

**University of Tennessee  
College of Social Work**

**SW-506 SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH**

Summer Semester 2002

Monday & Tuesday 5:30 pm - 8:30 pm

**Instructor:**

<b>Vaughn DeCoster, MSW, PhD, ACSW, LCSW</b>	Office hours: Mon/Tue 5:00-5:30 p.m.
Office: (901) 448-4460	Home: (901) 278-7868
E-mail: vdecoste@utk.edu	Fax: (707) 885-4712

I encourage students to call or e-mail with any questions or concerns, sooner rather than later. Be sure to visit my CourseInfo web-site for course material, assignments, updates. Appointments available prn.

**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)).

**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, 2002*).

**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 191 Hoskins Library at 423-974-6087. This will ensure that you are properly registered for services.

**Course Description:**

This course focuses on knowledge and practice of social scientific research philosophies and methodologies with respect to their evolution and application to the field of social work and the systematic evaluation of social work practice. It covers the history and philosophies of science; ethics of research practice; and the research process including problem formulation, research design, instrument use and construction; data collection, analysis and reporting, and evaluation and utilization of research.

**Rationale:**

Social workers must be provided with the knowledge of research and its methods in order to conduct research for informed, effective, and accountable practice within the framework of research ethics. Toward

that end, it is essential that social workers have the foundation knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to conduct research as well as retrieve and critically evaluate the existing research literature. It is also important that such a preparation for research practice be reinforced with the use of appropriate statistical procedures and computer technology. This course trains students to meet the increasing demands to develop knowledge and to demonstrate practice effectiveness with the help of such procedures and technology, in a responsible and ethical manner. It further aims to prepare students for more advanced research methods for clinical as well as management, community, and policy practice.

**Objectives:**

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

1. Understand of the role, history, and current status of research in social work theory and practice;
2. Understanding of how to conduct research within the ethical guidelines of the profession
3. Understand and know how to avoid potential biases in research with minority and disadvantaged groups;
4. Understand and be able to apply the major stages of the research process;
5. Understand the basic assumptions, concepts, foundations, and limitations of the traditional scientific approach and challenges to these foundations;
6. Know how to gain access to substantive and methodological research literature;
7. Understand the principles, logic, limitations, and alternative conceptualizations of qualitative and quantitative research designs;
8. Understand basic evaluation designs for clinical as well as program management, community, and policy practice;
9. Understand and be able to apply basic principles and methods of sampling;
10. Understand basic principles and limitations of measurement;
11. Select and use basic measurement methods for clinical as well as program management, community, and policy practice;
12. Prepare, enter, and manipulate data using a microcomputer;
13. Interpret and compute basic descriptive statistics using a microcomputer;

14. Understand basic principles of inferential statistics;
15. Compute basic inferential statistics using a microcomputer;
16. Critically formulate and interpret research conclusions;
17. Write a research report using proper form and style;
18. Understand beginning level applications of systematic evaluation of practice.

**Required Textbook:**

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

**Suggested Text:**

APA (1996). Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (4<sup>th</sup> Edition). Washington, D.C.: APA.

**Required Articles:**

All required articles will be made available in an electronic format on CourseInfo or handed-out in class.

**Course Requirements:**

This course intends to develop your skills as both a consumer as well as a producer of research. To develop these skills requires both didactic as well as experiential learning, with class time split between the classroom and the research/computer labs. Considering the significant amount of activity, attendance is mandatory and assignments must be turned in on time.

**A. Attendance** - Our absenteeism policy for class, arriving more than 20 minutes late or leaving class early counts as an absence. I don't distinguish excused versus un-excused absences, if you need to miss I know it's for a good reason. Given the limited number of class sessions, here's our policy:

<b>1 - Absence</b>	Highest grade attainable now... "B+"
<b>2 - Absences</b>	Highest grade attainable now... "B" and you must take and pass (80% or better) a comprehensive final.
<b>3 - Absences</b>	I'd rather not discuss this one but it would earn the grade that comes between D and G.

**B. Readings** - Students are expected to complete all assigned reading before class, be prepared to ask and answer questions, as well as contribute to classroom/group discussions.

**C. Assignments and Evaluation - Contracting for grades.** Grades will be determined at the beginning of the semester based on a written contract between the instructor and student. Satisfactory progress must be attained in each assignment, typically this means attaining a grade of “B” or better.

Assignment	Grade “B”	Grade “B+”	Grade “A”
Class Activities	<i>Required</i>	<i>Required</i>	<i>Required</i>
Pop Quizzes	<i>Required</i>	<i>Required</i>	<i>Required</i>
Research Article Reviews		<i>Required</i>	<i>Required</i>
Research Proposal			<i>Required</i>

**1. Class Activities** - The majority of our work will be conducting in-class activities (e.g. literature searches, constructing a data file, statistical problems, group tasks).

**Credit** is given for successful completion of each task, graded on a pass/fail basis.

**2. Pop Quizzes** - Several times during the semester, a brief multiple choice, true-false, short-answer quiz will be given based on the assigned readings. The purpose of these quizzes is to ensure that you are keeping up with the readings. These will *not be given* if the class seems prepared and is actively involved in class discussions and activities.

**Credit** is given for scoring an average of 80% on all quizzes given throughout the semester.

**3. Research Article Reviews** - If opting for a “B+” or “A” then you will be required to read *two research articles* from social work and/or related journals, identifying the “key research ingredients” for each article: problem statement, research question, theory/conceptual framework, hypotheses, design, variables, data/methods, findings, and conclusions. Your answers will be *typed* in a *brief outline form* using these categories. You will select the two from acceptable *refereed research journals* in an area of interest to you.

**Credit** is given for these reviews when “key research ingredients” are clearly and concisely identified (see “Research Article Reviews Handout” on CourseInfo).

**4. Research Proposal** - In the beginning of the semester, students contracting for an “A” will select a research problem and write a research proposal to investigate it, typically 15-20 pages. The paper will contain the following sections (see “Research Proposal” on CourseInfo for detailed instructions).

**Introduction** - problem statement, research question, rationale.

**Background** - literature review, theory or conceptual framework, hypotheses or expectations.

**Methods** - research design, methodology, population/sampling, variables, measurement instruments, if any, data collection process, analysis methods.

### Anticipated Findings/Conclusions/Social Work Implications

*Credit* will be given for this assignment with the successful competition of the paper and a grade of “B” or better.

#### Course Schedule & Assignment Dates:

Objectives	Assignments
<p><b>Class 1 - Intro to Research (5/28/02)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify your aptitude for science</li> <li>2. Understand ways we can “know our world”</li> <li>3. Understand the basic assumptions in science</li> <li>4. Understand the research process</li> <li>5. Recognize the components of a research article</li> <li>6. Understand course requirements</li> </ol> <p>Readings: Rubin &amp; Babbie - Chapters 1, 2, 3</p>	<p>Dissecting - identifying the ingredients of an article</p>
<p><b>Class 2 - Problem Formation &amp; Background (6/3/02)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify and apply research ethical principals</li> <li>2. List ways of avoiding bias</li> <li>3. Critique a research paper for potential bias</li> <li>4. Select a research problem &amp; rationalize your selection</li> <li>5. Conceptualize and operationalize your study</li> <li>6. Conduct a literature review “on-line”</li> </ol> <p>Readings: Rubin &amp; Babbie - Chapters 4, 5, 6</p>	<p>Brainstorming - boldly going where others have <i>gone</i> and <i>not gone</i>?</p> <p>Dissecting - identifying the ingredients of an article</p> <p>Article slamming - critiquing what we read</p>
<p><b>Class 3 - Operationalization (6/4/02)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain the four levels of measurement</li> <li>2. Recognize measurement error(s) in an article</li> <li>3. Assess the reliability &amp; validity of a measure</li> <li>4. Develop research instruments: questionnaire, interview schedule, &amp; scale</li> <li>5. Understand unobtrusive measures</li> </ol> <p>Readings: Rubin &amp; Babbie - Chapters 7, 8</p>	<p>Dissecting - identifying the ingredients of an article</p> <p>Article slamming - critiquing what we read</p>

<p><b>Class 4 - Sampling &amp; Research Designs (6/10/02)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understand sampling lingo</li> <li>2. Know the difference between probability &amp; non-probability sampling</li> <li>3. Understand the requirements for “causality”</li> <li>4. Relate validity &amp; reliability to social work research</li> <li>5. Identify the sampling &amp; research designs in published research studies</li> </ol> <p>Readings: Rubin &amp; Babbie - Chapters 9, 10, 11</p>	<p>Article slamming - critiquing what we read</p> <p>Sampling - research subject taste testing?</p> <p><i>Research Article Review #1 due for “B+” &amp; “A” grades.</i></p>
<p><b>Class 5 - Survey Research Designs (6/11/02)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recognize strengths &amp; weaknesses of survey research</li> <li>2. Understand the survey research processes &amp; methods</li> <li>3. Construct and administer a survey</li> </ol> <p>Readings: Rubin &amp; Babbie - Chapters 12</p>	<p>Survey Said? Looking for answers in the right places.</p>
<p><b>Class 6 - Qualitative Research Designs (6/17/02)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Differentiate qualitative from quantitative methods</li> <li>2. Collect data using qualitative methods</li> <li>3. Analysis data using qualitative methods</li> </ol> <p>Readings: Rubin &amp; Babbie - Chapter 13 &amp; 14</p>	<p>Live scientific voyeurism?</p>
<p><b>Class 7 - Data Management (6/18/02)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Code both close-ended and open-ended raw data</li> <li>2. Enter data into a computer spreadsheet</li> <li>3. Clean data set for analysis</li> <li>4. Safeguard computer data</li> </ol> <p>Readings: Rubin &amp; Babbie - Chapter 15</p>	<p>Coding &amp; Cleaning - entering data into spreadsheets.</p> <p><i>Research Article Review #2 due for “B+” &amp; “A” grades.</i></p>

<p><b>Class 8 - Descriptive Data Analysis (6/24/02)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understand the guidelines for doing descriptive analysis</li> <li>2. Construct and interpret a frequency distribution table</li> <li>3. Calculate and interpret mean, mode, &amp; median</li> <li>4. Graph data and visually interpret</li> </ol> <p>Readings: Rubin &amp; Babbie - Chapter 16</p>	<p>Baby Stats I - The infancy of understanding</p>
<p><b>Class 9 - Inferential Data Analysis (6/25/02)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Know how to rule-out rival hypotheses</li> <li>2. Determine when findings are significant</li> <li>3. Calculate &amp; interpret a Student's t-Test, chi-square, Pearson's product-movement correlation</li> <li>4. Select &amp; use appropriate statistical method(s) to analyze a data set</li> </ol> <p>Readings: Rubin &amp; Babbie - Chapters 17 &amp;18</p>	<p>Baby Stats II - The infancy of understanding</p> <p><i>Research Proposal due for "A" grade.</i></p> <p><i>Research Proposal due for "A" grade.</i></p>