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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the findings of a qualitative followup survey of a sample of programs listed in the 1986 "Directory of Evaluation Training Programs." Four programs listed in the directory are no longer considered evaluation training, and five, originally similar, are still going strong. A sampling strategy was used to compare the discontinued programs with the continuing programs through discussions with program administrators. Comparison indicated that several areas are important in program continuation. To begin with, two programs no longer listed were actually in operation with only minimal change, a finding that suggests that the present directory may underestimate the number of viable programs. The perceived importance of the program is vital to its continuation. Faculty members and their diverse interests are keys to continuing a program. Grant funding can be a help in getting started, but it can be risky if it does not eventually result in program institutionalization and ongoing support. Student recruitment is a necessity for program continuation. Overall, existing evaluation training programs seem to be meeting the challenges of training more and better evaluators. An appendix describes the nine programs. (Contains 18 references.) (Author/SLD)

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A qualitative follow-up of the survey for the 1994 Directory of Evaluation Training Programs.

for the Annual Meeting of the American Evaluation Association
Boston, Massachusetts

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a qualitative follow-up survey of a sample of programs listed in the 1986 directory, four of which are no longer considered evaluation training, and five others being originally similar and yet going strong.

A description of the procedure used is presented, with its strengths and weaknesses. The findings are presented with the programs surveyed being anonymous. Recommendations are made, such as retain faculty, seek stable sources of funding, take a proactive stance, and recruit students. Potential pitfalls for programs are identified, being decreased support from administration, faculty not being replaced, grants ending, and faculty overload.

Introduction

Evaluation means many things to many people. To some it means giving standardized tests; to others, the image of quality control comes to mind. One of the most popular definitions comes from Worthen and Sander's (1987) book. It states that evaluation is simply the method of determining worth (p 22). In determining worth, much depends upon the credibility of the evaluator. He or she is stating whether the object or idea is any good or not. The results will only be accepted if the evaluator is perceived to be competent. The evaluator needs to be taught to do a quality job that will speak well of both the profession and the professional.

Many evaluation training programs exist to train professionals in various aspects of evaluation. Some consist of a single course in a sequence of study (Morris, 1994; Wortman and Yeaton, 1986), while others are entire areas of focus

(May, Fleischer, Scheirer, and Cox, 1986). In 1986, the Evaluation Research Society and the Evaluation Network produced a Directory of Evaluation Training Programs. It reported 46 different programs. In an effort to prepare the updated 1994 American Evaluation Association (AEA) Directory of Evaluation Training Programs, Dr. James Altschuld, together with Engle, Cullen, Kim, and Macce, surveyed 77 possible evaluation training programs identified in the United States.

This survey defined an evaluation training program as consisting of "multiple courses, seminars, practices, offerings, etc., designed to teach primarily ... evaluation principles and concepts (Altschuld, etc., 1993, p 1)." It covered such areas as background information, characteristics of students or trainees, program description, and other institutional offerings. When Altschuld and Engle reported on their findings at the 1993 Annual AEA conference, it became apparent that ten of the original 46 programs in the 1986 directory would not appear in the new directory. This was an area of concern that we have undertaken to investigate.

Evaluation training programs are likely to cover much the same material, such as the history and philosophy of evaluation, different approaches to evaluation, and techniques of evaluation. What is more important, the real accomplishment of evaluation courses is to help the trainees develop evaluative sensibility, by using their values and judgments (Davis, 1986; Mertens, 1994; Sanders, 1986). One of the best ways to do so has been to allow students to obtain hands-on experience as they engage in coursework (Eastmond, Saunders, and Merrell, 1989). Evaluation training courses help train good evaluators. Usually when a single course is used, the intent is not to train full-fledged evaluators, but rather, as Morris (1994) notes, to train educated consumers of evaluation or cooperative advocates who can work alongside a practicing evaluator. The other option of pure apprenticeship work with an evaluator is not practical for many people.

Problem Statement

Ten of the original 46 programs in the 1986 Directory published by May, Fleischer, Scheirer, and Cox no longer qualified for inclusion in the directory by the time Altschuld and Engle set about publishing a second directory based on the 1993 survey. Because that survey could only obtain limited information regarding each program, many specific questions remain unanswered. Some of the proposed reasons for program demise included a program being run by a single person, and when that person retired, the program ended; faculty or administrators sabotaging the program; budget cuts that the legislature enforced on the school; or perhaps the program had changed its name and not have been reached by the surveyors.

Specifically, the professional association of evaluators (AEA) lacked empirical data to explain why some programs declined and others flourished in this seven year period.

Purpose and Objective

The purpose of this project was to identify pertinent information about evaluation training programs that have ended recently. The Altschuld & Engle study involved a broad survey of programs. In this study we wanted to investigate programs in more depth, to understand more about the human dimension of specific programs. We compared four such discontinued programs to five continuing programs that started roughly at the same time as their counterparts. In particular, we were interested in how programs began, how they developed and if

there was a "critical mass" of faculty and students needed for a program to "take off." This was accomplished with the use of a telephone survey.

Review of the literature

Formal evaluation training programs really began some almost 30 years ago when federal educational grants began to require some type of evaluation and accountability (Altschuld and Thomas, 1991). During the past thirty years, evaluation has become, if not a professional field, then at least a professional emphasis in many fields (Eastmond, 1992; Merwin and Wiener, 1985; Worthen, 1994; Worthen and Sanders, 1984). Its training has gone from a hands-on, trial-and-error experience, to single courses, to an expanded curriculum at many schools of higher learning (Altschuld and Thomas, 1991). Unusually, perhaps, there is some disagreement as to which discipline it should be taught in.

Worthen and Sanders (1987) argue that "evaluation ... necessarily cuts across disciplines, and evaluators are thus denied the luxury of remaining within any single inquiry paradigm (p. 53)." As such, in the education process,

it is best that several disciplines be sampled. Only through an interdisciplinary education can the evaluator become sensitive to the wide range of phenomena to which she must attend to if she is to properly [conduct evaluation] (Worthen & Sanders, 1987, p 33).

Eastmond also feels that it is "impossible to create" the expertise needed "within a single discipline." The "ideal program would be cross-disciplinary (Eastmond, 1992, p 5)." Likewise some feel that evaluation should be integrated as much as possible into core courses taught in any program (Perloff and Rich, 1986), while others feel that evaluation should be taught in an entirely separate department.

(For example, see the programs described at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the Directory published by May, Fleischer, Scheirer, and Cox, 1986.)

Moreover, those who are not professional evaluators are also taught evaluation. Managers are taught evaluation in the process of budgeting (Perloff and Rich, 1986), while health professionals learn evaluation for health administration and health services research, as well as in vocational education (Eldredge, Fried, and Grissom, 1991; Wortman and Yeaton, 1986). Educators learn evaluation through formal and informal experiences (Sanders, 1986), and engineers study evaluation as a part of quality control and design analysis. Evaluation is an integral part of virtually all professions.

Models for teaching evaluation have come from education or psychology (May, Fleischer, Scheirer, & Cox, 1986), as well as sociology or the legal education method (Caulley and Dowdy, 1986). No one field has a monopoly on evaluation or the teaching of it.

Finally, evaluation is not something you can learn once and never again open a book to study. It is, or should be, a "lifelong pursuit (Eastmond, 1992, p 4)." As new methods appear there is, at times, almost a "dire need for additional training (Eldredge, Fried, and Grissom, 1991, p 11)." Professional organizations and journals can be an integral part of this training (Worthen and Sanders, 1984).

In short, evaluation is a general practice that mainly concerns a frame of reference. Saying "I am an evaluator." may be equivalent to saying "I am a worthy judge." This self-qualification will generally be more acceptable to its recipients if backed up by training through a program or organization. Evaluation is a field of endeavor that should be treated with respect and mastered well with the proper training.

Procedure and Methodology

Method:

A purposive sampling strategy was used. The previous researchers were asked to identify selected programs where the contrasts between those ending and those continuing would be most evident. Four programs that were no longer included in the directory (discontinued programs) were selected, and five other programs that were still ongoing (continuing programs) were selected for comparison. We mailed out the questions we would be asking to the contact persons, and followed up with the actual telephone call roughly one week later. We took notes during the conversation, (no audio recordings were made), and asked for other sources of information and other people to contact. We wrote up the notes about all the conversations within 24 hours, and afterwards sent them to the contact person for confirmation of their accuracy when all the contacts have been made. This last step is still in process, with only one contact having sent back the corrected description.

Procedure:

The initial step was to become familiar with the literature, secure the funding, and clarify the aims of the project. It was during this time that the questions and programs were identified.

The main work involved making telephone calls to the nine programs and then writing up the results. The following questions were sent to the contact persons in a letter. They were then contacted by telephone and asked to respond in person. Respondents were assured of the anonymity of their responses, both for individual and program identification.

1. Describe your involvement with the ___ program.

2. What were the major steps in establishing it? Developing it?
3. What are some of the factors that led to the program being where it is today?
4. Are there other people who would provide a different perspective or additional depth?
5. Do you have a pamphlet that could help us understand the official position of your program?
6. Do you have any additional concerns or information to add at this time?

The responses were noted by hand and then compiled into a summary for each program. Each program received at least one phone call, with an average of three telephone calls, and two letters, one prior to the interview stating we would be calling, and the other after the interview, asking for an accuracy check. We asked the contact person or persons for names and phone numbers of other people who might be knowledgeable about the program or provide a different perspective on its history. We then called the new references. They in turn were asked for other people to call. When the information was repeated or we talked key people, (generally 2-3 per program), we wrote up the conversations.

The last, wrap-up stage was the time to clarify the findings and put them in a cohesive form. It is hoped that the results are applicable to at least 36 evaluation training programs.

Results

During the period from March 9 to October 25, 1994, we were able to contact representatives of all nine programs. People were fairly eager to talk about their programs, especially the students. In some cases, trying to match up schedules proved too frustrating to the respondent, and he or she simply mailed back their annotations on the questionnaire that had been sent to them. In one case, the correspondence was carried on through e-mail. Every program, with one

exception, received at least three telephone interviews. Some staff members were eager to talk about their program, and were well informed. In a few cases, respondents were ill-informed or refused to comment. In these cases, efforts were made to locate another respondent. The method was time consuming, but less expensive than some other forms of interviewing. The telephone had an advantage in that people didn't mind talking, as opposed to writing, and that the interviewer was able to probe on topics that might be otherwise have been misunderstood.

Altogether we talked to 20 faculty, 4 administrators, 4 students, and 6 staff members. After talking with all 34 people, the following conclusions about programs can be drawn:

Discontinuing programs: Two programs that had been assumed to be discontinued were still functioning, one having been overlooked in the previous study and the second excluded because of the change in classifying criteria. In this program a single course in evaluation continues to be taught. The current definition requires multiple courses for inclusion as a "program." One of the two remaining discontinued programs had been depending upon grant funding which expired, after which two faculty members retired, one died, and the final person moved to another school so that although the department is still there, the emphasis is not. The final school, previously considered leading program in the field, had a program, but in one year it saw two faculty move away, one move to another department, and six years later, the remaining faculty member moved to another institution. After he left, the program was defunct.

Continuing programs: All five started at about the same time (late 1970's, early 1980's) "when evaluation was coming of age." In every case, the programs have evolved to include more course and program offerings, more depth, and more field experiences. Courses have evolved in the direction of more

hands-on experience, more paid internships, and more contact with professional organizations like AEA. In no case was a continuing program found to have been misclassified.

Discussion

The discontinued programs had an average of two contacts each. They revealed several areas for thought, including sampling problems, perceived importance of the program, the importance of faculty, and the need for a stable source of funding. These problems are expanded below.

Sampling problems: The classification system for the study is not without its faults. Two programs identified as having been discontinued were in fact continuing on with minimal change (one seemed to have been improved). Since there were no instances of a misclassification of continuing programs, it is likely that the present directory tends to underestimate the number of viable programs.

Perceived Importance: If a program is seen as peripheral to the institution, department, or school, it is probably vulnerable, with budget and personnel cuts shortly to follow.

Faculty: Faculty are key to beginning and ending a program. "When you're out of faculty, you're out of business."

Soft money: Grant funding can be a help in getting a program started, but it can also be risky if it does not eventually lead to program institutionalization, with support coming from an ongoing source.

The continuing programs were also interesting. They each had a minimum of three contacts and some form of brochure that explained their programs in terms of required courses, time, and opportunities. Some of the areas that came to mind as being worthy of calling attention to included diversity in faculty interests, a proactive stance, stable funding sources, faculty retention, faculty overload, and the recruitment of students. These ideas are expanded below.

Diversity of faculty research interests can make for a strong program, if faculty interests complement each other and if there is mutual respect for varying points of view. One faculty member stated: "Students struggle to understand 'who's right.'" As they do that, they have to wrestle with different points of view.

The faculty interests are really what shape the program. One program was originally an educational research program, but the faculty were interested in doing and teaching evaluation, and eventually the whole program was transformed into an evaluation training program.

Moreover, the prominence of the program comes from the faculty. Faculty are encouraged to perform evaluations and do research, so that what they teach has a practical side. Most students and faculty believed that the quantity and quality of faculty publication were a source of strength in their program. The administrators only said that the faculty are the strength of the program and did not elaborate.

Proactive stance: A program needs to examine itself for strengths and weaknesses and then work to strengthen the program before some administrator takes action. A program should have its own agenda for development, possibly formalized as a strategic plan. One program saw itself as weak in one area and deliberately hired a new faculty member to fill that need and help them to stay on the forefront of technology and new ideas and perspectives.

Funding sources: Outside sources are important in funding students. They allow intern options and full-time student status, also allowing classes to be taught during the day, rather than in the evening. Several of the programs contacted had their own center for contracting projects; others had outside grants and interested businesses.

Recognizing that many students do have jobs and encouraging them to attend class at night, though, can greatly increase program enrollment. It also allows professionals to continue their work but at the same time to pursue their education.

Some programs have had to justify their existence; some will have to in the future. One faculty member stated that he saw the coming need defend expenditures with the state. Another faculty member was worried that, although their program had nearly a quarter of the students in the department, they weren't getting the proportional amount of funding.

Faculty retention: In insuring continuation, early retirement can be an attractive option for faculty and can play havoc with program continuation. It can be difficult to insure that, as a faculty member, you are replaced as you leave. Emeritus status helps in advising students, but not in continuing a program.

Faculty overload: Outside sources of work and funding can be so demanding that a professor no longer has time to teach, and is reduced to an advising position. This was the case for at least one faculty member talked to.

Regarding recruitment of students: It appeared that students learned of programs through diverse means, and then decided that they were interested (or well suited by temperament) in studying in the area. Quality of faculty (leading edge research interests and skills) was seen by the faculty and administrators as important to attracting students. Students, on the other hand, all said they "fell into" their programs, discovered them by accident, and then decided

they wanted to peruse the program. At least one faculty member mentioned that his program had no recruitment whatsoever. One solution offered was that the graduates were going out into diversified areas: therefore, the program's name was being spread across the country and into other countries as well.

Conclusion

Both students and administrators occasionally had a hard time seeing the program. One faculty member said this was because his program was not showy like other programs in his department. Active recruitment may be a way of increasing visibility for a program.

On the other hand, all of the students and most of the faculty mentioned that their individual program was good because the faculty, and occasionally the students, published papers and spoke at conferences. This professional exposure was seen as a major draw to attracting students, and may be a way to attract support, both moral and financial.

A concern voiced by several faculty had to do with retirement. They were concerned that when they did retire, their positions would not be filled and the program would diminish. Careful recruitment and continuing effort to save a "faculty line" is critical to preserving programs.

The use of grant funding to establish and Maintain programs can be seen as a mixed blessing. It may help establish a "presence" for a program and may help provide opportunities for students. However, if a degree of insitutionalization and local commitment does not emerge over time, the program will likely vanish when the outside funding diminishes.

All in all, the existing evaluation training programs seem to be rising to the task of training more and better evaluators. The future looks good.

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Appendix A

Descriptions of the nine programs surveyed

a - Discontinued programs

b - Continuing programs

Discontinued programs:

Having started in the mid 70's, the evaluation program at Book University was considered a leader in the field in the early 80's. It offered such classes as evaluation research, statistics in experimental design, and seminar on evaluation research. A field practicum formed a major part of the program, along with collaborative projects between faculty and students. It flourished until three of the five faculty either went to other universities or to migrated to other departments. Since evaluation was then viewed as peripheral to the progress of the department, the faculty were not replaced. It limped along with only one faculty member until he left for another institution in 1989. It is now considered defunct.

The evaluation program at Flame Graduate School is still in good order. It was apparently overlooked (or the inquiry lost in the mail) in the survey revising the AEA directory. The program started in the late 1970's with a seminar on evaluation and has grown to include numerous course offerings, field placement supervision, meta-analysis, and advanced methodological issues. The program reports approximately 30 doctoral students taking courses.

The University of Three Peaks no longer offers an evaluation degree. The program was completed on five-year grant schedule in the 1980's. The program is only a dim memory now. The Student Services Coordinator at UTP insisted that the program had ended before 1985, leaving no memorabilia. The faculty have all retired, moved away, or passed on.

Although Wolf College was listed in the 1986 Directory of Evaluation Training Programs, it is not listed in the new 1994 Directory. The College is still there and the course offerings are still there. The instructor of the evaluation course, our main contact, has written a well-known book on evaluation. The reason the program is no longer listed is that the definition of evaluation training programs has changed to "multiple courses, seminars, practicums, offerings, etc. designed to teach primarily ... evaluation principles and concepts." (Altschuld, etc., 1993) Wolf College's program offers only one course in evaluation, and by definition is excluded from the directory.

Continuing programs:

Delta University's School of Education offers degrees in policy, planning and evaluation through the Department of Administration and Policy Studies. The program originally started as Educational Research Methodology with a statistics emphasis but according to Dr. J, about 7 or 8 years ago we reorganized the department, and school, and we saw "evaluation as a need area." We had a "cluster of experience" in the faculty in evaluation. They kept teaching more and more evaluation classes and it gradually evolved into to an emphasis on evaluation, rather than educational research or statistics. The program has between 12 and 15 full-time Ph.D. students, with about 12 of them supported financially. One faculty member said that this program is not projected to be a growth area. "I see it as stable, if we continue to have the outside funding." He believes it will continue to have strong students and faculty.

Mountain University really has two evaluation programs: one in the Psychology Department, and one in the College of Education. The programs started in the late 1970's. The Psychology Department offers a Ph.D. in research and evaluation methodology; the College of Education offers an Ed.D. in evaluation. The psychology program has about 13 students; the interdisciplinary program in the College of Education has at most two. It has recently hired a faculty member to fill an area the program had seen as a weak point. One faculty member noted that her students had an early opportunity to get out in the field. She felt this made for a strong program. The faculty have published extensively, including at least one textbook in evaluation. It has proven to be attractive to faculty, with several wanting to join; it is also popular with the administration. The faculty see it as a strong program with solid institutional support.

Private Eastern University's evaluation program began in the late 1970's. In 1984, the faculty were given offices together and came to be recognized as a program area in the college by other faculty. Its strengths come from a diversity of faculty interests and beliefs, the enthusiasm of the faculty for evaluation teaching it, involving its graduate students in professional activities, and the fact that faculty are not dependent upon the funding of grants to maintain the program. One faculty member anticipates more involvement with international development and health services areas; another predicts a revamping of the curriculum to allow for modularized components of classes, more outreach to business and industry, and use of leading edge technology (like CD ROM-based simulations) to provide advanced training comparable to that now available in business settings.

Pond State University is the major university of its state. The evaluation program had begun in 1972 under the title of educational research as a single course and an occasional seminar. In 1982, the term 'evaluation' was added to the title, a move that, according to one faculty member, gained "face validity." It now offers six core classes on theory as well as statistics, research design, log-linear analysis, and modeling. An additional course in independent study or practicum is also required. One faculty member noted, "Publicity of the offerings is spreading, and we get students sent over from other departments. The other programs offer minors in evaluation" He said that they need to fight for the program regularly. "We have few resources and tight finances. We have about 1/4th of the total graduate students in the College of Education, but we get nothing like that level of support." He also

explained that the university offers early retirement with benefits, and some of the faculty are looking into it. "If we pulled out, then what?" He can't see the university replacing the faculty en masse if these retirements occurred. The program would probably be gone if this early retirement scenario was carried out.

Tree State has between 10 and 15 full-time Ph.D. students working full-time to obtain a degree with a concentration in educational evaluation, measurement, and research design. Although the program began in 1973, the Ph.D. portion has only existed for six years. Tree State has both a strong, well-known faculty and several centers that focus on educational evaluation. Two of the faculty have part time appointments in these centers. One faculty contact reported that all his outside appointment leaves him time for is advising doctoral students and sitting on committees. This program requires extensive research and outside experience. It is no wonder that "we expect students to take 3 1/2 to 4 years to complete the program." One faculty member stated that they have a fairly small program and don't actively recruit. They would like to expand their training and recruiting, which would increase the numbers of students. They would like to provide more stipends for the students and continue to provide the hands-on experience.