

David Grembowski. (2016). *The Practice of Health Program Evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. Paperback, 324 pages. (ISBN: 978-1-4833-7637-0)

Reviewed by Kirstian Gibson, University of Saskatchewan

The Practice of Health Program Evaluation is an introductory text to the world of health-related program evaluations. The text provides an overview of appropriate methods that may be used throughout a multitude of health-related evaluations, as well as advice regarding the interactions one may encounter with stakeholders/directors throughout an evaluation. Unlike conventional texts, Grembowski has separated the text into three sections: Asking Questions (Act I), Answering the Questions (Act II), and Using the Answers in Decision Making (Act III). The text is full of detailed and relevant examples and explanations of previous evaluations and issues throughout evaluations, as well as the steps necessary to conduct robust evaluations within a health-care setting. Although it is presented as a graduate-level textbook, Grembowski has developed a resource that is appropriate for anyone seeking to understand evaluation, specifically in health-related settings.

The text has a number of strengths that would benefit graduate students and new evaluators working within health-related organizations/sectors. First, the text is clearly written in a manner that is both inviting and thought-provoking—an important aspect of an introductory text in light of the fear commonly associated with evaluation. Grembowski provides a clear explanation of evaluating the impact and implementation of a program, as well as the benefits and means of conducting a cost-effectiveness analysis. The three sections of the book are covered in some depth, providing a wealth of background information as well as the necessary steps required to conduct an efficient and valuable evaluation. I believe that this is crucial for many new evaluators because it limits the need to seek a substantial amount of information from other sources. Furthermore, the text is full of meaningful examples of evaluations that offer a real-life application of the information at hand. These examples include, but are not limited to, logic-model development within health-care programs, the influence of evaluators' biases on the success of an evaluation (e.g., missing crucial aspects of a program can result in deceptive results), and the importance of determining evaluation questions based on the wants and needs of stakeholders. The examples and explanations add clarity to concepts/skills that may be difficult for new evaluators (e.g., developing appropriate research questions/outcomes) and reduce the chance that a concept will be misunderstood and/or misapplied to real-life situations. Reasoning is also provided for decisions between two or more possible options, which I believe

Corresponding author: Kirstian Gibson, kirstian.gibson@usask.ca

would benefit those who are new to evaluation. The explanations are important because they allow a reader to understand what may be most important to consider in some contexts, as well as the pros and cons of making difficult decisions throughout an evaluation.

The unique layout of three “acts” allows the reader to follow the steps of an evaluation from question conception to presentation of data to creating future change. This layout is helpful because it allows the reader to understand how an evaluation unfolds rather than forcing the reader to put the pieces together chaotically. Those in a health-care setting may appreciate the chapter arrangement because it provides an easy transition from little evaluation knowledge to grasping more difficult concepts. Consequently, I believe the text may be most suitable for individuals working within the community, rather than students of evaluation. Dividing the text into three acts forces the reader to wait for key concepts that are typically discussed early on in an evaluation graduate class. For example, outcomes, validity, and sampling are not discussed until Act III, but adequate detail of each concept is provided in the second half of the text. The delay in explaining some key terms could create some frustration when other key concepts in evaluation, such as logic models, are explained in the first few chapters. The latency of presenting basic terms may discourage new evaluators from continuing through the text or may add a level of complexity to understanding the concepts presented early on. Therefore, the layout of the text may be frustrating to instructors and students, as the text is most beneficial when read in full rather than segmented throughout a term.

A second limitation of the text is the limited attention afforded to qualitative research. Although it is discussed in slightly greater detail than in other introductory evaluation texts, the current text still leaves additional information to be desired. For example, how to analyze variables and how to decide which variables are most important to analyze is explained in terms of quantitative data, while qualitative data is discussed in terms of benefits, needs for triangulation, and possible analyzing software. This lack of detail in the area of qualitative analysis is concerning because of the current trend to implement qualitative methodologies in evaluation, especially within Indigenous populations. That being said, the acknowledgment of qualitative research as an important method of data collection during evaluations is appreciated.

Overall, *The Practice of Health Program Evaluation* is an informative read. Although there are some drawbacks, the text delivers a detailed and clear overview of the purposes for evaluation, best practices for communicating with stakeholders, appropriate methods and types of data analysis, and means of data presentation in a health-specific environment. The book provides a number of possible issues that may be experienced by evaluators and discusses the means to avoid or address such issues. Graduate students and new evaluators within the health-care sector would benefit from reading the text; however, due to layout constraints, it may be suitable more as an individual read rather than as a course text. I would recommend this text to anyone pursuing evaluation within health settings.