

The University of Tennessee
College of Social Work
BSSW Program
Fall 2009

SW 410 – Social Work Research (3 credit hours)

Instructor:	Merrie Rennard, MSW	Class Location:	209 HH
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Office Hours:	Tuesday 2:30-3:40pm and 6:20-7pm or by appointment		

Program Mission

The BSSW program at the University of Tennessee exists to fulfill a need for disciplined, highly educated and trained generalist social workers to help people improve their social functioning in a technologically complex, culturally diverse, and rapidly changing world without borders. There is a focus on the reciprocal relationships between persons and their environments. Social workers are doers; they are problem-solvers who are able to intervene in multiple-level systems and perform various professional roles. Their actions are guided and informed by a broad knowledge base, code of ethics, and professional values. Social workers are educated and trained to do things right, as well as to do the right thing.

The mission of the BSSW program is to develop generalist social workers that are strategic thinkers, life-long learners and opinion shapers. The knowledge-base, skills, and values necessary for generalist practice are taught in an environment that fosters professional development, critical thinking, and leadership and prepares students to take appropriate action guided by the best available scientific evidence. We are dedicated to preparing practitioners for the challenges of today's complex pluralistic world. Since the amount of knowledge doubles approximately every five years, what is taught today may soon be obsolete. Our challenge, therefore, lies in the on-going development and implementation of a curriculum that prepares and energizes students for generalist practice today and in the future.

Program Goals

Provision of education and training that enables students to become generalist social work practitioners who:

- are committed to advancing social and economic justice and the principles, values, and ethics that guide the social work profession;
- are committed to evidence-based practice;
- are grounded in systems theory and operate within a person-in-the-environment framework;
- use the problem-solving process to intervene in multiple-level client systems;
- have an understanding of human diversity, special populations, and domestic and international challenges, that informs practice interventions;
- use critical thinking, evaluative skills, and leadership skills to address the needs of a complex, changing global world; and
- are committed to continuous development of the professional self.

Course Description

The objectives of this course are to provide students with the opportunities and environment to understand and analyze:

1. the role of social scientific research in the development of knowledge for the profession of social work;
2. the role of program evaluation in the development of social work practice;
3. the basic building blocks of research design;

4. the purpose for and application of qualitative or quantitative social work research methods;
5. the relationship between research and social work practice;
6. the political and ethical issues related to social work research with special concerns for specific groups such as racial and ethnic minorities, women, and gay and lesbian clients;
7. current social work literature that reports the results of research studies; and
8. the evaluation of generalist practice.

Course Rationale

Social Work 410 is an introductory course in research methodology. This course provides the student with an introduction to research strategies used to evaluate practice and/or social service delivery. It attempts to develop the critical and analytical skills needed to evaluate social work literature.

Course Competencies:

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

1. discuss the role of social scientific research in developing knowledge for the profession of social work;
2. define and identify the basic building blocks of research: concepts, variables, hypotheses, theories;
3. discuss the relationship between program evaluation and social work practice;
4. define and distinguish among levels of measurement, and discuss the assessment of reliability and validity in measurement;
5. specify the distinguishing characteristics of basic types of probability and non-probability sampling designs;
6. for the following research methods, indicate the primary purposes, distinguishing characteristics - principal designs, and major strengths and weaknesses: experiments, surveys, field research, single subject designs, and secondary data analysis. For each method, give an example of a social work problem or question which could be appropriately addressed by that method;
7. explain the logic of hypothesis testing;
8. discuss the relationship between social policy and the analysis, interpretation, and reporting of data;
9. specify and give examples of ethical issues that are likely to arise in conducting social research;
10. discuss the use of research methods, including issues of ethics and potential biases, with specific groups such as racial and ethnic minorities, women, and gay and lesbian clients; and
11. apply the principles of research to the crucial evaluation of journal articles, which report the results of research studies.

Code of Conduct

Students should read the College of Social Work Ethical Academic and Professional Conduct Code that is in the College of Social Work BSSW handbook.

Honor Statement

An essential feature of the University of Tennessee is a commitment to maintaining an atmosphere of intellectual integrity and academic honesty. By enrollment in this class, you pledge that you will neither knowingly give, nor receive, any inappropriate assistance in academic work in SW 410, thus affirming your own personal commitment to honor and integrity (*Hilltopics*)

Disability Services

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a documented disability or if you have emergency information to share, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 2227 Dunford Hall (865-974-6087). This will ensure that you are properly registered for services.

Inclement Weather

Class will be cancelled only if the University is closed due to inclement weather. Campus and local radio and TV stations will be notified, so that appropriate announcement may be made. If class is cancelled, any assignments due that day will be due the next time class meets.

Required Text

Rubin, A. & Babbie, E.R. *Research Methods for Social Work, 6th Edition*.

If you don't mind reading from a computer screen or printing out .pdf files, it is cheaper to get the book from www.ichapters.com.

Course Requirements for students in SW 410

- A. Attendance and Participation: Students are expected to be in attendance at each class and to be prepared to discuss assigned topics and readings. Additionally, students should be present and ready to ask thoughtful questions during the group presentations of the critical appraisal. The purpose of attendance is to address competencies #1-11.
- B. Critical Appraisal of Empirical Article: Students will work in small groups that are assigned by the instructor to critically analyze a data-based journal article. Groups will be announced in the first class and later posted on Blackboard. The choice of the article is up to the group; however, a copy of the entire empirical article must be turned in with the critical appraisal paper. Specific guidelines for this assignment are attached at the end of the syllabus. The purpose of this assignment is to address competencies #1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10 and 11.
- C. Group Presentation of Critical Appraisal: As a group the students will present their analysis to the class, as well as answer questions from the class and the professor about their analysis. The presentation should be 10 minutes and should be done with PowerPoint (or a similar type of software). After the presentation is finished the group should be prepared to field questions from the class and professor for about 5 minutes. The purpose of the group presentation is to address competencies #1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10 and 11.
- D. Quizzes: There will be five quizzes. All five quizzes will be posted on Blackboard and done during class time in the computer lab. The four highest scores will be counted toward the final class grade. Missed quizzes will be recorded as a "0". There will be no make-up quizzes – if you miss one quiz it will be counted as your lowest score. The purpose of the quizzes is to address competencies #1-11.
- E. SPSS Assignment: Students will work individually on an SPSS assignment provided by the instructor. SPSS will be taught in specified classes throughout the semester; however, the completed assignment is due at the end of the semester. The assignment will be handed out during class. The purpose of the SPSS assignment is to address competencies #1, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Deadline extensions are made rarely, at the discretion of the instructor, and in only in extenuating circumstances. Late assignments will be penalized 10% for each calendar day past the due date unless alternative arrangements are made with the instructor prior to the due date.

The course grade for students in SW 410 will be calculated as follows:

Attendance and Participation	10%
Critical Appraisal/Evaluation of Empirical/Data-based Article (Due November 19 th)	30%

Group Presentation of Critical Appraisal	10%
Quizzes (5 quizzes/only 4 will count/lowest grade dropped) - Therefore, each of the counted quizzes will be worth 10%	40%
SPSS Assignment (Due December 1st)	10%

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Grading Scale for SW 410

A	93-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-92	C	73-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-72
B	83-86	D	60-69
B-	80-82	F	Under 60

Extra Credit:

It is the BSSW program's expectation that all social work majors participate in the BSSW Student Social Work Organization (BSSW-SWO). All students, regardless of major, who are enrolled in a social work course or considering a major in social work are welcome. BSSW-SWO meets every Tuesday from 11:10 -12:25 in room 209, Henson Hall. This time slot is built into the class schedule as a lab for many social work courses. Given the time of the meetings, students are encouraged to bring their lunch.

The BSSW-SWO is a student organization that provides an excellent opportunity for leadership development, community and university service, the enhancement of group skills, research opportunities, and socialization. The organization and its activities are viewed as an extension of the BSSW curriculum. *Students in this class will have the opportunity to earn 3-5 points added to their final course grade by attending and participating in the BSSW-SWO this semester.* Your attendance and participation must be documented. Attendance will be taken at each meeting. To be an active member in BSSW-SWO and be eligible for extra credit, students are required to attend at least 7 meetings per semester (officers are required to attend 75% of the meetings each semester) and earn between 3 and 5 participation points. Participation points are earned using the following scale:

- 1 point for attending minimum number of meetings required for membership (see above);
- 1 point for participating in one or more drives;
- 2 points for fundraising participation;
- 2 points for community service or other participation

The BSSW-SWO faculty advisor and committee chairs determine criteria for participation in all activities. Students may earn 3 to 5 extra credit points in designated BSSW courses. Points awarded for extra credit equal BSSWO-SWO participation points for a minimum of 3 and not to exceed 5 points. No points will be awarded for students earning less than 3 participation points. *No other extra credit is available in this class.*

Class Schedule and Readings

<u>August 20th</u> --	Introduction to Class
<u>August 25th</u> –	Topic: Why Study Research? Chapter 1, Rubin & Babbie
<u>August 27th</u> -	Topic: Evidence-based Practice Chapter 2, Rubin & Babbie
<u>September 1st</u> –	Topic: Ethics/Politics of Research Chapter 4, Rubin & Babbie
<u>September 3rd</u> –	Topic: Ethics/Politics of Research Chapter 4, Rubin & Babbie
<u>September 8th</u> –	Topic: Culturally Competent Research Chapter 5, Rubin & Babbie
<u>September 10th</u> –	Intro to SPSS #1/Quiz #1
<u>September 15th</u> –	Topic: Problem Formulation Chapter 6, Rubin & Babbie
<u>September 17th</u> –	Topic: Operationalization Chapter 7, Rubin & Babbie
<u>September 22nd</u> –	Topic: Measurement Chapter 8, Rubin & Babbie
<u>September 24th</u> –	Topic: Constructing Instruments Chapter 9, Rubin & Babbie
<u>September 29th</u> –	Topic: Constructing Instruments No assigned reading (if needed catch up on previous readings)
<u>October 1st</u> –	Intro to SPSS #2/Quiz #2
<u>October 6th</u> –	Topic: Causal Inference/Correlational Designs

- Chapter 10, Rubin & Babbie
- October 8th – Topic: Experimental Designs
- Chapter 11, Rubin & Babbie
- October 13th – Topic: Single-case evaluation designs
- Chapter 12, Rubin & Babbie
- October 15th – **FALL BREAK – ENJOY and BE SAFE**
- October 20th – Topic: Program Evaluation
- Chapter 13, Rubin & Babbie
- October 22nd – Intro to SPSS #3/Quiz #3
- October 27th – Topic: Sampling
- Chapter 14, Rubin & Babbie
- October 29th – Topic: Survey Research
- Chapter 15, Rubin & Babbie
- November 3rd – Topic: Secondary Data
- Chapter 16, Rubin & Babbie
- November 5th – Intro to SPSS #4/Quiz #4
- November 10th – Topic: Quantitative Data Analysis
- Chapters 17 & 19, Rubin & Babbie
- November 12th – Topic: Qualitative Data Analysis
- Chapters 20 & 21, Rubin & Babbie
- November 17th – Topic: Qualitative Data Analysis
- No assigned reading (if needed catch up on previous readings)
- November 19th – Intro to SPSS #5/Quiz #5

[CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF ARTICLE DUE BY THE BEGINNING OF CLASS TODAY]

November 24th - Class Presentations of Critical Appraisal of Empirical Article

December 1st - Class Presentations of Critical Appraisal of Empirical Article

[SPSS ASSIGNMENT DUE BY THE BEGINNING OF CLASS TODAY]

CRITICAL APPRAISAL/EVALUATION OF AN EMPIRICAL ARTICLE

Your group should choose a single, empirical (data-based) article to review. This article does not need to be from a social work journal, but, ideally, it should be on a topic that is of interest to all of your group members. This assignment will allow you to critically analyze your data-based article. The goal is for you to learn how to appropriately read an article, and use critical thinking skills to evaluate it and decide how an article can be improved. An outline is provided below – each section in your paper should build upon the previous section.

- I. Review the article (3-5 pages)
 - a. What was the research question/hypothesis of the study?
 - b. Literature Review in the Article
 - i. Give a short summary of the literature used by the authors to support the reasoning examining the research topic
 - c. Methodology
 - i. Who was the sample? How many participants were there?
 - ii. What was the sampling method used to obtain the sample?
 - iii. To which population are the authors hoping to generalize?
 - iv. How did the researchers obtain the data?
 - v. What were the variables examined?
 - d. Results Section
 - i. What were the findings?
 - e. Discussion Section
 - i. How did the author(s) apply their findings to the knowledge base?
 - ii. What were the stated limitations of the study?

- II. Critique the article/methodology (4-5 pages)
 - a. Was the methodology appropriate?
 - i. Were the variables operationalized appropriately?
 - ii. What about the sample?
 - iii. To which populations can the results be generalized?
 - b. Was the discussion supported by the results? Did it overstate its case?
 - c. Is the study relevant to the field of social work? If not, for what field is it most relevant?
 - d. Discuss the strengths of the article and the research methodology.

- III. Provide Improvement Suggestions for Methodology (4-5 pages)
 - a. How would you improve this study? What methodological changes would you apply to produce a stronger study, which would lead to results that you have more faith in?

- b. If your article was not geared toward the social work profession, provide suggestions for how to make it applicable to the social work field.
- IV. Critique Your Suggestions for the Improvement of the Methodology (4-5 pages)
- a. Are your suggestions for improvement feasible? What difficulties might you encounter if you tried to change the methodology to what you suggested?

You **must** provide the instructor with a copy of the empirical (data-based) article you used for this critical appraisal. This allows the instructor to review the article to better understand your paper and suggestions.

Your group will do a presentation about your article and the appraisal at the end of the semester. This will allow you to practice speaking clearly about research with the intent that it will help you prepare for the lifelong ability to integrate critical thinking about research into your social work practice.