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PSC 527.01: Performance Measurement

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Political Science 527
Performance Measurement
Fall 2007

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Course Description

Performance measurement is the process by which organizations routinely and systematically gather data to assess their progress in achieving their goals. Since the early 1990s it has been touted as the key to “managing for results” and “making public organizations more businesslike.”

This course examines how to identify mission-related outcomes, develop indicators for measuring progress toward achieving those outcomes, and use the resulting data to improve the performance of government and nonprofit agencies. Students are asked to assess the current use of performance measurement in a specific government or nonprofit agency, program, or unit and develop a fully integrated performance measurement system for possible use by that agency, work unit, or program. (This is a simulated exercise; students may simply pretend to be developing a performance measurement system for an agency, work unit, or program).

Course Prerequisite

Students must have sufficient knowledge of a government or nonprofit agency/program to be able to design a performance measurement system for it, or at least the ability to obtain that knowledge quickly.

Course Objectives

1. To gain a better understanding of the nature and purposes of performance measurement systems and the ideological assumptions on which they rest.
2. To develop skill in designing a performance measurement system.
3. To draw personal conclusions about the value of such systems and whether their benefits outweigh their costs and technical limitations.

Required Text

Harry P. Hatry, Performance Measurement: Getting Results (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 2007).

Other readings are available thru the Library's Electronic Reserve system. Password = PSC 527.

Course Requirements and Grading

Students are required to complete all reading assignments prior to class, submit five writing assignments (20 points each), and present a final report of your proposed performance measurement system both orally and in writing at the end of the semester (100 points).

A = 186-200 A- = 180-185 B+ = 174-179 B = 166-173 B- = 160-165.

Note: These assignments require you to pretend you have been asked by a higher level administrator or board member to investigate and propose a performance measurement system for your program or unit (not the agency as a whole unless it is a small one). Consequently, it is to be written in the form of an internal, technical report, i.e. succinct and to the point. You are to make it as realistic as possible but you are not expected to submit it to your agency.

Weekly Assignments

Wed., Sept. 5 An Introduction to Performance Measurement

Read Hatry=s Preface and Chapter 1, Osborne and Gaebler=s chapter from Reinventing Government (Library Reserve), Frederickson and Frederickson’s Chapter 1 (Library Reserve), and Karen Aguilera’s PSC 527 paper (Library Reserve) Also, be thinking ahead to Assignment #1, and be prepared to identify the organization or organizational unit for which you will develop a performance measurement system.

Wed., Sept. 12 The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993

Read Frederickson and Frederickson Chapters 2 and 3, and skim the Forest Service Performance and Accountability Report – FY 2004 (go to www.fs.fed.us/plan/par/2004 and then click on the link to “Annual Performance Report” pdf). Just try to get a sense of the logic of moving from strategic goals, to strategic outcomes, to measurable indicators. Continue working on Assignment #1.

Wed., Sept. 19 Core Concepts in Performance Measurement

Read Hatry Chapter 2, James Q. Wilson’s “Types of Agencies” on Library Reserve, and Frederickson and Frederickson, Chapter 10. Be prepared to identify the “type” of your agency (from Wilson’s four choices) and the potential difficulties in measuring its performance. Submit Writing Assignment #1 by **Monday, Sept. 24**.

Writing Assignment #1. Write a five-page paper (double-spaced) summarizing what you have learned about performance measurement (e.g., its purpose, logic, process, and limitations). Do so in a way that demonstrates you have read and understood the reading assignments for the first three weeks.

Wed., Sept 26 Process Prerequisites and Agency Mission

Read Hatry Chapters 3 and 4, and begin working on Writing Assignment #2.

Wed., Oct. 3 Identifying Outputs and Outcomes

Read Hatry Chapter 5 and continue working on Writing Assignment #2.

Wed., Oct 10. Identifying Measurable Indicators

Read Hatry Chapter 6 and submit Writing Assignment #2 by **Monday, Oct. 15.**

Writing Assignment #2. Taking guidance from the example on electronic reserve by Karen Aguilera, write and submit the following three components of your final report:

- a) Write the Introduction to your Technical Report (1 or 2 paragraphs). You will want to introduce the purpose of the report by, for example, briefly defining the concept of performance measurement, citing a few of its advantages, and establishing the purpose of the report, i.e., developing a performance measurement system for possible use in your agency, work unit, or program.
- b) Write an introductory paragraph for your Section entitled “Outcome-Sequence Chart,” which explains what these charts are and the roles they play in performance measurement. Next, insert the chart itself. It should identify your core work activity, the outputs that are produced as a result of that activity, and the intermediate and end outcomes that your work activity is intended to achieve. It should also identify 1-3 measurable indicators for each output and outcome.
- c) Include a written narrative that clarifies each box in the chart, i.e., your core work activity, your outputs, and your outcomes. Where appropriate, explain how you intend to measure each output and outcome.

Wed., Oct 17 Gathering Data and Identifying Breakouts

Read Hatry Chapters 7 and 8. (Think ahead to Assignment #3 where you will be asked to identify the sources of your data, and Assignment #4 where you will be asked to explain how data will be collected, analyzed, and reported).

Wed., Oct 24 Identifying Appropriate Benchmarks (Performance Targets and Standards)

Read Hatry Chapter 9 and the article AA Proper Mentality for Benchmarking@ on Electronic Reserve, and submit Writing Assignment #3 by **Monday, Oct. 29.**

Writing Assignment #3: Create a new section of your report entitled “Measurable Indictors and

Benchmarks,” introduce these two concepts, and then, for each of your outputs and outcomes, identify appropriate measurable indicators and benchmarks. Improve on the method adopted by Karen Aguilera (electronic reserve) by identifying the sources of your data as well. Example:

Intermediate Outcome: Children meet their therapy goals and complete treatment

Measurable Indicator: # and % of children who are exited from therapy program each calendar year who have met their treatment goals.

Source of Data: Therapy session records. Data will be maintained on each child’s progress on special excel spreadsheet; the date that the counselor certifies treatment plan has been completed will be entered.

Benchmark: 1) 50% of children who were seen for 10-29 hours of therapy will exit from program having met their treatment goals. 2) 80% of children who were seen for 30 hours or more of therapy will exit from the program having met their goals.

Wed., Oct. 31

Reporting and Using Performance Data

Read Hatry (2nd edition) Chapters 10, 11, and 12 and submit writing assignment #4 in class by **Monday, Nov. 5.**

Assignment #4: Perhaps using a matrix such as the one developed by Karen Aguilera, add a section to your report explaining how the data will be collected, analyzed, reported. Close this section with a summary (1-3 paragraphs) of how this system, taken as a whole, will help your agency/work unit close the gap between actual and desired performance (Yes, I know Karen didn’t do this).

Wed., Nov. 7

Ensuring System Integrity

****No class on Nov. 7** Do the following on your own.**

Skip Hatry’s chapter on Results-Based Budgeting, read Chapters 14, 15, and 16, and submit writing assignment #5 by **Wednesday, Nov. 14.**

Writing Assignment #5: Add a section to your report entitled “Ensuring System Integrity.” In this section identify the kinds of problems that typically plague performance measurement systems and the specific features you will build into your measurement system to maintain its integrity and ultimately its usefulness. Although Hatry identifies several of these problems in the final chapters, I am particularly concerned about the system becoming a hollow ritual, about data being used to threaten the agency with sanctions, about behaviors being skewed toward the few things that are measurable, about data being fudged to make you “look good,” about the whole thing being a waste of time, etc.

Wed., Nov. 14

Alternative Approaches to Performance Measurement

Wed., Nov. 21

Thanksgiving Holiday

Nov. 28, Dec. 5 and 12

Oral Reports

Be prepared to present your performance measurement system to the class on one of these dates (perhaps bring a hand-out showing your Outcomes-Sequence Chart). Your final written report will be due at the time you give your oral report.

The Final Report

This internal, tightly-written report, which essentially integrates assignments #2-#5, is likely to come in at about 15-18 pages. At the close of your report, offer any conclusion you like, perhaps offering honest advice to your superiors about the potential advantages and disadvantages of such a system and whether you are prepared to recommend its adoption.