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SW 400.01: Social Work Research

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Social Work Research
SW 400
Spring, 2003

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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 series of research exercises and presenting their 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. Understand the ethical considerations and processes for protecting human subjects.
4. Describe basic data gathering techniques and the implications of different levels of measurement for social work research.
5. Identify and discuss a variety of methodological approaches to research such as case studies, experimental, participatory, needs assessments and so on.
6. Read, interpret, and critique research journal articles based on their consideration of the underlying values, ethics, and principles of social work profession.
7. Develop a working familiarity with library resources necessary to conduct a literature review based on your practicum placement field of study.
8. Demonstrate competency in the computation and interpretation of basic statistics.
9. Identify basic steps of the generalist practice model and their connections to scientific inquiry.
10. Discuss the contextual nature of research and its ethical, political, and sociocultural implications.
11. 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.
12. Demonstrate a working knowledge of focus groups as a data collection strategy and the skills necessary to conduct them.
13. Demonstrate a working knowledge of content analysis as a qualitative data analysis strategy and the skills necessary to complete this process.
14. Participate in a program evaluation and acquire hands-on knowledge of working collaboratively with a research team.

Reading Material:

Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (2001). *Research Methods for Social Work*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

Articles on hard copy reserve at the library and through ERES. (Password: socres)

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1. Program Evaluation Research Project: (100 points)

The experiential component of this class will provide students with the opportunity to participate in a program evaluation of the BA social work program. The project will combine quantitative and qualitative research methods and enable students to learn about the research process by engaging in the conceptualization, design, and implementation of a real life program evaluation. Students will be divided into 3 or 4 research teams that will meet during class time to address different aspects of the research process. Some out of class time will be required to complete the project. For example, some students may perform literature searches, others may organize and facilitate focus groups and some may help with computer-assisted data analysis. The project will culminate in a student-planned forum where others in the department (students and faculty) can gather to hear about the research results and implications for programmatic changes. Detailed information concerning the research project will be distributed in class. **Students will need to pass an online certification process regarding the protection of human subject and other ethical considerations in order to participate in the study.** We will discuss the details of the certification process in class

2. Attendance/Participation: (40 points)

Due to the experiential nature of this class, attendance is mandatory. Students can request excused absences from class due to illness or family emergencies or other unforeseen circumstances but they must notify the instructor before the class for approval. Because the class is conducted in a 3-hour block, missing one class means missing a week of classes. Students will be working in research teams to complete a research project. Poor attendance and lack of participation in these activities has a detrimental influence on group cohesion, the spirit of the project, the amount of workload distribution and they ultimately affect the final product produced in research teams. **For each class attended, students will receive 2 points and an additional 1 point for arriving on time.**

3. Research Article Critique: (40 points – 20 points each)

Students will be reading **two** research articles for the purpose of critique. Students will submit a paper no longer than 3 type written pages. Critiquing an article means assessing its strengths and limitations, its theoretical premise, clarity, appropriateness of research design and data analysis strategies, and so forth. Detailed information addressing how to do a critique will be distributed in class.

4. Quizzes: (80 points)

There will be 4 short quizzes (approx. 30 minutes) worth 20 points each. These will consist of matching, true and false, multiple choice and short-answer essay questions. Quizzes will be administered at the beginning of class. They will cover course reading and class discussion.

5. Program Evaluation Forum: (40 points)

Students will be instrumental in planning a research forum for faculty and students to disseminate and discuss the results of the program evaluation conducted during the course of the semester. Planning and participating in the forum will take the place of a 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:

Program Evaluation Research Project	100	
Research Article Critique (2)	40	
Attendance/Participation		40
Quizzes (4)	80	
Final Examination	40	
Total:	300	

<u>Points Earned</u>	<u>Final Grade</u>
300-276	A
275-251	B
250-226	C
225-195	D
< 195	F

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:



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

Grading Policy: Papers and homework assignments are expected to be turned in on the date specified in the syllabus. Quizzes are expected to be taken during the time provided. Points will be deducted for late papers and quizzes which decrease the grade one grade level (e.g., an A becomes a B; a B becomes a C, etc.) unless the student has made prior arrangements with the instructor.

Course Outline and Assignments:

Week of:	Class Discussion and Lecture Topics	Assignments and Readings to Complete by <u>Next</u> Class
Jan 30 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course Introduction • Course Content and Expectations • What is Research and Why do It? (con't) • Positionality and Other Influences on Scientific Inquiry • Research Team Meeting #1 (all groups on field research) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubin & Babbie- Chaps 1 & 2 • Rubin & Babbie – Chapt 19 – (This chapter will be an important reference throughout the course.)
Feb 6 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early History of Social Work Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubin & Babbie - Chaps 3 & 4

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Film: The Women of Hull House: Harnessing Statistics for Progressive Reform (VT11200) • Research Paradigms • Overview of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches to Research • Research Team Meeting #2 	
Feb 13 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking Theory and Research • Theory Construction – Deductive vs. Inductive Logical Systems • The Practitioner/Researcher • Social Work Roles and Research • Human Diversity, Ethics and IRB • Film: Protecting Human Subjects (VT04908) • Research Team Meeting #3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubin & Babbie - Chaps 5 & 6 • Prepare for Quiz #1
Feb 20 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz #1 • IRB Certificate Due • The Research Process • Research Questions/Questioning Research • Literature Review - The Hows and Whys • Critiquing Research Articles and Using Findings in Practice • Research Purposes • Making Meaning – Conceptualization • Defining Concepts and Measurement • Research Team Meeting #4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubin & Babbie - Chapt 7
Feb 27 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library Field Trip – Literature Review • Review Quiz #1 • Levels of Measurement • Measurement Error • Reliability and Validity • Other Ways of Thinking about Reliability and Validity • Research Team Meeting #5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubin & Babbie – Chaps 9 & 10
Mar 6 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of Sampling Types • Sampling and Issues of Diversity • Causality • Group Research Designs • Research Team Meeting #6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubin & Babbie – Chapt 11 • Prepare for Quiz #2
Mar 13 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz #2 • Introduction to Single-Case Designs • Measurement and Data Gathering • Journal Article Critique of Single-Case Design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubin & Babbie – Chapt 12 • Read Journal Article for Critique – Soliman, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Treatment Outcomes for A Kuwaiti Child

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research Team Meeting #7 	
Mar 20 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Quiz #2 Journal Article Critique Due Introduction to Survey Research Methods of Survey Research Strengths and Limitation of Survey Research Secondary Analysis Case Examples of Survey Research Research Team Meeting #8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rubin & Babbie – Chapt 13 Finn & Jacobson – Chapter 8 – Evaluating, Reflecting On, and Celebrating Our Efforts (reserve and ERES)
Mar 27 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spring Break – No Classes 	
Apr 3 rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative Research Methods Participatory Approaches to Research Community-Based Research Research Team Meeting #9 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rubin & Babbie – Chapt 14 & 15 Prepare for Quiz #3
Apr 10 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz #3 Content Analysis – Coding and Looking for Themes Analyzing Data Research Team Meeting #10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rubin & Babbie – Appendix C Rubin & Babbie – Review Chapt 19 on Program Evaluation
Apr 17 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Quiz #3 Writing up the Results: Tips and Techniques Research Team Meeting #11 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read article for critique – Reserve and ERES – Nora Gold – “Using Participatory Research to Help Promote the Physical and Mental Health of Female Social Workers in Child Welfare.”
Apr 24 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journal Article Critique Due Research Team Meeting #12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare for Quiz #4
May 1 st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz #4 Rehearsal for Research Forum and Presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare to present case study presentation at research forum
May 8 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program Evaluation Research Forum and Presentation Course Evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare final assessment of program evaluation and research forum
May 15 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time to be announced – discussion and submission of program evaluation and research forum assessment 	

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