The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs frequently receives requests from organizations and agencies for help with program evaluation. Program evaluation is the systematic collection of information for use to improve effectiveness and make decisions with regard to what those programs are doing and affecting. Sometimes these organizations simply know that the program in question could be improved, and recognize that a formal evaluation can offer some guidance for how to make such improvements. Other times the evaluation is necessary to fulfill a grant requirement or to satisfy internal organization or agency requirements.

Although there are many resources at the University of Minnesota that can provide evaluation assistance, they are not easy to find. Until this past fall, a search of the University’s website for evaluation returned 10,000 links, mostly to internal resources like staff, student, or departmental evaluation.

To address the difficulty in locating evaluation resources at the University, CURA has created a new website called Program Evaluation at the U (www.evaluation.umn.edu). The idea is to help government agencies and nonprofit organizations locate critical evaluation resources quickly and easily. The idea for the website came from Kathie Doty, the Hennepin County/University of Minnesota Liaison. Website content was developed by Laura Hammond, a graduate student in the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. The website itself was developed by Kristopher Layon in the Office of the Senior Vice President for System Academic Administration, CURA’s institutional home.

The website has seven key parts:

- Evaluation 101—frequently asked questions about evaluation
- Expertise at the U—people and centers that can provide assistance
- Get Student Help—various ways to get student assistance

The Program Evaluation at the U website is at www.evaluation.umn.edu.
- What Will it Cost?—covers the range of costs, from free to contracting for evaluation services
- Contact Information—contacts for a few key gateway people
- Educational Opportunities—training programs, coursework, self-study
- External Links—other organizations that can provide assistance

**Expertise at the U**
The meat of the website is a list of 9 centers and 31 people—both faculty and staff—at the University of Minnesota who can provide evaluation assistance and services. In addition, the website provides links to 32 online campus directories that can be used to locate people or centers with topical expertise. This last resource recognizes evaluation help can come both from evaluation experts and from those who have expertise in the topic area (e.g., social work or water resources). Resources are sorted into six topic areas to make it easier for users to find what they are looking for: (1) general, (2) education, children, and youth, (3) social services, (4) science, technology, and the environment, (5) health, and (6) public policy.

Because the nine centers can be overwhelming to anyone, outsiders and insiders alike, a separate page on the site presents 10 types of evaluation services and indicates which centers provide those services:

- evaluation plan design
- evaluation design review
- mail surveys
- telephone surveys
- web surveys
- focus groups
- technical assistance
- assistance writing evaluation funding
- complete evaluation
- evaluation workshops

**Get Student Help**
Student resources at the University also can be used to help with an evaluation.

This section of the website provides information on how to find the right student for the job. It also provides some general guidelines for working with students.

One option is to post a job or internship opportunity. The University has a general site for student jobs and internships called GoldPass; the website provides a link to that resource and tips for using it. Several programs, departments, and colleges also have individual websites that post positions. The evaluation website provides links to each of these. The section of the website called What Will It Cost? provides details about the cost of students hired through the University.

A second option is to apply to CURA for a graduate research assistant. CURA has four programs that could provide evaluation assistance. These are competitive programs and not all projects are funded. As with the first option, the student works directly for the organization or agency, but CURA pays the student’s salary.

A third option is to find a course at the University willing to take on your evaluation as a class project. Most introductory evaluation courses require students to design an evaluation plan. Instructors are always looking for organizations willing to provide student support in exchange for the creation of an evaluation plan for the organization. Advanced evaluation classes often place students in an internship. Other classes at the University may provide evaluation resources as well.

**Educational Opportunities**
As one might expect from an educational institution, there are many learning opportunities provided by the University. The website provides a one-stop listing of the various professional development programs, degree and certificate programs, and evaluation courses available. It also provides links to a variety of online resources to assist visitors in learning about or implementing an evaluation.

For those looking for short-term conference, training, and fellowship opportunities at the University, the website lists those professional development opportunities. Individuals who have completed an approved masters degree and have substantial work experience are eligible to enroll in the University’s interdisciplinary evaluation certificate program. In addition, the University offers dozens of courses in evaluation as well as several degrees. Enrollment in a degree program is not required to take these courses, although most are taught during the day. For University graduate students, an interdisciplinary minor in program evaluation is available. Graduate students majoring in educational policy and administration can add a program emphasis in evaluation.

**Other Evaluation Resources**
The University of Minnesota is not a business looking to make money providing evaluation services, nor do we want to compete with our graduates who offer professional evaluation services in the community. Accordingly, one page of the website is dedicated to external resources, and includes a link to the Minnesota Evaluation Association, whose many members are available to provide evaluation services.

**Conclusion**
The University of Minnesota has a wealth of program evaluation resources, but they have been difficult to find. CURA’s new evaluation website opens the window on these resources. In so doing, it helps the University of Minnesota fulfill its Land Grant mission by improving access to University resources that are useful to individuals, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations seeking assistance with program evaluation.

**William J. Craig** is associate director of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. The Program Evaluation at the U website is at www.evaluation.umn.edu.