Paths to Being a Psychological Scientist Supporting Evidence-Based Policymaking in Government

APS Student and Early Career Webinar
May 5, 2021

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## Overview

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<td><em>Heather Kappes</em></td>
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<td>Project Examples</td>
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<td>What is it Like to Work in Government?</td>
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<td><em>And How do You Get There?</em></td>
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Office of Evaluation Sciences

About Us and Our Work
What is the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES)?

Based at the General Services Administration (GSA), OES is a team of interdisciplinary experts that works across government to help agencies build and use evidence.
What does OES do?

OES provides government-wide expertise and support on leading practices for evidence-building and evaluations, and partners with Federal agencies to answer priority questions using rapid and rigorous evaluation.

Build and Use Evidence

- Apply behavioral insights
- Embed evaluations
- Share leading practices
- Build skills of the Federal workforce
What does OES do?

OES team members work alongside agency collaborators to apply behavioral insights, make concrete recommendations for how to improve government, and evaluate impact using administrative data.

- Partner with Federal Agencies to target priority outcomes
- Translate behavioral insights into concrete recommendations
- Embed evaluations
- Analyze results using existing administrative data
- Ensure our work meets evaluation best practice
- Measure impact and generate evidence to continuously improve
What does OES do?

Our portfolio has spanned areas such as retirement security, reducing the cost of government operations, improving public health outcomes, and increasing educational opportunity.

- Achieved $8M+ in cost savings and revenue in less than 15 months.
- Enrolled more than 20,000 active duty servicemembers into retirement savings plans.
- Informed more than half a million Americans about the benefits of getting vaccinated.
- Showed text message reminders could increase college enrollment by 6%.

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Translate behavioral insights

Small changes in context or presentation can influence human behavior
What are examples of behavioral insights?

- Immediacy
- Social Norms
- Anchors
- Simplification
- Feedback
- Accountability
- Defaults
- Loss Aversion
Since 2015, OES has recruited over 50 interdisciplinary experts into Federal government, representing a mix of Federal Employees, Fellows and Academic Affiliates.
Heather Kappes

- BS Biopsychology, UC Santa Barbara, 2000
- PhD Social Psychology, New York University, 2012
- Assistant Professor of Marketing, in the Department of Management, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012-present
- “Fellow” at the Office of Evaluation Sciences, August 2020-present
- Visiting Behavioral Insights Scholar, Association for Psychological Sciences, May 2020-present
Mary Clair Turner

Education

- PhD Human Development and Social Policy, Northwestern University, 2020

Career

- Technical Research Assistant, MDRC, 2009 - 2011
- Research Fellow, UChicago Urban Labs, 2012 - 2020
- Education Pioneers Graduate Fellow, OneGoal, Summer 2015
- Associate Fellow, Office of Evaluation Sciences, 2017 - 2020
- Portfolio Lead and Behavioral Scientist, Office of Evaluation Sciences, 2020-present
Russ Burnett

- PhD, Cognitive Psychology, Northwestern University, 2004
- Postdoc, Yale University & Hebrew University, 2005-2007
- Survey researcher for government clients, 2007-2009
- Methods Lead, Office of Evaluation Sciences, 2016-present
Project examples
A collaboration between OES and HHS

Dear Dr. Provider,

The figure to the right displays your prescribing of Seroquel treatments (Seroquel, Seroquel XR, or generic quetiapine) compared to other general care practitioners in Maryland.

As can be seen, you prescribed far more treatments – 188% more – than similar prescribers within your state. In turn, you have been flagged as a markedly unusual prescriber, subject to review by the Center for Program Integrity.

We recognize that some flagged practitioners have appropriate reasons for this pattern. However, we have seen that other practitioners may drift into prescribing patterns that would be considered medically unjustified or abusive. Abusive prescribing can lead to extensive audits and even revocation of Medicare billing privileges.
Reducing Overprescribing of Quetiapine in Medicare Part D
A collaboration between OES and HHS

Quarterly Quetiapine Prescribing in Treatment and Control Groups

Each point is the average days of quetiapine supplied by prescribers in the quarter. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. Arrowheads denote when letters were sent to prescribers.

Publications
Reducing Self-reporting Errors by IFF Form Users
A collaboration between OES and GSA

I promise that the information I am providing is true and accurate: Doug Powell

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<th>Quarter Ending</th>
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Reducing Self-reporting Errors by IFF Form Users

A collaboration between OES and GSA

Differences in Remittances Collected:
No Signature Confirmation vs. Up-Front Signature Box

- No Signature Confirmation: $27,016,009
- Up-Front Signature Box: $28,606,628

6% higher total payments

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We frame a cash incentive so as to invoke the endowment effect or loss aversion.
What is it like to work in government? And how do you get there?
How does OES build evidence?

OES team members work alongside agency collaborators to apply behavioral insights, make concrete recommendations for how to improve government, and evaluate impact using administrative data.
How does OES build evidence?

A typical week includes...

Disseminate results in writing and talks
Measure utilization and impact of OES work

Meetings with agency collaborators

Review academic literature and government resources
Write option memos and project initiation documents

Negotiate data-sharing agreements
Write project design documents

Measure impact and build evidence to continuously improve

Partner with Federal Agencies to target priority outcomes

Translate behavioral insights into concrete recommendations

Embed evaluations

Analyze results using existing administrative data

Clean and analyze data

Re-analyze data
Write-up findings for academic articles, blog posts, and project abstract document

Ensure our work meets evaluation best practice

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What is next in the Federal efforts?

The Evidence Act puts the role of policy-relevant research front and center

What do agencies do?

**Learning agenda:** Identify priority questions and activities to address those questions.

**Evaluation plans:** Describe significant evaluations, with methods, information needed, and dissemination.

**Evidence-building capacity:** Lists activities being evaluated and capacity for research and evaluation.

Who is involved?

- Evaluation Officer
- Statistical Official
- Chief Data Officer
- Performance Improvement Officer

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Ways of working with the federal government

As a federal employee
See USAJobs.gov

- Occupational series: 0100 – Social Science, Psychology, and Welfare
- Useful search terms include: social science, behavioral science, evaluation

Via the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA)

- Enables agencies to reimburse academic and other institutions for part- or full-time collaborations
- Various pathways exist for finding collaborations
- Find more info in the OES IPA Toolkit

With offices or organizations that position academics to support agencies

- OES is one of these
- There are a variety of others
Are you interested in working with OES?

**Annual Fellowship Program**

Full-time OES team members are selected annually, with applications often opening in early Fall. These individuals come to the team for one year, are based in Washington, D.C., and are often on loan from a variety of home institutions such as a university or another Federal agency.

- Join our mailing list at the bottom of our homepage ([oes.gsa.gov](oes.gsa.gov)) to be notified of our next recruitment cycle, opening up in September 2020
- You can also learn more about the position and what we look for at [oes.gsa.gov/opps](oes.gsa.gov/opps).

**Academic Affiliates**

We often require specific subject matter expertise as we identify opportunities to work with agencies on an ongoing basis. As an Academic Affiliate, you will be able to apply your work to improve government, and have the opportunity to publish results.

You can tell us about your area of expertise at [oes.gsa.gov/contact](oes.gsa.gov/contact) and we may reach out to you to collaborate on a specific project.

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Questions?
Thank you!

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