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SW 520.01: Social Work Research - MSW Foundation Year

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Social Work Research (SW 520)
MSW Foundation Year
Fall 2003

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Office Hrs: Tuesday: 9:00 - 10:45, Thursday 9:00 - 10:45, Friday 11:15 - 1:15, or by appointment
Time: Friday: 8:10 – 11:00
Location: GB 225
Credits: 3

CATALOG DESCRIPTION

Principles, methodologies, technologies and statistical approaches of human service research are introduced. Beginning capabilities in evaluation of social work practice and skill development regarding use of published research are emphasized.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to develop each student's ability to understand the results of empirical research presented in professional journals including the reading of statistics. In addition to developing the ability to critically analyze research, students will develop an ability to design and conduct basic research studies within the ethical constraints of human research while supporting the underlying ethics, values (human diversity, social justice, self-determination and equality) and principles of the social work profession. The implications and impact of research on disadvantaged populations, persons on color, women, sexual minorities, and persons with disabilities are examined. In this learning process students will become familiar with two predominant social science research paradigms; logical positivist and interpretative (relativist) approaches, and explore possibilities for blending methodologies that are qualitative and quantitative in nature to best fit differing research needs.

Examples of research drawn from the field of social work will be used to illustrate selected research methodologies. Course content examines the unique nature of social work practice settings and their potential and limitations for knowledge building through research. Social research designs covered in this course include case study, content analysis, single subject/system, ethnographic, experimental, quasi-experimental, survey, and program evaluation methods and designs. The course will introduce students to associated statistical methods that are applicable to the aforementioned methods. Focus will be primarily on reading/interpreting results and understanding appropriate uses of a statistic. Students will also begin to develop their research skills through the experiential component of this course which will consist of developing in collaboration with their practicum agency a limited qualitative and quantitative study to answer a research question of interest. The course emphasizes blending the practitioner/researcher role and therefore making research an integral component of ethically informed effective social work practice.

RELATION TO OTHER COURSES

This first research course provides the foundation for the understanding and appreciation of completed research studies and reports through literature reviews and analysis of secondary data sources. It includes an introduction to designing and carrying out research studies. Examples of research studies are drawn from a variety of topics related to other foundation courses, for example: implications for research on policies at local and state agency levels (policy); research methods which may impact the respondent's behavior as well as confidentiality and ethical considerations in the design and collection of data (HBSE and practice); sensitivity to diversity issues in design and collection methods (HBSE and policy); how to use research to improve interventions and practices (practice).

FOUNDATION OBJECTIVES THAT RELATE TO THE COURSE:

1. Provide students with analytical skills needed to critically examine the cultural, historical, political and economic contexts that have shaped the meaning of social work and its practice.
2. Provide students with knowledge and skills of generalist social work practice as a foundation for assessment and intervention with diverse systems and client populations.
3. Introduce students to the integrated practice model and the epistemological and theoretical issues that inform it.
5. Provide students with theoretical perspectives and practice frameworks to understand and address questions of difference and diversity and forms and mechanisms of oppression, inequality, discrimination, with particular attention to special populations in the region.
6. Engage students in collaborative teaching-learning opportunities with diverse scholars, activists, and community practitioners regarding contemporary issues and debates in social welfare.
8. Provide students with the knowledge and skills to engage in integrated practice with individuals, families, groups and communities, assess the process and outcomes of practice, and promote best practice approaches.
10. Prepare students to analyze social policies and their influence on social work organizations, services, and client populations and contribute to their development and improvement.
12. Socialize students to continually assess and evaluate their professional competence and pursue opportunities for self-awareness and professional growth and development.
13. Promote understanding of research as a fundamental component of practice and prepare students to use research to inform and evaluate practice.
14. Develop students' knowledge of key issues in individual and family practice and their relation to contemporary federal and state social welfare policy and programs.
15. Provide students with skills and strategies of participatory, collaborative practice that include the voices of client population in the decisions that affect their lives.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Obj. 1 Demonstrate a beginning understanding of the nature, components, and methods of social science research and their relevance to professional social work practice.
- Obj. 2 Develop a working familiarity with library resources necessary to conduct a literature review based on your practicum placement field of study.
- Obj. 3 Describe the relationship between theory, research, and practice.
- Obj. 4 Identify basic steps of the generalist practice model and the connection to scientific inquiry.
- Obj. 5 Evaluate the ethical consequences of research activities on human subjects.
- Obj. 6 Discuss how unquestioned assumptions about human diversity, which includes issues concerning gender, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation, can cause biases in question formulation, research design, measurement, sampling, analysis, and results.
- Obj. 7 Demonstrate a beginning ability to interpret the relevance of social work research to clients of differing age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and disability.
- Obj. 8 Demonstrate a beginning ability to critically analyze empirical literature, formulation of researchable questions or hypotheses, selection and implementation of appropriate research methods.
- Obj. 9 Critically analyze research studies at a beginning level in terms of their theoretical and methodological strengths and weaknesses as well as their contributions and limitations for the field of social work.
- Obj. 10 Read, interpret, and critique research journal articles based on their consideration of the underlying values, ethics, and principles of social work profession.
- Obj. 11 Demonstrate understanding of the various threats to validity and associated reliability questions as applied to research articles and unpublished agency studies that incorporate a range of research methods.
- Obj. 12 Demonstrate knowledge of the practice content of social work research.
- Obj. 13 Demonstrate an understanding of the research process, including problem formulation, sampling, design, measurement, data collection, analysis and issues relevant to appropriate choices.
- Obj. 14 Identify and discuss a variety of methodological approaches to research such as case studies, experimental, participatory, needs assessments and so on.
- Obj. 15 Articulate the difference between qualitative and quantitative research methods, their philosophical bases, and their strengths and limitations.

- Obj. 16 Identify researchable practice problems, formulate questions and hypotheses and select appropriate methods for sampling, instrument construction, data collection and analysis.
- Obj. 17 Use basic descriptive statistical procedures and schematic presentations of data to arrive at conclusions regarding research questions.
- Obj. 18 Demonstrate the use of a computer statistics package to calculate basic statistics.
- Obj. 19 Draw conclusions and implications from research for practice.
- Obj. 20 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.

Required Text: Research Methods for Social Work, (2001) Rubin & Babbie.

Recommended Reading (on reserve): New Advances in Technology for Social Work Education and Practice (2001) Julie Miller-Cribbs (Ed)

1. ASSIGNMENTS:

Integrating Practice/Research Exercises

Students will have several opportunities to engage in direct research, research planning, and research evaluation/critiquing projects. These efforts are designed to assist the student in applying what they are learning through the text, lectures, and class discussion to real research.

Through out the course in class (groups) and individually students will engage in evaluation of research articles. Three of these evaluations will be completed for a grade. The final exam will also be one of these evaluations for a total of four critiques.

In addition to the evaluation of research literature, each student will complete three research design and implementation projects. Beginning with a simple design (known in this class as the Mini Project), students will advance through the design and completion of a single subject research project and finish with the completion of a qualitative/quantitative research investigation and report. The single subject and qualitative/quantitative research projects will be completed in consultation with the instructor. By the end of the course the student will be comfortable in examining, critiquing, and designing a number of different types of research projects that will have direct application in the practice arena.

Detailed outlines will be provided to students regarding the above assignments.

ALL PAPERS SUBMITTED FOR THIS CLASS ARE REQUIRED TO BE IN APA FORMAT.

2. Quizzes/Final Examination:

There will be 4 short quizzes. These will consist of matching, true and false, multiple choice, short essay and recall questions. Quizzes will cover course reading and class room discussion information. The final examination will entail an evaluation of a quantitative/qualitative research article. Guidelines will be presented prior to the exam and will also be used with other research article evaluation exercises

3. Incomplete Policy.

No incomplete grade, "I", will be allowed except in exceptional cases in accordance with university policies regarding Incomplete (I) Grades. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with this policy.

4. Timeliness.

Papers are expected to be turned in on the date specified. Quizzes are expected to be taken during the time provided. Points will be deducted for late papers and quizzes.

5. Participation and Attendance

The class will be participating in several hands-on exercises to help facilitate learning of key concepts, including group projects focused on analyzing research articles. Attendance is important for maximum student benefit. The grade will be based upon students attendance and readiness to participate (including: covering readings in advance of class and having materials in hand for group projects as assigned). Note: missing more than 2 classes will result in the student losing one grade level in the class.

6. Due Dates

Mini Project	Week 3
Article Critique	Week 4
Quiz 1.	Week 5
Quiz 2.	Week 8
Article Critique	Week 9
Single Subject	Week 10
Quiz 3.	Week 11
Article Critique	Week 13
Quiz 4.	Week 14
Article Critique	Week 15
Qualitative/Quantitative Research	Week 16
Final Exam.	Week 16

7. Determination of Course Grade *(points/percentage)*

Mini Project	50 (5%)
Single Subject Design Project	100 (10%)
Qualitative Research Project	150 (15%)
Research Article Analysis (4@50 points)	200 (20%)
Quizzes (4@100 points each)	400 (40%)
Final Examination (evaluation of article)	<u>100 (10%)</u>
Total Points:	1000 (100%)

<u>Points Earned</u>	<u>Final Grade</u>
1000-900	A
899-800	B
799-700	C
699-600	D
< 600	F

SCHEDULE

Week One: September 5

Empirically based practice: the research foundation.

Read: Preface/Chapter 1, 2
 Topics: Introduction to class/assignments, the importance of research to humane, ethical social services. The nature of reality/knowing and the scientific method. Introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Week Two: September 12

Research, theory, and practice; the ethics of rational inquiry.

Read: Chapters 3, 4
 Topics: The link between theory, research and practice. Research purposes. Introduction to ethical considerations. Protection of Human Subjects. Cultural &/or gender bias- social and political implications. Benefits vs. costs of research.

Week Three: September 19

MINI PROJECT - DUE

Read: Chapters 5, 6
 Topics: Research purposes and process. Units of analysis. Measuring anything that exists. Operational considerations; causal relationships, independent/dependent variables Qualitative and Quantitative Measures.

Week Four: September 26

ARTICLE CRITIQUE #ONE - DUE

Read: Chapter 7, Handout (Threats to Internal and External Validity)
 Topics: Measurement. Variation. Levels of Measurement. Frequency Distributions. Introduction to reliability, validity and threats to validity.

Week Five: October 3

QUIZ: WEEKS 1, 2, 3, 4

Read: Weinbach & Grinnell, (2001). chapter 3.
 Topics: Descriptive Statistics. Working with measures of central tendency, variability, and percentages. Standard deviation.

**Week Six:
October 10**

Read: Chapter 11
Topics: Descriptive statistics continued, uses of computers in research. Statistical vs. practical significance. Parametric and Non-parametric defined
Introduction to single case designs in social work.

**Week Seven:
October 17**

Read: Chapter 11
Topics: Use of single case designs in social work continued: designs, validity. Standard normal distribution/ z scores, skew-ness. The chi-square statistic. Introduction to research instruments.

**Week Eight:
October 24**

QUIZ: WEEKS 5, 6.7

Read: Chapter 8
Topics: Construction of research instruments. Developing questions and questionnaires. The Mann-Whitney U statistical test.

**Week Nine:
October 31**

ARTICLE CRITIQUE #TWO - DUE

Read: Chapter 9
Topics: Probability and sampling designs. The Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs statistical test.

**Week Ten:
November 7**

SINGLE SUBJECT PROJECT - DUE

Read: Chapter 10, 17
Topics: Validity and the relationship to experimental and quasi-experimental designs. Cause. Introduction to types of inferential statistical tests. Reading inferential statistics, basic concepts, t-tests, analysis of variance.

**Week Eleven:
November 14:**

QUIZ: WEEKS 8, 9,10

Read: Chapter 12, 18
Topics: Methods of survey research - The questionnaire: personal face to face interviewing, mail and telephone interviewing. Reading inferential statistics; regression analysis, logistic regression.

**Week Twelve:
November 21*****ARTICLE CRITIQUE #THREE - DUE***

Read: Chapter 13
Topics: Qualitative research terminology, methods, and issues of establishing validity.

**Week Thirteen:
November 27 – 30*****THANKSGIVING BREAK*****Week Fourteen:
December 5*****QUIZ: WEEKS 11, 12, 13***

Read: Chapter 14
Topics: Unobtrusive research methods and secondary analysis.

**Week Fifteen:
December 12*****ARTICLE CRITIQUE #FOUR - DUE***

Read: Chapter 19
Topics: Program evaluation: types and utilization focused methods.

**Week Sixteen:
December 15 - 19
Finals Week:*****QUALITATIVE/QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT: DUE (15th)******FINAL EXAM (December _____)***

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