

## University of Tennessee College of Social Work

Social Work 602 - Research for Social Work Practice II Spring 2018

Instructor: William R. Nugent, Ph.D.

Tuesday 1:25 – 4:25

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### Code of Conduct

It is the student's responsibility to have read the College of Social Work Ethical Academic and Professional Conduct code that is in the student handbook ([www.csw.utk.edu](http://www.csw.utk.edu)). You also need to become familiar with what constitutes plagiarism, and must write all of your course assignments without plagiarizing any materials. The Library web pages have information on this topic.

### The Honor Statement

An essential feature of The University of Tennessee is a commitment to maintaining an atmosphere of intellectual integrity and academic honesty. As a student of the University, I pledge that I will neither knowingly give nor receive any inappropriate assistance in academic work, thus affirming my own personal commitment to honor and integrity. I also affirm that I will not plagiarize from any source. (*Hilltopics*, <https://hilltopics.utk.edu/>).

### Disability

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a documented disability or if you have emergency information to share, please contact the University of Tennessee Office of Disability Services, 915 Volunteer Blvd/100 Dunford Hall, Knoxville, TN 37996, Tel: 865-974-6087, Fax: 865-974-9552, VP: 865-622-6566, email: [sds@utk.edu](mailto:sds@utk.edu). This will ensure that you are properly registered for services.

### University Civility Statement

Civility is genuine respect and regard for others: politeness, consideration, tact, good manners, graciousness, cordiality, affability, amiability and courteousness. Civility enhances academic freedom and integrity, and is a prerequisite to the free exchange of ideas and knowledge in the learning community. Our community consists of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and campus visitors. Community members affect each other's well-being and have a shared interest in creating and sustaining an environment where all community members and their points of view are valued and respected. Affirming the value of each member of the university community, the campus asks that all its members adhere to the principles of civility and community adopted by the campus: <http://civility.utk.edu/>

### Dimensions of Diversity

The College of Social Work and the University of Tennessee welcome and honor all people. In accordance with the U.S. National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the U.S. Council on Social Work Education (CSWE 2015 Educational Policy Statement), "the dimensions of

diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including” age, class, color, culture, mental or physical disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, gender identity, immigration status, marital status, national origin, political ideology, race, regionality, religion and spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status. The College values intellectual curiosity, pursuit of knowledge, and academic freedom and integrity. “A person’s diverse life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim” (CSWE 2015 Educational Policy Statement). The College of Social Work promotes social justice and social change, and strives to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice.

### **Ph.D. Program Competencies**

Upon completion of the UT CSW Ph.D. program, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate expert knowledge in a focused substantive area relevant to social work.
2. Conduct independent and original scientific research that advances knowledge in a substantive area.
3. Communicate scientific findings in an effective way to a range of audiences (from lay persons to other scientists).
4. Secure funding for a substantive research agenda.
5. Teach students the knowledge, skills, and values they need to be proficient social workers in a substantive area.

### **Course Description**

This is a course focusing on research methods for the development of knowledge for social work practice, with an emphasis on research design. The course will be taught as a seminar, allowing for both presentation and discussion. In addition, there will be homework assignments and projects designed to help students learn important concepts. Students’ evaluations will be based on their presentations, participation in class discussions, quizzes, exams, and research proposals. Students will be expected to attend all classes, complete assignments prior to class, participate actively in class discussion and submit class work on time.

### **Course Rationale**

Social work education at the doctoral level is designed to foster an appreciation and understanding of the scientific method so that graduates can improve and extend the knowledge base of social work through empirical research. This course provides initial doctoral level training in the application of social science research methods to understanding and improving social work practice and theory at the individual, family, organization and community levels.

### **Course Objectives**

This course is designed to provide students with an understanding of each step in the development and implementation of social science research. Upon completing the course, students will be able to formulate research hypotheses; appropriately sample populations for study; implement experimental, quasi-experimental, and survey research designs; use measurement instruments appropriately; and select appropriate statistical analyses. In addition, students will have acquired an understanding of the ethical issues involved in human subject research and of current controversies surrounding social science research methods.

By the end of this course students should be able to:

1. Define various common errors of inference that human beings make and describe how these can lead to beliefs about the world that are incorrect;
2. Describe how a scientific approach to developing and justifying “knowledge” can help prevent researchers from committing these common errors and help insure more valid knowledge;
3. Define the terms “statistical conclusion validity,” “internal validity,” “external validity,” and “validity of putative causes and effects”;
4. Describe terms “independent variable” and “dependent variable”, and give examples of each;
5. List and define various threats to statistical conclusion validity and methods that can be used to control for these threats;
6. List and define various threats to internal validity and methods that can be used to control for these threats;
7. List and define various threats to external validity and methods that can be used to control for these threats;
8. List and define various threats to the validity of putative causes and effects, and methods that can be used to control for these threats;
9. Describe methods of sampling, both probability and non-probability;
10. Define measurement; define the various levels of measurement; discuss the concept of reliability and define the reliability coefficient; define the concept of validity in measurement and discuss the various forms of evidence to support claims of validity; and describe various measurement methods;
11. Define and describe various research designs, including experimental designs, quasi-experimental designs, associational or correlational designs, ex post facto designs, survey designs, and single subject designs; and discuss the various strengths and limitations of these designs
12. Define and discuss various forms of bias in research;
13. Articulate plausible alternative explanations for research results;
14. Develop and conduct a validity study of a measurement instrument.
15. Conceptualize a research project, including research questions and hypotheses; sampling design; measurement plan; research design; data analysis plan; and delineation of limitations of the proposed research project;
16. Use confirmatory factor analysis to conduct measurement equivalence studies;
17. Use path analysis to test mediation and moderation hypotheses; and
18. Write a research proposal.

### **Required Text**

There is no required text for this course. The course instructor will assign readings from texts and journal articles. These materials will be emailed to students or handed out in class.

**Grading**

Exams (2)	35% (17.5% each)
Quizzes	15% (total)
Homework and experiential projects	30%
Research proposal	20%
Total	100%

**Grading Standards**

A	92% - 100%
B+	86% - 91.99%
B	80% - 85.99%
C+	75% - 79.99%
C	70% - 74.99%
D	65% - 69.99%
F	below 65%

Your grade will be the weighted average of your grades on exams, quizzes, etc. Each grade will be weighted by the percentages above under **Grading**.

**Exams**

There will be two exams, one at approximately mid-term, and the other at the end of the semester. Each exam will account for 17.5% of your course grade.

**Quizzes**

There will be frequent quizzes that will cover course material, including readings. The total of your quizzes will count 15% of your final grade.

**Homework and Experiential Learning Projects**

There will be homework assignments of a variety of forms. There will be projects that will be done in class and as homework designed to help you learn important research concepts and skills. These will include learning projects on scale development and validity studies; random sampling; doing a CFA measurement equivalence study; using path analysis to test hypotheses about mediation and moderation hypotheses; and the use of structural equation modeling. Specifics of these projects will be given out in class.

**Reading Assignments**

Reading assignments will be given out each class by the course instructor. The tentative reading sequence is below.

**Research Proposal**

A major project for this course will be the writing of a research proposal. You will write a research proposal for a possible research project in your area of interest. The proposal, the

sections of which are described below in the words of Dr. Charles Glisson, should be in APA style. This proposal will be due the end of the term and will be discussed in class.

## **Components of the Research Proposal**

Adopted from Dr. Charles Glisson

### **I. Statement of the Problem**

The problem statement is the guiding theme of the proposal. This section should include a statement of the **purpose** of the study and should specify its **objectives**.

#### Purpose of the Study

This section should specify the social problem or practice issue addressed by the study and explain why the research is being conducted. It should establish the importance of the problem addressed by the research and explain why the research is needed. For example, it might describe the seriousness of juvenile antisocial behavior nationally, the gaps that exist in the knowledge about this behavior, and why the specific knowledge gap chosen for study is of particular importance.

#### Objectives

This section should describe what the investigator hopes to accomplish with the research. After reading this section, the reader should be clear about the questions to be answered and the nature of the information to be provided by the proposed research. For example, one might propose to test a drug abuse treatment approach to determine the intervention characteristics that contribute differentially to the success of adolescent boys and girls who participate in the program. Expected outcomes might also include the provision of descriptive information not currently available. An example of this might be a comparison of arrest rates for participants in the years prior to and following participation in the program.

### **II. Review of the Literature**

This section will review published research related to the purpose and objectives described above. It should be noted that references may be found throughout the proposal, but it is preferable for most of the literature review to be reported in this section. A review of the literature should support the hypotheses, the definition of the variables, methodology and data analysis plan that follow. It should summarize the results of previous studies that have examined similar questions and relationships among the variables included in the proposed research.

An important function of the literature review is to provide a theoretical foundation for and explanation of the relationships among the variables of interest. It is important that the review explain the mechanisms that link the variables of interest. The review can also provide information about related problems, intervention programs and target populations.

The literature review must address three areas:

1. **Topic or problem area:** This part of the literature review covers material directly related to the problem being studied. It is common for at least two substantive areas to be reviewed because most research involves variables that have been studied in a variety of substantive areas. For example, a study of some aspect of juvenile antisocial behavior suggests a review of the literatures on anti-social behavior, adolescent development and families at risk. As another example, research on the differential impact on males and females of intervention characteristics in a substance abuse program could require a review of the literature on substance abuse programs, the specific intervention characteristics in question, and pertinent research on gender differences. As another example, research on conceptualizations of work in high stress settings could suggest a review of the literature on the stress factors in such settings, the concept of stress

and the development of job-related attitudes.

2. Theory area: Investigators must identify the social science theory which relates to the problem area. Examples of such theories might be selected from sex-role theory, theories of deviance, leadership theory, small group theory, family systems theory, or conflict theory. The theory area provides the theoretical “lens” through which the writer chooses to view and understand the problem. It provides guidelines for explaining the etiology of problems and the linking mechanisms that connect variables.

3. Methodology: Investigators must review the literature which is appropriate to various aspects of their chosen method, including design, selection of subjects, and methods of data collection. This section describes research methods and measurement approaches used in previous investigations in the area. This content should be considered in designing the proposed research and used to support the choice of design and measurement techniques. Otherwise, the investigator must explain why s/he has chosen methods or approaches that have not been used previously.

After reading the literature review, the reader should understand the problem area you have selected and the theoretical models, findings, methodologies, and measurement techniques that have been used in previous, related research efforts. The literature review should be written to lead up to specific hypotheses which are then stated at the end of the literature review.

### **III. Methodology**

#### **Subjects**

Subjects can be individuals, families, groups, organizations, states, or countries, depending on the unit of analysis. This section will describe how the sample in the study will be selected. For example, how will subjects be selected? Will every subject who volunteers be included? If not, what criteria will be used to choose those to be included? Will there be a comparison group? How will the subjects in that group be chosen? In addition to describing how subjects will be chosen, this section should provide a rationale for the selection approach taken. This rationale usually includes external validity requirements (i.e., the conditions necessary to generalize the findings to a particular target population). After reading this section, the reader should have a clear understanding of how subjects will be selected for the proposed research and of why they will be selected in that particular manner. The reader should also have a clear idea of the characteristics of the intended subjects, including age, sex, ethnicity, education, SES, and other related variables.

#### **Design**

This section will describe the type of research design to be used. Will it be an idiographic, survey, quasi-experimental or experimental design? Will it be cross-sectional or longitudinal? Will it be a retrospective or a prospective design? The design should also describe the sequence of events that will occur in conducting the research. This would include how the subjects will be divided up, what the subjects are expected to experience during the research, and when and how often they will be observed or asked for information. After reading this section, the reader should have a clear understanding of the overall design of the study.

#### **Measurement**

This section will specify the measures to be included in the proposed study and the methods used to gather the data. It is helpful to divide the variables into dependent variables, independent variables, and covariates. Dependent variables are outcomes (e.g., drug abuse, self-esteem, depression) that are affected or predicted by other variables. They might also include variables that are affected indirectly (e.g., arrest rates, recidivism, employment record). Independent variables can include

intervention approaches, program characteristics, and subject characteristics believed to affect the dependent variables. Covariates are additional independent variables included in the research solely for the purpose of controlling for differences that might exist among subjects. These differences are controlled statistically so that they will not confound conclusions that are drawn about relationships between independent variables and dependent variables.

A description of how each variable will be measured should be included in this section. Sometimes, it is advantageous to measure variables two different ways so that some estimate of measurement validity can be made. After reading this section, the reader will know the specific variables that will be included in the proposed study and how they will be measured.

#### **IV. Data Analysis**

This section will explain how the data will be analyzed once they are collected. Usually, more than one analysis is conducted. Each analysis that will be used to meet each objective listed above should be described. Also a description of the specific effects to be examined in each analysis, such as main effects, interaction effects, or simple main effects, should be included.

The unit of analysis to be used should be specified and the reason for choosing that unit should be explained. After reading this section, the reader should know which effects will guide the data analysis and in exactly what way the data are to be analyzed to meet each objective of the proposed study. Data analyses should be specifically linked to the hypotheses so that it is clear how each hypothesis will be tested.

#### **V. Bibliography**

The bibliography should include full reference documentation for all articles and texts mentioned in the proposal. It is important that the investigator fully review relevant previous work in developing the proposal.

#### **VI. Timetable**

This section will describe the sequence of activities necessary to conduct the research. It will include the time necessary to complete each activity. After reading this section, the reader will have a clear understanding of what steps will be taken, the order in which they will occur, and the time each step will require.

**Tentative course content schedule** (This schedule is subject to change as class contingencies arise).

Week 1 (January 16): Review of SW 601; basic research concepts

Week 2 (January 23): Development of measurement scale; validity study

Week3 (January 30): measurement equivalence studies

Week 4 (February 6): measurement equivalence continued

Week 5 (February 13): sampling; random and non-random

Week 6 (February 20): research designs; random assignment

Week 7 (February 27): review for midterm exam

Week 8 (March 6): (approximate date of midterm exam)

Week of March 13<sup>th</sup> - spring break

Week 9 (March 20): testing mediation and moderation hypotheses using path analysis

Week 10 (March 27): testing mediation and moderation hypotheses using path analysis  
continued

Week 11 (April 3): The research proposal

Week 12 (April 10): The research proposal continued

Week 13 (April 17): The research proposal continued

Week 14 (April 24; last day of class): Research proposal due.