

Introduction to the Occasional Paper Series

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The Western Michigan University Evaluation Center's Occasional Paper Series (OPS) was active from 1974 to 1984, experienced a brief revival from 1999 to 2003, and has been dormant since. When it started back in '74, it was an innovative outlet for disseminating scholarship on evaluation. According to Daniel Stufflebeam (personal communication), who was director of the Center at the time and founded the series, it was modeled after an occasional paper series published by The Ohio State University Bureau of Educational Research and Services, led by Egon Guba. (Incidentally, it was that organization that spawned The Evaluation Center).

For those of us who can barely remember how we got information before the Internet, it's hard to imagine how this sort of "grey literature" would be advertised and disseminated without the aid of the myriad Web-based communication tools that are now at our disposal. Professor Stufflebeam explained the existence of an "invisible college" whose members regularly met in person to talk about their work and scholarship in evaluation. This informal network included members of the May 12 Group, a handful of evaluation scholars who met periodically beginning in the late 1960s to discuss and exchange ideas around

evaluation and who played a pivotal role in developing evaluation as a profession and discipline (Stufflebeam, personal communication; King, 2010). These folks and others were on a mailing list maintained by the Center and they would be mailed the papers as they became available.

Now, more than a decade into the 21st century, in the age of blogs, Tweets, Facebook, listservs, wikis, in addition to standard-fare websites, the idea of such mail-order scholarship seems almost prehistoric. But in 1974, OPS was cutting edge. The Evaluation Network—the first professional evaluation organization—was a year away from being created. There were no journals dedicated to evaluation. The first periodical dedicated to evaluation was *Evaluation News*, the newsletter of the Evaluation Network. *Evaluation News* was self-described as having an "informal, newsy orientation," (Davis, 1981, p. 1), its guidelines for submission called for a maximum of "3-5 typewritten, double-spaced pages" (p. 2). In contrast, OPS was a means for disseminating scholarly work on theoretical, methodological, and practical issues in evaluation by those who were at the forefront of the field's development—Campbell, Glass, Sanders, Scriven, Stufflebeam, and others.

When I came to work at the Center in 1997, there was still a special room here called the “OPS Room” (Occasional Paper Series) where these documents were stored in neatly labeled cubbies, ready for retrieval and mailing. In 2000, the OPS papers were scanned and put into PDF form so we could make them freely available on The Evaluation Center’s website, although hard copies were still available for purchase for some years to come.

Last year, the Center’s website underwent a major overhaul. We carefully considered each component of the old site and what should be done with its content. Publication of the Occasional Papers had become a little too “occasional” to befit the label. But these early writings by some of the evaluation field’s most influential figures were too important not to be preserved. Moreover, after three to four decades of exile in the “gray literature,” they deserved to be dusted off, polished, and showcased. Accordingly, I suggested to Chris Coryn that he publish them in this journal so as to ensure their availability to the worldwide evaluation community far into the future. To his credit, Dr. Coryn was able to track down nearly all of the authors and obtain their permissions to reprint. You’ll see the papers have all gotten facelifts by way of reformatting, but the content is 100 percent original.

References

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