

1-2002

## SW 400.01: Social Work Research

Maxine Jacobson

*University of Montana - Missoula*

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### Recommended Citation

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**Social Work Research**  
**SW 400**  
**Spring, 2002**

**Professor:** Maxine Jacobson, Ph.D.  
**Office:** Jeannette Rankin Hall 116  
**Phone:** 243-6384  
**E-mail:** mj@selway.umt.edu  
**Office hrs:** By appointment  
**Class Time:** Thursday, 4:00-7:00  
**Prerequisites:** SW 360

□ To a student, the term research is often scary. It is usually associated with a form of scientific inquiry that relates to the physical sciences. However, research is part of everything we do. It is a thought process we use to solve problems, a method of inquiry that helps us build knowledge. In essence, research is a scientific process we use in every aspect of our lives. □

--Bruce D. Friedman

**Introduction:** Human beings enter this world with an endless curiosity about themselves, others, and their surrounding environment. In this sense we are □ born □ researchers. At its essence research is inquisitiveness in thought and action. It is the pursuit of new knowledge and discovery through a creative, conceptual process of researcher engagement with the world and its mysteries. Social work research takes many shapes and forms. Social workers use and apply the principles of social research to evaluate their practice; determine the effectiveness of their programs and policies; assess group, organizational and community needs; and evaluate the individual change process using single-subject design. Social workers also conduct research to build theory from the ground up.

**Course Description:** This course is designed to develop students' ability to design and conduct research within the ethical constraints and considerations of human research and to understand the results of empirical research presented in professional journals. Students will become familiar with two predominant social science research paradigms; positivist and interpretative approaches, and explore possibilities for blending methodologies. We will critically engage with the basic tenets of these paradigms, and investigate the interplay of these approaches with the underlying ethics, values (human diversity, social justice, self-determination and equality) and principles of the social work profession. This analysis will provide a framework for assessing various research designs, their methodologies, results and implications. Studies drawn from the field of social work will be used to illustrate selected research methodology.

Students will be introduced to a range of research methodologies that will include oral history, participant observation, case study, ethnography, qualitative and quantitative program evaluations, and experimental and quasi-experimental designs. Students will develop their research skills through the experiential component of this course which will consist of collaborating with a small group of class members in conceptualizing, designing, and conducting a research project and presenting its results. The course emphasizes moving away from distinctions between the practitioner/researcher roles to envision research as an integral component of ethically informed social work practice.

**Course Objectives:**

1. Articulate the difference between qualitative and quantitative research methods, their philosophical bases, and their strengths and limitations.
2. Discuss how unquestioned assumptions about human diversity, which include issues concerning gender, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation, can cause biases in question formulation, research design, measurement, sampling, analysis, and results.
3. Describe basic data gathering techniques and the implications of different levels of measurement for social work research.
4. Identify and discuss a variety of methodological approaches to research such as case studies, experimental, participatory, needs assessments and so on.
5. Read, interpret, and critique research journal articles based on their consideration of the underlying values, ethics, and principles of social work profession.
6. Develop a working familiarity with library resources necessary to conduct a literature review based on your practicum placement field of study.
7. Demonstrate competency in the computation and interpretation of basic statistics.
8. Identify basic steps of the generalist practice model and their connections to scientific inquiry.
9. Discuss the contextual nature of research and its ethical, political, and sociocultural implications.
10. Describe how research findings can contribute to social work's knowledge base and the development of programs and services that promote social justice in our society.
11. Demonstrate a working knowledge of focus groups as a data collection strategy and the skills necessary to conduct them.
12. Participate in a small group research project and acquire hands-on knowledge of working collaboratively with a research team.

**Reading Material:**

Marlow, C. (1998). Research Methods for Generalist Social Work. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co.

Articles on reserve at the library and through ERES.

## Course Assignments:

### 1. Small Group Research Project: (50%)

The experiential component of this class will provide students with the opportunity to participate in a small group research project. Groups will consist of no more than 4-5 students. Students will have one hour of class time each week to devote to their project. The bulk of the work will take place outside of class. Students will present a case study of their research project during the last two class periods before the final examination (May 2 & May 9). Students will be evaluating their own and the participation of fellow team members in the project through an instrument(s) we will develop together in class. My evaluation of each student's contribution to the project will be included in the final grade for this project. Detailed information concerning the project will be discussed in class.

### 2. Homework Assignments: (10%)

Over the course of the semester, students will complete (4) brief homework assignments that promote students' integration of course material. Each will require a brief write-up of no longer than 1 type-written page.

### 3. Quizzes: (20%)

There will be 4 short quizzes (approx. 30 minutes). These will consist of matching, true and false, multiple choice and short-answer essay questions. Quizzes will cover course reading and class discussion.

### 4. Final Examination: (20%)

For the final examination students will evaluate a research article by following the guidelines presented by Marlow on pages 316-317 in our text. The guidelines will be used throughout the semester to critically evaluate several research articles we will be discussing that are on reserve in the library. For the final exam, students will be given an article one week before the designated final date and will critique the article based on Marlow's guidelines. This will be an open-book, take-home exam that students turn in no later than the designated final date. Students will be on their honor to work alone on the final examination.

**Note: If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible.**

## Determination of Course Grade:

Small Group Research Project	50%
Homework Assignments (4)	10%
Quizzes (4)	20%
Final Examination	20%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100%</b>

<u>Points Earned</u>	<u>Final Grade</u>
100-90	A
89-80	B
79-70	C
69-65	D
< 65	F

\* I  show you how grades are calculated in class.

**Grading Criteria:** As does any reader, I have difficulty with written work that is carelessly put together and poorly organized and thought out. The ease with which I can understand your work has a positive effect on your grade. I do not necessarily have to agree with what you say but I do have to understand your work and make sense of it. All written work should be proofread before handing it in or have a classmate assist you with editing. For all written assignments, I use the following criteria for grading:

- X correct grammar, spelling and punctuation
- X indications of thoughtfulness and critical reflection
- X thoroughness and attention to detail
- X well organized (use of headings, subheadings and clarity of thought)
- X push beyond surface content to interpretation, analysis, and original ideas
- X make connections to class readings, discussion and illustrate these in your written work

**Course Outline and Assignments:**

Week of:	Class Discussion and Lecture Topics	Assignments and Readings to Complete by <u>Next</u> Class
Jan 31 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Course Introduction</li> <li>X Course Content and Expectations</li> <li>X What is Research and Why do It?</li> <li>X Research Paradigms - Approaches to Inquiry and Knowledge Production</li> <li>X The Practitioner/Researcher</li> <li>X Brainstorming Research Topics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Marlow - Chapters 1&amp;2</li> <li>X Homework Assignment #1</li> </ul>
Feb 7 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Homework Assignment #1 Due</li> <li>X Considerations in Selecting a Research Topic</li> <li>X Human Diversity</li> <li>X Ethics and IRB</li> <li>X Deciding Projects</li> <li>X Research Team Meeting #1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Marlow - Chapter 3 &amp; 4</li> <li>X Marlow – Chapter 15 (scan)</li> </ul>
Feb 14 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Research Questions/Questioning Research</li> <li>X Literature Review - The Hows and Whys</li> <li>X Critiquing Research Articles and Using Findings in Practice</li> <li>X Research Team Meeting #2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Marlow - Chapter 7</li> <li>X Prepare for Quiz #1</li> </ul>
Feb 21 <sup>st</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Quiz #1</li> <li>X Evaluating Practice and Practicing Evaluation</li> <li>X Dominant and Alternative Designs</li> <li>X Research Team Meeting #3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Marlow - Chapter 8 &amp; 9</li> <li>X Homework Assignment #2</li> </ul>

Feb 28 <sup>th</sup>	X Homework Assignment #2 Due X Collecting Research Information X Overview of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches X Multiple Methods/Multiple Measures X Selecting a Sample X Research Team Meeting #4	X Marlow - Chapter 5-6
Mar 7 <sup>th</sup>	X Program Evaluation and other Research Strategies X Participatory Approaches X Community-Based Research X Research Team Meeting #5	X Marlow - Chapter 12 X Prepare for Quiz #2
Mar 14 <sup>th</sup>	X Quiz #2 X Quantitative Data Analysis X Statistical Tools X Strengths and Limitations of Numbers - The Self-Sufficiency Scale X Research Team Meeting #6	X Marlow – Chapter 13 X Homework Assignment #3
Mar 21 <sup>st</sup>	X Spring Break – No Classes	
Mar 28 <sup>th</sup>	X Homework Assignment # 3 Due X More Sophisticated Quantitative Analysis X Inferential Statistics X Research Team Meeting #7	X Marlow - Chapter 11
Apr 4 <sup>th</sup>	X Review Qualitative Approaches X Analyzing Qualitative Research Information X Coding and Looking for Themes X Grounded Theory X Research Team Meeting #8	X Marlow - Chapter 10 X Prepare for Quiz # 3
Apr 11 <sup>th</sup>	X Quiz #3 X More on Qualitative Approaches X Research Team Meeting #9	X Marlow - Chapter 14 X Homework Assignment #4
Apr 18 <sup>th</sup>	X Homework Assignment #4 Due X Writing up the Results: Tips and Techniques X Research Team Meeting #10	X Marlow – Chapter 15 X

Apr 25 <sup>th</sup>	X Practice Research Article Critique X Research Team Meeting #11	X Prepare group presentation X Prepare for Quiz #4
May 2 <sup>nd</sup>	X Quiz #4 X Refresher on Research Article Critique X Small Group Research Presentation	X Prepare group presentation
May 9 <sup>th</sup>	X Small Group Research Presentation X Pass out Take Home Examination	
May 16 <sup>th</sup>	X Finals□Week X Final Exam turned in by 12:00 noon Thursday, May 16 <sup>th</sup>	

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