

CEAC Update

Collaborative for Evaluation and Assessment Capacity

Guiding Well-Informed Policy and Practice

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UCIS: A Capacity Building Success Story



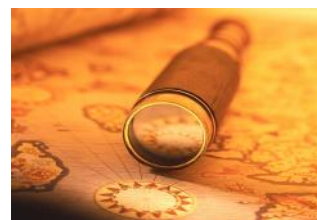
CEAC recently completed a summary evaluation of UCIS, the University Center for International Studies, at the University of Pittsburgh. This project was a successful example of what col-

laborative capacity building can bring to evaluation and assessment.

An important step in capacity building is helping the client understand the importance of evaluation to long-term strategic planning. In the case of UCIS, evaluation served two

purposes: 1) as a triage effort which applied evaluation at the end of the funding cycle, in a retrospective approach, and 2) as an introduction to evaluation that helped to develop, implement, and support an evaluation plan for future funding.

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Evaluation Focus

What does President Obama's economic stimulus package mean for your evaluation needs?

*Read more in
EVALUATION FOCUS, page 3.*

CEAC Expands Focus to Include Social Service Agencies and Other Not-for-Profits

CEAC's recent selection as provider of program evaluation and assessment services for the United Way of Allegheny County's ACT Against Violence - Parents Raising Safe Kids Program (ACT Curriculum) adds yet another entry to CEAC's continually diversifying list of clients.

The ACT Curriculum is a national, research-based initiative designed by the American Psychological Association to educate families and communities to create safe, healthy environments that protect chil-

dren and youth from violence.

An established resource for educational evaluation services, CEAC is expanding to include social service and not-for-profit evaluations and assessments.

CEAC recently completed the Year 5 Evaluation for the Amachi Pittsburgh mentoring program, which pairs children of inmates with positive adult role models.

In late 2008, CEAC completed an individual and agency analysis report for the Greater Pittsburgh

Literacy Council's nationwide Literacy*Americorps initiative.

By expanding beyond preK-16 evaluation, CEAC hopes to provide proven service and capacity building to social service agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and non-formal education providers, as well.

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Feature Article *(continued from page 1)*

Interaction with UCIS and center representatives turned the evaluation into a binding agent, a place at which all parties converged.

One way in which evaluation helps clients to build capacity is by incorporating their logic models into the evaluation activity, tying it even more closely with each client's goals. In this example, UCIS serves as an umbrella structure, covering six separate centers. While UCIS has a general mission, each center serves as a separate entity, with separate priorities and associated programs. We were able to encourage the separate centers and UCIS as a whole to consider the importance of an explainable program theory. This helped us to collaboratively research, develop, pilot, deploy, analyze, and report on a student survey (n=1,268; 56% response rate) in less than four months. The resulting report was able to address issues for

each of the centers and UCIS as a whole, providing important information for their end-of-funding reports as well as a base line for a new set of funding proposals. An essential aspect of applying for funding is the ability to describe what you do, how you do it, why it's important to your target clientele, and how you intend to evaluate and calibrate your efforts.

Another important part of capacity building is in the provision of time, effort, and guidance in the evaluation process, specifically with timelines, data collection, and client feedback. For UCIS, the organizational structure made the evaluation process especially challenging. The structure of UCIS is not a hierarchical system; instead, it works more like a consortium. UCIS leadership and center leadership each approached the evaluation with specific needs in mind. Working to incorporate the needs of UCIS as a whole and those of

each center into one comprehensive, yet not overwhelming, evaluation activity was a challenge. But, we found that interaction with UCIS and center representatives turned the evaluation into a binding agent, a place at which all parties converged,. All parties contributed to build something that reflected them all together, as well as provided specific information for separate units.

All in all, the evaluation was a success in building capacity for both UCIS and for CEAC, as CEAC built its largest evaluation instrument to date, a survey that gathered information from over 700 respondents. And UCIS, including the individual centers within, gained new perspectives of their programs and of evaluation. The end result was an evaluation report that allowed them to see what about their program works, as well as what information and program needs they have for the future.

Evaluation and Assessment: Your Questions Answered

CEAC

Have a question about evaluation or assessment? Ask CEAC! With over 30 years of collective experience in evaluation and assessment, CEAC may have the expertise to answer your questions.

I need to report on my program's progress, but I haven't done any assessment for the last three years! Is there anything you can do to help?

While it's always best to involve evaluation planning from the beginning of a program, all is not lost if you didn't! If that's happened to you, it's time for "evaluation triage." Triage, a term that comes from the French verb *trier*, meaning to separate, sort, sift or select, is often used in

healthcare to determine order of treatment based on severity and resources. Just as in a health crisis, triage indicates a need to focus on priority evaluation issues. The best way to approach this is to ask key questions: To whom do we need to report our progress? What will they find acceptable? What are the areas of our priority impact? What data do we currently have (or can we easily access) that will directly reflect those impacts?

Often, organizations are surprised at the kinds of data --- often referred to as output data (who, what, where, when, to what extent) --- they already collect. These can serve as indicators of a program's first level of impact as measures of activity.

Outcomes --- changes in knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes, policies and practices --- are more difficult to ascertain without evaluation planning, but some data may still exist that can address these issues in triage. Most importantly, take an inventory of all the sources of information already on hand and ask, "How can we best use these data to tell others what we have accomplished?"

Evaluation planning can help you avoid evaluation crisis and the need for triage --- consider evaluation a partner to all forms of planning, and you'll be ready when that report is due!

Have questions about evaluation or assessment? Email us at ceac@pitt.edu. We'll respond to you personally, and your question could be featured in our next issue.

Evaluation Focus



President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) brings much needed funds for education, job creation, service delivery and other initiatives. But, much like any other government funds, these ARRA monies come with "strings attached."

Important concepts to keep in mind are **accountability** and **impact**. Agencies and educational institutions that receive funding via the ARRA will have to **evaluate** and **assess** their funded programs. That means that the recipients must identify how funds are allocated, track results of the program(s) funded, and report those results to stakeholders and to citizens.

Government-funded programs may fall under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), one of a series of laws

designed to improve government project management. The GPRA requires agencies to engage in project management tasks such as setting goals, measuring results, and reporting their progress. In order to comply with GPRA, agencies produce strategic plans, performance plans, and conduct gap analysis of projects. This third aspect, analysis, requires that agencies prepare annual performance reports that evaluate and assess the agency's success or failure in meeting its targeted performance goals.

All of these efforts can require thoughtful evaluation planning and systematic collection, analysis, and reporting of meaningful information. A solid evaluation plan can assist you in knowing where to look for impact, and what data to collect that can provide the best evidence of your impact. A good evaluation plan helps you to make

A good evaluation plan helps you to make use of information for your own formative planning, as well as the reporting necessary as part of external funding.

use of information for your own formative planning, as well as the reporting necessary as part of external funding, whether these funds come as part of the stimulus package, part of other federal sources, through foundations, or through tax dollars. CEAC can help --- give us a call to discuss your evaluation needs!

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(412) 624-7240
ceac@pitt.edu

Affiliate Spotlight

Clement Stone, Ph.D., Professor in the Research Methodology program at the University of Pittsburgh, is currently collaborating with CEAC on the Math Science Partnership (MSP) project. Together with graduate student Sean Tierney, Dr. Stone is analyzing student achievement data from 2003-2008 in math and science, exploring how teacher and Teacher Leader involvement in the MSP project impacts student learning.

Recent Publications and Events

Cindy Tananis and Debra Moore's article, "Measuring change in a short-term educational program using retrospective pretest design," was published in the June 2009 issue of the *American Journal of Evaluation*.

In March, Cindy Tananis participated in a panel discussion at Duquesne University. Her presentation, entitled *Cultural Competency in Evaluation: A View from the Field* provided a mid-career evaluator's perspective for Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Minority Evaluation Interns.

In February, Keith Trahan participated as a member of the Perspectives in Latin American Education panel at the 2009 Student Conference on Latin American Social and Public Policy at the University of Pittsburgh. Keith presented his

paper, *Using Socio-Historic Frameworks to Analyze Educational Issues: Positioning Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas Against the Dominant Educational Paradigm*.

Collaborative for Evaluation and Assessment Capacity: Guiding well-informed policy and practice.

Who we are

Cindy Tananis, Ed.D.

Director, CEAC
Associate Professor
School Leadership Program
School of Education
University of Pittsburgh

Cara Ciminillo, M.Ed.

Project Manager, CEAC

Keith Trahan, M.A.T.

Lead Evaluator, CEAC
Graduate Student
Social and Comparative Analysis in Education
University of Pittsburgh

Tracy Pelkowski

Lead Evaluator, CEAC
Graduate Student
Social and Comparative Analysis in Education
University of Pittsburgh

Crystal Wang, M.P.A.

Evaluator, CEAC
Graduate Student
Social and Comparative Analysis in Education
University of Pittsburgh

Becky Price, M.L.I.S.

Communications Specialist, CEAC
Graduate Student
Social and Comparative Analysis in Education
University of Pittsburgh

Jonathan Adams

Undergraduate Work-Study Student
University of Pittsburgh

Justin Rodgers

Undergraduate Work-Study Student
University of Pittsburgh

CEAC Up Close

Congratulations to Tracy Pelkowski!
Tracy has been admitted to the Ph.D. program in Social and Comparative Analysis in Education (SCAE) at the University of Pittsburgh, to begin in Fall 2009. A former social studies teacher, Tracy has served as an evaluator with CEAC since Fall 2007. She is currently completing her M.Ed. thesis in SCAE.

JoEllen Taylor, M.Ed.

Summer Graduate Assistant
Graduate Student
Social and Comparative Analysis in Education
University of Pittsburgh

Collaborative for Evaluation and Assessment Capacity



School of Education
University of Pittsburgh
4316 WWPH
230 S. Bouquet St.
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
(412) 624-7240
ceac@pitt.edu
www.ceac.pitt.edu

Guiding well-informed policy and practice.

The Collaborative for Evaluation and Assessment Capacity (CEAC) addresses pressing evaluation and assessment needs by drawing on resources throughout the University of Pittsburgh's School of Education and the evaluation community at large. Through interdisciplinary and inter-agency collaboration, affiliates of CEAC work together to merge technical, evaluative, research design, statistical, and theoretical expertise to best address practical evaluation and assessment issues.

For more information, contact:

Cynthia Tananis, Ed.D., Director
Collaborative for Evaluation and Assessment Capacity
(412) 624-7240
ceac@pitt.edu
www.ceac.pitt.edu

Find us online @

www.ceac.pitt.edu