NU-PEL’s Annual Report

Message from the Leadership

The Northeastern University Public Evaluation Lab (NU-PEL) began in 2018 through the support from a Tier 1 grant from the Northeastern University Office of Research Development, Bouve’ College, and the College of the Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH). Faculty from the Institute for Race and Justice came together with faculty from the Institute for Health Equity and Social Justice Research to create a Lab that brings together faculty and students from across the Northeastern University campus with an interest and commitment to developing community partnered evaluation efforts. Northeastern University has a rich history of community engagement and our team builds upon these strengths to provide a forum that allows for us to more efficiently and fully respond to community partner needs for data driven decision making support and evaluation.

In creating this lab we have brought together 23 students from multiple undergraduate majors, the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs (SPPUA), the Public Health Program, and doctoral programs in both colleges to develop and provide community-engaged classroom learning, training curricula for students, and mentored experiential opportunities to work with community partners on evaluation efforts. We have also developed key training and professional development partnerships, including with the American Evaluation Association (AEA) and the Greater Boston Evaluation Network (GBEN), and hosted two well-attended trainings in the spring of 2019 described in this report.

Just in this first year we have been able to make great strides towards our goal of developing and sustaining the Lab including: working with Northeastern University Research Administration and Finance (NU-RES) to determine appropriate financial models for working with the diverse partners engaged with NU-PEL; partnering with the school of engineering on the re-submission of the Puerto Rico Testsite for Exploring Contamination Threats (PROTECT) grant as the evaluators of the training core; partnered with faculty in the SPPUA on a Boston Foundation funded evaluation effort; received several small evaluation grants with community partners; supported an Experiential Summer SGA for a CSSH student; and have reached out to a number of CSSH and Bouve faculty to partner in future evaluation efforts.

About NU-PEL

NU-PEL is an interdisciplinary lab comprised of faculty and student teams conducting evaluation research that leads to healthier communities and enhances the lives of those living within them. The overall vision of NU-PEL is to build a community-academic partnership to improve local communities and enhance the well-being of the people living in them through the use of evaluation research. This is accomplished by bringing together expertise and resources to advance the theory, practice, and utilization of evaluation through research, education, and service.

NU-PEL’s aims are threefold:

1. To build collaborations and share evaluation expertise across Northeastern University’s colleges.
2. To train students in the techniques of program evaluation through a wide-array of experiential learning opportunities.
3. To provide evaluation and consultative services to greater Boston area community organizations with the mission of improving the health, well-being, and safety of the people impacted by these organizations.

Photograph by Lisa Wu
MEET THE NU-PEL TEAM

The Steering Committee

Alisa Lincoln, PhD, MPH, is the Director of the Institute on Health Equity and Social Justice Research. She is a Full Professor in Bouvé College of Health Sciences and the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. She is also the Associate Dean of Research in CSSH. Her research focuses on the mental and physical health of marginalized communities.

Jack McDevitt, PhD is the Director of the Institute on Race and Justice. He is also Professor of Practice in School of Criminology and Criminal Justice in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. His research expertise involves ways to assist criminal justice agencies in responding to crime such as hate crimes, racial profiling, gun violence, and human trafficking.

Laurie Dopkins, PhD, is the Executive Director of the Northeastern University Public Evaluation Lab. She is jointly appointed in Bouvé College of Health Sciences and the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. She brings a background of evaluation consultative experience as well as teaches Techniques of Program Evaluation.

Emily Mann, PhD, MSSW, is a Teaching Professor in the Human Services program in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. She is also a Senior Research Associated at the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy. Her current research highlights the impact of education and clinical interventions on youth development.

Suzanne Garverich, MPH, is the Program Manager for the Northeastern University Public Evaluation Lab and for the Institute for Health Equity and Social Justice Research. Her work focuses on the mental and physical health of marginalized communities.

Affiliated Faculty

Claudia Santelices, PhD, is a Senior Researcher Research at the Institute for Health Equity and Social Justice Research. She is also an Associate Teaching Professor in the Department of Health Sciences in Bouvé College of Health Sciences.

Alicia Sasser Modestino, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, with appointments in the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs and the Department of Economics.

Amy Farrell, PhD, is the Associate Director of the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice and an Associate Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. Her research examines institutional legitimacy and justice system responses to new crimes such as hate crime and human trafficking.

Beth Molnar, ScD, is the Director of Violence Prevention and Trauma Studies at the Institute for Health Equity and Social Justice Research. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Health Sciences in Bouvé College of Sciences as well as the Director of the Population Health PhD Program.
**The Student Community**

Students from the Techniques of Program Evaluation and other Northeastern University students joined NU-PEL to form the NU-PEL Student Community to assist in providing consultative evaluation services to Boston Area community organizations.

Alexandra Alden is a Doctoral Candidate in Sociology in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. Her work with NU-PEL spanned from developing evaluation plans, conducting a landscape analysis, creating logic models, and collecting evaluation data via focus groups and interviews.

Megan Zelinsky is a Doctoral Student in the Population Health Program in Bouvé College of Health Sciences. She focused on evaluating sports for development programs through the development of evaluation plans, conducting focus groups, and building evaluation capacity.

Lauren Contorno is a Doctoral Candidate in Sociology in College of Social Sciences and Humanities. Her work with NU-PEL focused on developing toolkits as well as quantitative analysis for an evaluation of a program dedicated to reducing race, ethnic, and gender disparities in the work place.

Sumire Maki is an undergraduate Health Sciences student in Bouvé College of Health Sciences. She worked with NU-PEL on literature reviews to inform evaluation plans and specifically developed a plan for conducting photovoice at one of the community organizations.

Cherry Tangri is a Master in Public Health student at Bouvé College of Health Sciences. Through her Capstone she worked with NU-PEL on an evaluation plan and a survey to evaluate the impact of an early childhood behavioral health model.

Christina Ransom is a Master in Public Health Student at Bouvé College of Health Sciences. Through her Capstone she developed and conducted focus groups that were analyzed to help in the process of creating a patient satisfaction survey for patients utilizing secondary cancer screening methods.

Jeton Devereaux is a Master in Social Policy and Urban Affairs student in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. Her work with NU-PEL included her Capstone to better understand best practices and policy during the transition from high school for students with disabilities.

Charlotte Gray is a Master in Public Health student at Bouvé College of Health Sciences. She worked with Human Services faculty in CSSH on several NU-PEL evaluations developing, collecting and analyzing evaluation research data.

**A Student’s Perspective**

As part of my MPH program, I took a program evaluation course which gave me my first taste of evaluation research. This experience sparked my passion for evaluation and I joined NU-PEL, working on two evaluations. I got hands-on evaluation experience through developing and analyzing multiple instruments for the evaluation of Northeastern University’s Bystander training program and 826 Boston Writers’ Room. NU-PEL has provided a plethora of valuable and unique opportunities as well as ample support to ensure all members are adequately equipped to conduct our work. All project members come together regularly to share progress, ask for input, and expand our evaluation knowledge. NU-PEL has expanded my network both in and out of Northeastern, giving me a wealth of knowledge and resources.

~ Charlotte Gray
NU-PEL’s Evaluation Partnerships

Having an experiential learning model, NU-PEL’s faculty and staff led students and students team in working with Boston area community organizations to help build evaluation into their organization’s programs. Throughout the year, NU-PEL utilized various strategies to collaborate with community partners.

**Techniques of Program Evaluation**
Through the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs in CSSH, students taking Techniques of Program Evaluation participated in experiential learning as they worked collaboratively with community organizations in developing evaluation plans. *Asian American Civic Association, Compass Working Capital, and The Arc of Massachusetts* were chosen as recipients of the NU-PEL no-cost evaluation, where students developed an evaluation plan for each organization.

**Greater Boston Evaluation Network (GBEN)**
NU-PEL worked collaboratively with GBEN, the American Evaluation Association local chapter to provide community organizations and academic institutions training on evaluation. In the first of what will be a regular series of jointly sponsored events, GBEN and NU-PEL sponsored an evaluation training focused on impact evaluations. Members from the community as well as faculty, staff, and students from Northeastern University came together to hear from a panel of experts about their experience with conducting impact evaluations. NU-PEL will continue working with GBEN to provide other important evaluation trainings that intersect the needs of community organizations and academic institutions.

**Evaluation Project Teams**
Intergenerational evaluation teams were formed where faculty and senior staff mentored graduate students, who in turn mentored undergraduate students while providing community partners with a variety of evaluation services. Our partnerships and a description of the evaluation team’s work are as follows.

**Bethel Institute for Social Justice**
Consultative evaluation services were provided to the In Your Corner program that collaboratively serves adjudicated youth to prepare them to successfully transition back into the community.

**Shooting Touch**
An outcome evaluation plan was developed to determine the efficacy of the sport for development program located in Boston. A pre and post survey was administered to youth participating in the program. Photovoice will also be a method employed to assess the impact the program had on youth and their families. NU-PEL received $2,500 in funding from Shooting Touch to support these evaluation efforts.

**Project R.I.G.H.T.**
Project Rebuild and Improve Grove Hall Together, Inc. was a no-cost evaluation contest winner. NU-PEL is providing evaluation services related to two Project R.I.G.H.T. programs, including development of program logic models.

**Highlighted Partnership**
Through the no-cost evaluation contest NU-PEL hosted, the *YW Boston* was one of two organizations chosen as the recipient of a free evaluation plan.

NU-PEL worked in collaboration with YW Boston’s team that is responsible for running their *Dialogue on Race and Ethnicity program*. An outcome evaluation plan was developed to determine the efficacy of the program. The evaluation team also developed assessments that would be utilized for the evaluation.

After the evaluation plan was completed, NU-PEL continued its partnership with YW Boston and provided them with a doctoral student intern that worked on creating evaluative toolkits to build evaluation capacity within the participating organizations.

This partnership with YW Boston continues to grow as we have paired up with the organization to provide training through the Northeastern University Open Classroom about how to work collaboratively with community organizations and the benefits of building evaluation capacity within these organizations.
**Dimock Community Health Center**

Funding was provided by the Myra Kraft Foundation and NU-PEL received $2,500 to conduct an evaluation of secondary cancer screening procedures.

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**A Community Organization’s Perspective**

As a small and resource-constrained organization, finding the capacity to build evaluation infrastructure that helps us learn, assists us in being effective, and demonstrates our impact is a constant challenge.

NU-PEL was instrumental in our path to build the organizational infrastructure and capacity we needed to engage in sustainable and meaningful program evaluation.

Our area of work is at the intersection of gender and racial equity. As the Director of Research and Evaluation, questions that I get are: How do you define and measure gender and/or racial equity? and How do you know you are making progress? NU-PEL took on the challenge and searched the literature for valid, reliable, and replicable ways to assess the impacts of one of our programs. When needed, they also drew from other Northeastern experts to inform their work.

One of the most helpful things we found was that NU-PEL did not ask us to fit into any particular research agenda. Rather, NU-PEL allowed us to establish our needs and collaboratively we came up with a scope that made sense given the resources required. Moreover, NU-PEL was flexible and willing to tackle a project that was about capacity building rather than a one-time evaluation.

We look forward to building on NU-PEL’s work and using our evaluation capacity to strengthen our own work and leverage our programmatic strengths with our evaluation work to serve as thought leaders.

- Ivette Tapia, YW Boston

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**826 Boston Writers’ Room**

NU-PEL, with the Human Services program, continued an ongoing collaboration with 826 Boston to evaluate their Writers’ Room programs in the Boston Public Schools.

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**The Boston Foundation**

NU-PEL worked in collaboration with Northeastern University’s Dr. Alicia Modestino to conduct a landscape analysis of current ESOL programs as well as a Return on Investment analysis. This evaluation research was funded by TBF in the amount of $70,000.

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**The Boston Public Health Commission**

NU-PEL is continuing a long-term partnership with BPHC and evaluating their efforts to systematically improve effectiveness in achieving health equity goals within BPHC on a systems level.

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**Youth Opportunities Upheld**

As part of a Master in Public Health Capstone, an evaluation plan was developed including pre and post surveys to formally assess the existing Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Model.

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**You’re With Us**

As part of a School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs Capstone, focus groups were developed as part of a needs assessment to better understand best practice and policy for students with disabilities as they transition from high school.

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**Little Brothers-Friends of the Elderly, Boston**

NU-PEL is working with the local Little Brother’s organization to develop an evaluation plan for their seniors’ mentoring program with funding support of $5,000.

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**Office of Prevention and Education at Northeastern (OPEN)**

NU-PEL with Human Services is developing, conducting, and analyzing focus groups to help evaluate the impact of the bystander interventions provided through OPEN.

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**Puerto Rico Testsite for Exploring Contamination Threats (PROTECT)**

NU-PEL submitted a grant with the College of Engineering to evaluate PROTECT’s Training Core which aims to provide high quality interdisciplinary training and mentoring.
Building Evaluation Capacity One Training at a Time

NU-PEL is committed to training undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff, and community partners in evaluation theory, methods, and techniques and tools to advance the evaluation capacity in the academic and community setting. Throughout this past year, NU-PEL was successful in providing a wide-array of evaluation training opportunities focusing on qualitative methods, survey development, evaluation methods, theories and techniques.

Qualitative Methods

NU-PEL provided various qualitative trainings that increased the learning capacity of all participants. A variety of different forums were provided to students, faculty, staff and community members to build qualitative evaluation capacity. Training included sessions on learning the qualitative software, NVivo, and how to conduct focus groups.

NU-PEL also sponsored a training that provided training on Photovoice. NU-PEL brought in researchers who have and are utilizing Photovoice in their research to discuss this method which incorporates photography and narrative. Panel members included Laura Senier, Laura Cordisco Tsai, and Peter Balvanz.

Survey Development

Trainings were provided in collaboration with Northeastern University’s Information Technology Services in how to utilize the survey tool, Qualtrics. Trainings included an introduction to the tool which trained participants to be able to develop a wide range of surveys. A second more in-depth training was offered to learn how to utilize Qualtrics’ analytics feature.

Quantitative Methods

In collaboration with the Greater Boston Evaluation Network, NU-PEL co-sponsored a panel presentation on the research evaluation method, Impact Evaluation. Panel members included Lisa Goldblatt Grace, Executive Director of My Life My Choice, Northeastern University’s Amy Farrell, Jessica Britt from Year Up, Ira Nichols-Barrer, Senior Research at Mathematica, and Northeastern University’s Jack McDevitt (picture on right).

Evaluation Theory and Techniques

NU-PEL is dedicated to training undergraduate and graduate students in evaluation theory and tools to enable them to provide state-of-the-art evaluation consultative services to our community partners. The student community met monthly and were provided training opportunities to increase their evaluation knowledge and skills. Trainings included topics such as evaluation theory and methods, how to develop and leverage the use of a logic model, and how to utilize evaluation techniques such as rubrics and checklists.

For more about NU-PEL, visit our website at: https://bouve.northeastern.edu/nu-pel/

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