administrators and her university-based advisor, this topic was deemed a reasonable and valuable program evaluation.

To start the process, Sally created a concise research question with the help of her advisors and two other educators within the district. The research question settled upon was:

“Is the district crisis plan ready to be implemented (i.e., does it have the capacity to be successful based on best practice ideas and stakeholder knowledge/comfort)? Is it a valid crisis plan (i.e., does it meet local, state, and national standards)?”

Given this question, Sally chose to emphasize the first two objectives in the Objectives-Based Approach (Spaulding, 2014): *Capacity & Intent* and *Validation*. Needing three sources of data to answer the research question and to meet her objectives, Sally, her field-based collaborating advisor, and her university-based advisor considered several options. Ultimately, the following data collection strategies were developed:

- *District stakeholder Interviews.* Sally proposed interviewing five district stakeholders (two crisis team members, two principals, and a head custodian). A semi-structured interview (six open-ended questions) was developed with questions based on her knowledge of PREPaRE School Crisis Prevention & Intervention concepts and best practices. Sally recorded the audio of the interviews (each about 20 minutes) and transcribed each, leading to about 30 pages of text (qualitative analysis).
- *Document Analysis.* Sally reviewed the actual crisis plan on her own, using the PREPaRE curriculum Workshop 1 Crisis Plan Checklist Handout. Using the checklist, she simply marked when a crisis plan component was in place and when it was missing. This process led to a “percentage of best practices” for the crisis plan (quantitative analysis).
- *An electronic survey of a small sample of district parents (n = 20).* Using Qualtrics, Sally developed a survey with eight likert scale questions related to parent knowledge about and comfort with specific crisis plan components involving parents (e.g., family reunification plan, knowledge of how to seek out crisis intervention assistance). Sally’s field-based cooperating advisor helped her secure a diverse cross section of potential parent participants for this portion of the project (quantitative analysis).

After finalizing her research question, objectives, and methods, Sally completed a program evaluation proposal. The proposal summarized critical background information on the topic, her research question, the two objectives involved, her proposed participants, the proposed measurement of the variables, and the data collection process. Following approval by the UW-RF IRB (about a 10 day process), data collection commenced and was completed in eight weeks. The process used in Sally’s data analysis is summarized next:

- *For data collection method # 1 (stakeholder interviews),* Sally reviewed the 30 pages of transcripts. She determined the most common interview themes from across the five stakeholders. She also recorded some “exemplar quotes”

from the interviewees, related to each key theme. Sally's university-based advisor agreed to serve as the qualitative theme "auditor" (as recommended in the Consensual Qualitative Research method), providing feedback and insight on the draft themes Sally had created. Upon completion of the auditing process, Sally determined a final set of interviewee qualitative themes.

- *For data collection method #2* (document review), Sally reviewed the crisis plan best practice checklist she had used when analyzing the crisis plan herself. She calculated a simple percentage of best practices in place in the district crisis plan. Additionally, Sally kept track of specific crisis plan components that were strong or lacking, so she could report those details to the district.
- *For data collection method #3* (parent survey), Sally uploaded the completed parent survey data from Qualtrics into SPSS (a process easily done directly within Qualtrics), where she analyzed descriptive trends in parent knowledge and comfort (percentages and means related to each question). Demographic data were also noted for purposes of describing the sample.

With data from the three sources in hand, Sally made plans to *triangulate* the data (see Spaulding, p. 31). To complete that process, she decided an active and visual process would be helpful. With the assistance of her university-based advisor, she reserved an open classroom in the Wyman Building for two hours in order to facilitate the triangulation process. With her university-based advisor present, Sally created three columns on the classroom white board, where she jotted important data and themes that she had determined from each source. With the research question and the two objectives (Capacity & Intent, Validation) in mind, Sally and her advisor began the process of triangulation of the data. While the results from the three sources of data did not entirely converge, the triangulation process did result in some meaningful alignments across the three data collection methods.

To complete the process, Sally completed a written evaluation of the project. Building on her original proposal, she utilized the evaluation report structure recommended by Spaulding (2014) which includes a cover page, executive summary, an introduction, methods, and the body of the report (i.e., analyzed data and findings). Sally's goal was to emphasize report readability, keeping in mind her primary audience – the school district stakeholders involved. Her two specific objectives were used as subheadings in the body of the report, where Sally summarized the key themes gleaned from the triangulation process. Finally, Sally scheduled a 20-minute meeting with several district stakeholders, her cooperating professional, and her university-based advisor. She summarized her conclusions verbally, while providing a one-page handout of key findings, as well as the full report.

References

Hill, C. E., Thompson, B. J., & Williams, E. N. (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist, 25*, 517-572.

Spaulding, D. T. (2014). *Program evaluation in practice (2nd ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

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