

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK**

**SW 520: Foundations of Evidence-Based Practice  
Section 501; 502; 503; 504  
Summer 2018 | 1 credit hour**

**Professor:** Matthew J. Cuellar, PhD, MSW

**Contact Information:** mcuellar@utk.edu

**Class Time and Location:** Online, July 9 @ 6:00pm – 9:00pm CT

**Class Meeting Room:** Zoom (Tennessee.zoom.us) Meeting Room ID: 3871857746

**Office Hours:** Online (By Appointment)

**Prerequisites:** None

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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 College of Social Work MSSW Handbook ([www.csw.utk.edu](http://www.csw.utk.edu)). Students are also expected to sign and adhere to the Social Work Field Placement Code of Conduct.

**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. (*Hilltopics*).

**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.

### **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 at 100 Dunford Hall (865) 974-6087. This will ensure that you are properly registered for services.

### **Course Description**

This is a required advanced curriculum course. The course examines how to (1) convert information needs related to practice decisions into well-structured answerable questions; (2) efficiently locate the best evidence with which to answer such questions; (3) critically appraise such evidence; (4) apply results to practice and policy decisions; and (5) evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the application of such results to practice and policy decisions.

### **Course Rationale**

In order to maximize services to client systems that are effective in achieving valued outcomes, and to minimize ineffective and harmful services, social workers must have the knowledge and skills to formulate well- structured answerable questions about practice and policy decisions, and locate, critically appraise, apply, and evaluate the best evidence for making practice and policy decisions within a culturally affirming generalist social work context.

### **Course Competencies**

By the completion of this course, the students are expected to be able to demonstrate the following competencies (through course activities, assignments, and/or exams):

1. Define, articulate, and apply principles of critical thinking by learning how to recognize, define, and avoid practice fallacies to improve care given and care received with diverse clients/client systems.
  - *Content: assertions and assumptions of practice; common logical fallacies when examining evidence; common errors in reasoning that violate principles of science called “practitioners’ fallacies”; steps in evidence based practice; controversies and misconceptions about evidence based practice).*
2. Formulate well-structured answerable questions about practice and policy decisions through engagement with the client, a mutual understanding of expectations, and a careful assessment of service needs and availability, the client/client system's culture, context, and motivation.
  - *(content: Client Oriented Practical Evidence Search” (COPES) questions; evaluation, prevention, assessment, description, and risk questions).*
3. Employ a scientific analytic approach using qualitative and/or quantitative methods to

rigorously, critically and open-mindedly investigate, analyze, synthesize, and interpret available primary and secondary data and research findings, evaluation outcomes and other information toward formulation of professional judgments and conclusions

- *(content: steps in evidence based practice; utilizing electronic searches and information technology using methodological filters; quality of study rating forms and frameworks for evaluating research studies; meta-analysis).*
4. Analyze the influence and implications of cultural, geographic, community, gender-based, religious, political, ideological and other identities and orientations on thinking about social issues, concerns, ethics and values.
- *(content: identity formation; experiences of individuals in these contexts; formation of multiple identities; case studies of life experiences in identity formation and their relationships with the thoughts on contemporary social issues; critical analysis of self with respect to the above identity designations; history of cultural insensitivity in research; generalization of research findings to other groups; recruitment and retention of minority and oppressed populations in research studies; problematic issues in making research more culturally competent).*

### **Office Hours**

I am available for phone appointments if you have any questions about the course or assignments. I am also available by e-mail for questions or issues and will respond to you within 1 day, except on weekends or if there are special circumstances that I inform you about in advance.

### **Academic Integrity**

University policies on academic integrity will be strictly enforced in this class. If you have any questions about what academic integrity and academic dishonesty mean, please bring these up with me as soon as possible. Please read and follow the UTK Center for Student Conduct and Community Standards' statement on academic integrity at [http://studentconduct.utk.edu/students\\_current\\_dishonesty.php](http://studentconduct.utk.edu/students_current_dishonesty.php).

### **Course Requirements/Assignments**

This course is unique because it is very short, it is only 1 credit hour, and there are three sections combined for a total of 60+ students. In addition, the readings for this particular class are crucial to adequately understanding evidence-based practice, which will lay the groundwork for your entire MSSW course of study. Because of these characteristics, the requirements for this course are intentionally structured to prioritize reading and comprehension over producing written work. Specifically, your grade will be comprised entirely of weekly quizzes on the readings.

Quiz 1	40%
Quiz 2	20%
Quiz 3	20%
Quiz 4	20%
<hr/> TOTAL	100%

There will be a Blackboard quiz every Wednesday on the previous week's readings. These quizzes make up the entirety of your grade, so you must ensure that you are carefully and thoroughly keeping up with all assigned readings and other assigned content, such as podcasts, handouts, and lecture slides. Though the quizzes are all open book (you can use any course material you want

while taking them), they will be timed, so you need to have read all of the required content *before* you start each quiz so that you don't risk running out of time while looking up the answers.

As you can see in the course schedule below, there are far more readings in week 1 than in any other week, so the quiz for week 1 will be twice as long and worth twice as many points as the subsequent quizzes, but you will also have twice as much time to complete it. The table below outlines the quizzes based on the number of questions, the number of total possible points, and the amount of time you will have for each.

	Date	Number of questions	Points per question	Total points available	Amount of time given
Quiz #1	July 13	20	2	40	1 hour
Quiz #2	July 20	10	2	20	1 hour
Quiz #3	July 27	10	2	20	1 hour
Quiz #4	August 3	10	2	20	1 hour

Each quiz will open at 12 am on Wednesday and close at midnight (in other words, you have the entire 24 hour period each Wednesday to take the quiz at your convenience). You must take the entire quiz in one timed sitting. Once you open a quiz there is no way to stop it, so do not open the quiz until you are ready to complete it. **There will be no opportunities for make-up quizzes; you must take the quiz in the allotted 24-hour window.**

Please note that sharing *any* information with any of your classmates about the content of any quiz is CHEATING. Any evidence of information sharing will result in a grade of zero for every person involved.

*Important side note:* I am not the OIT Help Desk. If you experience problems related to Blackboard, I cannot help you. You have to call the Help Desk. For this reason, I strongly urge you NOT to wait until the last minute to start a quiz, because I will not be able to do anything about it if you experience a Blackboard-related delay that you have to seek help for, and which causes you to miss the quiz window. **It is your responsibility to ensure that you take each quiz in the ample window of time available**, so *please* do not put yourself in a situation where you are cutting it too close to absorb any minor delays that might arise.

The topics for the quizzes are:

Quiz 1:

Intro to EBP: Definitions, historical development, controversies/debates. (CC: 1, 4)

Quiz 2:

Formulating questions and searching for evidence (CC: 2, 3)

Quiz 3:

Critical thinking and appraising evidence (CC: 1, 3, 4)

Quiz 4:

Implementing interventions using EBP (CC: 3, 4)

## Grading

### Late assignment policy

Quizzes must be taken in the 24-hour window designated each Wednesday during the course. If you do not complete the quiz during the designated window, you will receive a grade of zero (0) for that quiz and no make-up quiz will be given.

### **UTK Grade Scale**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Point range</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Description of standard</b>
A	94-100	Outstanding/Superior	Exceptional performance, consistently exceeds expectations
B+	90-93	Very Good	Consistently meets, and occasionally exceeds, normal expectations
B	85-89	Good	Consistently meets normal expectations
C+	80-84	Average	Unevenness grasping course content as evidenced by assignment performance; inconsistent in meeting normal expectations
C	70-79	Poor	Lack of understanding of course content as evidenced by assignment performance; does not meet course expectations
F	69 or below	Very Poor	Lack of attendance or incomplete or deeply deficient performance; does not meet course expectations

### **Readings**

**There is no required text for this course. All assigned readings will be posted on Blackboard.**

All readings are listed in the course schedule below under the week in which they are to be completed. Additional handouts and other material such as power point slides will be added to Blackboard weekly and will also be required reading. I will have all required materials posted on Blackboard by Thursday of each week, a full week before the quiz on that content will take place. *Please note that content from any or all readings, podcasts, handouts, and power points may appear on the weekly quizzes.* Hint: Keep up with the readings!

### **Recommended supplemental material**

While not required, you may wish to complete all or some of the free training modules at <http://www.ebbp.org/training.html>. The modules are organized by topic, and they may help you

enhance your understanding of the material. These are completely optional.

## Week 1: July 9-15

### **Recording on Blackboard Posted on 7/9/2016**

The purpose of the session is to review the syllabus, the course structure, assignments, grading, and class expectations in a format that allows you to ask questions. We will also have a short introductory lecture focused on defining EBP. The link to the meeting will be sent out prior to the day of the live session. You should not wait until the Wednesday live session to start your readings for the week.

*Topic:* Introduction to the course and the topic

- Class overview and expectations
  - Review of syllabus, course requirements, grading, etc.
  
- Introduction to evidence-based practice
  - Defining the steps of EBP
  - The historical context and current state of the EBP movement
  - Distinguishing *evidence-based practice* from *empirically-supported interventions*
  
- Controversies and debates related to EBP
  - Challenges to EBP and responses
  - Practitioner perspectives on using EBP

*Readings:* (These are listed in the suggested order that you should read them.)

1. Thyer, B. A. (2004). What is evidence-based practice? *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention*, 4(2), 168-176.
  
2. Singer, J. B. (Host). (2011, March 9). The process of evidence-based practice: An interview with Danielle E. Parish, Ph.D. [Episode 65]. *Social Work Podcast*. Podcast available at <http://socialworkpodcast.com/2011/03/process-of-evidence-based-practice.html>
  
3. Okpych, N. J. & Yu, James L-H. (2014). A historical analysis of evidence-based practice in social work: The unfinished journey toward an empirically grounded profession. *Social Service Review*, 88(1), 3-58.
  
4. Mullen, E. J. & Streiner, D. L. (2004). The evidence for and against evidence-based practice. *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention*, 4(2), 111-121.
  
5. Gibbs, L., & Gambrill, E. (2002). Evidence-based practice: Counterarguments to objections. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 12(3), 452-476.
  
6. Gambrill, E. & Gibbs, L. (2002). Making practice decisions: Is what's good for the goose good for the gander? *Ethical Human Sciences and Services*, 4(1), 31-46.

## Week 2: July 16-22

### **Live Online Session on Zoom (6:00pm – 9:00pm CT)**

*Topic:* Formulating questions and searching for evidence (EBP steps 1 and 2)

- Developing searchable questions
- Types of research questions
- Search strategies

*Readings:*

1. Yeager, K. R. & Roberts, A. R. (2006). A practical approach to formulating evidence-based questions in social work. In A. R. Roberts & K. R. Yeager (Eds.), *Foundations of evidence-based social work practice* (pp. 47-58). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

*Assignment:*

- July 22: Quiz #1

## Week 3: July 23-29

*Topic:* Appraising research evidence (EBP step 3)

- Using critical thinking
- Hierarchy of evidence
- Assessing credibility of sources
- Components of research articles
- Key statistical terms and concepts

*Readings:*

1. Gambrill, E. (2005). *Critical thinking in clinical practice: Improving the quality of judgments and decisions*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
  - Chapter 6: *Formal and informal fallacies: Mistakes in thinking and how to avoid them*

*Assignment:*

- July 29: Quiz #2

## Week 4: July 30-6

*Topic:* Implementing interventions using EBP (EBP step 4)

- Clinical expertise
- Client values/preferences
- Cultural adaptation

- Intervention fidelity

*Readings:*

1. Mullen, E. J., Bledsoe, S. E., & Bellamy, J. L. (2007). Implementing evidence-based social work practice. *Research on Social Work Practice, 18*(4), 325-338.
2. Thyer, B. A. (2008). The quest for evidence-based practice?: We are all positivists! *Research on Social Work Practice, 18*(4), 339-345.

*Assignment:*

- July 6: Quiz #3

<b><u>Week 5: August 6</u></b>
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*Topic:* Course wrap-up

*Assignment:*

- August 6: Quiz #4