

# OPEG Fall Newsletter

Fall Edition 2016

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## OPEG Fall Conference 2016

Make plans to attend the OPEG Fall 2016 Workshop as the theme of "Challenges in Evaluation" continues.



Join us for interactive presentations on a variety of topics that vex evaluators and those who live in the evaluation space.

Such topics include:

- Q Methodology to increase your program evaluation toolkit
- Data Visualization best practices to most effectively communicate evaluation findings
- Participatory data analysis to increase the likelihood of usage among key stakeholders

**Date & Time:**

## Letter from the President

One of the visions articulated by the board is for OPEG to serve as a space for important conversations related to the issues of evaluation.



For those of you who attended the Spring Exchange, I think you would agree that it was intellectually stimulating to participate in these discussions during that gathering. The "thought prompt" for the day was focused on challenges in evaluation, and we were able to cover that topic from many different vantage points.

Relatedly, an important question that continues to emerge in various ways is: What does it mean to be an evaluator? We've been grappling with this question at the chapter level for several years, echoing a similar struggle occurring at the national level. How should one be defined as an evaluator? Should certifications be required of an evaluator? are questions that are being dealt with both nationally and internally.

Within that backdrop, I think it is important that our membership understands how AEA is addressing these questions. As context, the AEA appointed a Task Force "to develop a set of competencies for evaluators." These competencies are not part of a certification program akin to what exists in Canada, rather a set of expectancies that would be promulgated to providers and users of evaluation services. AEA is inviting feedback on these competencies, and I encourage all members of OPEG to provide their feedback.

To review the competencies, visit their [website](#). To provide actual feedback please email, [competencies@eval.org](mailto:competencies@eval.org). I hope all OPEG members are actively involved in this critical discussion. And if you want to be able to engage in other important evaluation topics, please make plans to attend the Fall Workshop in September and to participate in other OPEG events.



## Meet Your New OPEG Board Members

In May, three new members joined the OPEG Board.

Friday, September 30  
8:00a - 4:30p

**Early Bird Registration Fee:**  
Professional Members - \$90;  
Student Members - \$45; Non-  
Member - \$105

[\*\*Register here!\*\*](#)

**Location:**

Educational Service Center of  
Cuyahoga County  
6393 Oak Tree Blvd.,  
Independence, OH

**We've Got To Start  
Meeting Like This!**



**"Yours Truly  
Restaurant"**

**When:**  
September 29 @7pm

**Where:**  
8111 Rockside Road  
Independence, OH

**2016 OPEG Award  
Recipients**

**Dr. Tom Williams received  
the 2016 Roberta O'Keefe  
Recognition Award**



**Dr. Robert Fischer received  
OPEG's 2016 Evaluation  
Recognition Award**

**Natalie Wilson** joins OPEG as a Member-at-Large. She is a brand new member coming to us from Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs. Natalie holds a Bachelor's degree in English and a Master's in Public Administration with a certificate in Women's and Gender Studies from Ohio University. Natalie began working at Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs in 2011 on the Planning, Evaluation, Education, and Research (PEER) Team. She primarily performs quantitative analysis for program evaluations in the areas of health and education in Appalachian Ohio. She is interested in making data available and accessible to a wide audience in order for social programming to be as effective as possible through providers' understanding the population they serve. Natalie just completed a three-year term as Treasurer of the Voinovich School Alumni Society, and just started a term as Member-At-Large of the Susan B. Anthony Memorial Unrest Home Womyn's Land Trust (SuBAMUH).



**Thomas (TJ) Horwood**, also a new member, will be coming on to take over the Treasurer's position from long-time member Michael Levin. TJ is with ICF International and resides in the Canton area. TJ is an experienced program evaluator with 15 years of experience as a consultant working with education and community agencies at the Federal, state, and local levels to develop, implement, evaluate, and improve their programs. Prior to joining ICF International in

2005, he worked as a program evaluator for Kent State University in the College of Education, Health and Human Services and in The Corporate University at Kent State Stark.

**Cheryl D. Marcus** is completing two years as a member of OPEG and was elected to the Board of Directors at the 2016 Spring Exchange. Cheryl serves on the Membership Committee and oversees the development of the newsletter. Her professional career included more than 20 years in higher education in diverse leadership roles.



Cheryl's professional preparation includes earning an Ed.S degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Dayton, completing educational course work as a doctoral candidate at the University of Dayton, and participating in the Management Development Program through Harvard Institutes for Higher Education.

Her research interest seeks to advance research and knowledge in the area of student success and retention of minority students. An evaluation associate with the Harper Mack Group, the team recently were approved as external evaluators for Central State University's NSF Undergraduate Scholarship for Education Excellence in Environmental Engineering and Water Resources Management grant. As an independent consultant, research projects included serving as a field interviewer with California based, Vital Research, LLC and Teacher Ranger Teacher with the Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument where she researched, drafted and recorded the script for the cell phone audio tour for the Colonel Charles Young and the History of the Wilberforce, Ohio Community Program. Cheryl is also a member of Xenia Community Schools Board of Education.

Cheryl is affiliated with the American Educational Research Association, Ohio Program Evaluators' Group, and the Ohio School Boards Association

**Michael Levin** will remain on the Board in an At-Large position.

**Member Profile: Meet Robert Fisher**



## Currently Seeking Nominations for the 2017 OPEG Awards

The deadline for nominations is January 30, 2017. Awards will be presented at the Spring Exchange in 2017.

**Roberta O'Keefe Recognition Award:** To recognize an OPEG member involved with serving and promoting OPEG in an exceptional manner.

**Evaluation Recognition Award:** To recognize an individual and/or special body of evaluation work.

To see the complete award guidelines and to make a nomination click our nomination button below.



## Job Announcements



Job listings and employment opportunities can be found on the [OPEG website](#).

It is a pleasure to feature member, Dr. Rob Fischer, in this edition of the OPEG Newsletter. Rob is a long time member of OPEG, since 2001. He joined the organization immediately following his relocation from Georgia to Ohio. Recruited to the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development in the School of Social Work at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) which he now co-directs, he also directs a master's degree program in nonprofit leadership. An academic researcher, he spent several years as an evaluator in the non-profit sector, and he feels right at home with evaluation groups such as our national association, American Evaluation Association, and with regional affiliates like OPEG.



With an academic background in policy development and evaluation, Fischer completed his doctoral work at Vanderbilt University and moved to Atlanta to be an internal evaluator with a nonprofit organization. His interest in program evaluation was stoked in the mid '90s as the federal government began pushing publicly-funded agencies for outcomes and national organizations had pushed out logic models which shaped the thinking across a broad spectrum of grantees. He knew that policy development and evaluation offered an opportunity to do important work and was a way to contribute to policy changes. He also understood that the lever of change for practitioners and policy makers would be found in having good data at the program level. Particularly, he saw that better decisions for practitioners are guided by good data and changes in practices are made much faster than changes in policy. Frequently, changes in organizational and program practices are made first and then changes in policies catch up later, he noted.



His time with OPEG and his commitment to its mission can also be measured by the accolades he's received: the Roberta O'Keefe Award in 2011 and the 2016 Evaluation Excellence Award. For Rob, there is no greater honor than to be recognized by your peers for your intellectual contribution to the professional field of research and evaluation. "The award means a lot."

Dr. Fischer served as president of OPEG for six years, from 2005-2011. During his term in office, the perennial issues around membership and recruitment were of concern and are a part of his legacy. He recalled that membership grew from a low of 50 to a high of 180 members. Indicative of the premise that leadership is characterized as a verb rather than a noun, Rob Fischer attributed the growth in membership during his term in office to the work and efforts of the entire Board of Directors. Their efforts focused on ensuring stability within the organization by maintaining consistency and reliability in programming and working to keep the agenda updated and relevant to the needs of evaluators throughout the state.

OPEG is one of the oldest regional affiliates whose leaders have often been contacted by other new regional start-ups for tips and strategies for succeeding as an all-volunteer organization made up of individuals from academic institutions, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and independent consultants. For Fischer, OPEG's networking opportunities offer evaluators, especially those who work as solo practitioners in a range of organizational environments, a sense of connectedness and a resource for discussing comparable issues. These include common frustrations like low response rates, surveys and forms not filled out correctly, and strategies for balancing the role of evaluator and objectivity with funders.

In closing, I asked Fischer for advice that would bring more people

The logo features the words "Save the Date" in a white, elegant script font, set against a blue shield-shaped background with a white border.

## SPRING EXCHANGE

**When:** May 19, 2017

**Where:** Columbus

### Ode to OPEG

*A professional without a home,  
kinda lonely too,  
Looking for colleagues who do  
what I do.*

*What's this? Could it be?  
An 88 county support network for  
nearly free.*

*Building my tool kit and making  
connections,  
Joined a committee, then  
suddenly, elections.*

*On the board, what an honor to  
serve,  
Lots of work, many chances to  
swerve.  
Seniority sneaks up, thanks to  
board attrition  
Lots of opportunities to make a  
contribution.  
Wait...President...that's not what I  
wanted,  
Too bad, missed the meeting, and  
got nominated.*

*Little known secret, President is  
not hard  
The key is having board members  
who do their part.  
Programs are the backbone of  
what we do,  
Thank goodness for Marsha,  
Nancy, and Shon, too!*

*Time has flown and it has been a  
pleasure,  
The friendships I've made I will  
always treasure.  
Thank you OPEGers for being part  
of this association,  
OPEG is strong and is a model for  
the nation.*

into the field of evaluation. He says that the one thing we can do is to offer encouragement because we need more individuals from diverse backgrounds doing this work. Often, program operators may not have a comfort level with evaluation which can generate misperceptions about its value and application. However, he says that better evaluation comes from a partnership between program operators and program evaluators because the relationship permits conversations around the questions being asked, the methods being used to generate answers, and the intended use of data. Undoubtedly, he says that going from program operator to the practice of program evaluation in an organizational setting is a leap. There are, nevertheless, many professional development opportunities and voluntary certifications that are free or low cost. One question that the emerging evaluator should consider regarding the wide world of evaluation is: "Where do you see yourself playing a role?" Is it in traditional/quantitative methods that are survey based; qualitative methods using focus groups or interviews, or is it domain based with your expertise in education, social justice, business or some other field?

Fischer finds the work of research and evaluation fulfilling and fun. He sees himself as the "evaluation guy" who loves being able to professionally contribute to incredible, innovative programs. At the end of his tenure as president, he wrote and delivered a poem at the 2011 Spring Exchange, the Ode to OPEG. The poem recognizes the joy of membership in the organization. The poem can be found in the sidebar to the left.

## 2016 Spring Exchange Recap

The 2016 Spring Exchange, held on May 20 at Otterbein College, focused on "Challenges in Evaluation."

Dr. Diana Gurley gave the morning keynote address, "*What Challenges the Validity of our Work? A Discussion of Unanticipated Circumstance.*" Dr. Gurley described evaluation as a cycle of learning and shared with us her lessons learned and associated take-aways from studies she's conducted throughout the years. Key take-aways from the Washington Heights, NY study was to, "look beyond the obvious folks and the role they play." In addition, "pilot the protocols and be careful about assumptions made."

Lessons learned from her Mesa Verde, Arizona study were to "be wary of the interventions and the resulting consequences as some will be a surprise." In addition, she urged attendees to "be willing to cross cultural lines and find a good advisor to help." Other studies described were her veterans study and her incarceration study that was based on policies that contributed to the growth in the prison population.

Her population study triangulated data by conducting focus groups, chart studies, and patient interviews of user services in order to examine high rates of cancer and high rates of death found in residents of Harlem, NY. The lesson learned from this study was that "if you do not know what the population is, you cannot generalize."



The day's Concurrent Sessions included presentations from Christopher Buzzelli and Deepa Shanadi which focused on Challenges in Mental Health and Education Data respectively. Roundtable Discussions were facilitated by Jan Noga who urged participants to consider context maps as a way to systemically view the environment and to demonstrate how and where pressure can be placed on the



## Are YOU a Member?

OPEG is a completely volunteer-run organization that:

- Seeks to promote quality evaluation and research as critical components of service delivery programs in Ohio
- Supports those who conduct evaluations, whether part- or full-time
- Is open to anyone with an interest in evaluation, students as well as professionals

Members serve OPEG in various ways:

**OPEG Board** officers meet via conference call every other month or as needed to make organizational decisions.

**Committees** handle OPEG activities and functions:

- **Program** (Plans and organizes Spring Exchange and Fall Workshops.)
- **Membership** (Recommends activities to recruit members and engage existing members.)
- **Webinar** (Assists with planning informational webinars.)
- **Web Site** (Assists with oversight of the OPEG web site.)
- **Newsletter** (Assists with writing and editing articles.)
- **Elections** (Receives nominations from OPEG members for Board service and conducts the election process.)
- **Awards** (Receives nominations for OPEG awards.)
- **Photography** (Take photos at OPEG events.)
- **OPEG on LinkedIn** (Maintain contact with OPEG members via LinkedIn.)

If you're not a member of this dynamic organization, join

system for change; Tim Miller offered tips for communicating bad news by establishing rapport, understanding the mental models of your client as you educate them about the evaluation, and as an evaluator, always be transparent; and Sheri Chaney Jones discussed innovative strategies for designing programs.

## Summer Stats Series

OPEG sponsored the Summer Stats Workshop on Friday, July 15 at Otterbein University. Dr. Michael Levin, immediate past treasurer of OPEG and associate professor and chair of Marketing facilitated the workshop. Participants learned to use Excel software to conduct and interpret inferential statistics such as chi square for cross-tabulation, ANOVA, correlation, regression, and to create pivot tables. While the available datasets focused on marketing and economics, the application and analysis strategies discussed were transferable to various disciplines.



Attendees were from diverse organizations: Franklin County Children Services, Ohio University, Ohio State Bar Association, National Future Farmers of America, Cleveland State University, Alcohol Drug and Rehabilitation of

Montgomery County, and the Harper Mack Group.

This is the second year that Dr. Levin has volunteered to conduct the workshop on behalf of OPEG. The Ohio Program Evaluators' Group has a long history of offering a free Summer Stats workshop for its members. The practice dates back to Dr. Jerry Bean of Ohio State University. Following the retirement of Dr. Bean, there was a four-year hiatus. Since Michael facilitated the 2015 workshop, the size of the group doubled. Last year, there were seven members in attendance and this year, there were 14 attendees.

Sarah Goodman, of Community Research Partners (CRP) of Columbus, said the workshop was "Perfect!" "It was exactly what was needed since Excel is the software that many of our clients use."



Learning to use the analytical tools in the Microsoft product as a statistical package will allow her firm to run robust statistics beyond descriptive statistics which can be helpful to the clients that CRP serves. CRP recently joined OPEG and the opportunity to attend the workshop was offered free of charge.

Scott Williams, a semi-retired grants consultant for non-profits is a regular participant in the workshop. Scott's membership in OPEG began in 1993 and he is a consistent attendee. He recommends the workshop to grant writers, program managers, consultants, and anyone who may find that they rarely use statistics in their day-to-day activities. Scott says that "Workshop attendees will be able to apply the statistical knowledge learned to proposals and other evaluative opportunities."

## Recommended Reading



The recommended reading for this edition features a study co-authored by OPEG member, Dr. Robert Fischer.

The article is "Leveraging Integrated Data Systems to Examine the Effect of Housing and Neighborhood Conditions on Kindergarten Readiness" by Claudia Coulton, Francisca Richter,

us by visiting our  
[website!](#)

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In many big cities, substantial numbers of children enter kindergarten already well behind in their cognitive and social development, presenting a major challenge for public education systems. While it is generally acknowledged that the environment in which children spend their early years is crucial, little is known specifically about how housing conditions in children's own homes and the immediately surrounding areas factor into their school readiness.

Drawing on two Integrated Data Systems (IDSs), this longitudinal, population-based study examines the influence of housing and neighborhood conditions since birth on school readiness of all children entering kindergarten over a four-year period in a big city school system. Using marginal structural models that properly account for dynamic housing and neighborhood selection, we find that children exposed to problematic housing and disadvantaged neighborhoods have lower kindergarten readiness scores after accounting for other factors.

The negative effects of housing problems on kindergarten readiness are partially mediated by child maltreatment incidences, residential instability, and elevated blood lead levels. Communities are advised to pay more attention to distressed housing as a cause of disparities in early child development and school readiness. IDSs that incorporate detailed housing and property information, especially for the youngest children, can be used to target areas where there is elevated risk and coordinate local efforts to prevent the adverse effects of distressed housing stock on early child development.

See the Study Brief [here](#).

See the Full Report [here](#).

See the [Full Article](#) in the Atlantic Monthly.