

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

**SW 519 SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH
Spring 2009**

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Credit Hours: 3

Prerequisite: None

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.utk.csw.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*, 2008).

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 2227 Dunford Hall (865) 974-6087. This will ensure that you are properly registered for services.

Course Description

This is a required Foundation course. This course is designed to help students gain an understanding of and appreciation for the use of research as a tool for professional evidence-based practice with and on behalf of at-risk populations and to evaluate programs and practices. Students are introduced to the concepts and skills underlying a systematic approach to social work research, including basic research terminology, the scientific method in social work, the value of research in social work, research ethics and the social work value base, problem formulation and conceptualization, measurement, research designs, sampling, alternative quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analytic techniques, and relevant information and computer technologies.

Course Rationale

Social workers must be critical consumers of research and possess the knowledge of research and its method in order to use research as a tool for competent and accountable evidence-based practice with and on behalf of at-risk populations. Toward that end, it is essential that social workers have the foundation knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to formulate questions about practice and policy, access and critically appraise the research

literature available to answer such questions, and to prepare for more advanced methods used to evaluate programs and practices.

Course Competencies

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

1. Recognize and explain differences between an evidence-based helping professional and one guided by tradition, authority, dogma, and speculation (CT/EBP F.1, F.3,F.4; Practice F.6) [*Content: role, history, knowledge acquisition, and current status of research in social work; basic assumptions, concepts, foundations, and limitations of the traditional scientific approach and challenges to these foundations; principles, logic, limitations, and alternative conceptualizations of qualitative and quantitative research designs*];
2. Access relevant data bases for research evidence to support or refute social work practice, program and policy decisions (Research: F.1) [*Content: evidence based practice, purpose of a literature review, sources of literature, and assess the quality of available literature*]
3. Critically evaluate the methodological rigor of different kinds of qualitative and quantitative research and use this information to prioritize knowledge into a hierarchy of evidence from the most to the least rigorous (Research- F.2, F.3; CT/EBP- F.3) [*Content: research questions/hypotheses, practice problems (and transitions to research questions and hypotheses from these practice problems), principles and methods of sampling, measurement, design; descriptive and inferential statistics; and framework for evaluating research studies*]
4. Critically evaluate the strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative research in reference to race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, family structure, relational status, national origin, age, and religion (Diversity- F.1, F.3, F.5, F.6; Pops at- risk & SJ- F.2) [*Content: principles and methods of sampling, measurement, and design; data interpretation; and culturally competent research*]
5. Prepare, enter, and manipulate data using a spreadsheet or other software programs (Research- F.4) [*Content: Level of measurement, hypothesis testing, compute and interpret basic descriptive and inferential statistics; and selecting statistical tests*];
6. Apply appropriate empirical techniques to evaluate process and outcomes with program evaluation and single client systems (Research- F.5) [*Content: case level research designs; univariate and bivariate statistics*]
7. Articulate the core values and ethical standards of the social work profession (based on the NASW Code of Ethics and the International Federation of Social Work Code of Ethics) to research in settings with diverse constituencies across multiple systems

(Values/Ethics- F.1, F.3, F.4) [*Content: NASW code of ethics, historical overview of ethics in research, voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and cultural competent research*];

8. Effectively communicate empirically-based knowledge (or lack thereof) (Research-F.6) [*Content: writing a research report, APA style, research proposal components; framework for evaluation of research studies*]

Required Texts

Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (2008). Research Methods for Social Work (6th Ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Course Requirements

This is a web supported class using Blackboard technology to supplement classroom learning. Face-to face class sessions will be used to clarify and expand on assigned course readings. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Students are expected to complete ten modules online and assignments associated with each module. Class participation is expected and will be determined by your participation in online discussions and attendance in class. Students are also expected to attend all class meetings. A student who wishes an extension of time for an assignment due to medical or personal emergency should consult the instructor in advance. However, an extension is not automatic and there may be a grade penalty.

Evaluation Procedures and Grades

The following scale will be used for the final course grade:

A (95-100) Outstanding/Superior. Student consistently exceed expectations.

B+ (90-94) Above Average. Student consistently meets, and occasionally exceeds, normal expectations for the course.

B (85-89) Average. Student consistently meets normal expectations for the course.

C+ (80-84) Below Average. There is unevenness in grasping course content. Student is inconsistent in meeting normal expectations for the course.

C (70-79) Poor. There is lack of understanding of course content. Student does not meet course expectations.

F (69-Below) Very Poor. Course expectations are not met. There is a lack of attendance or incomplete assignments.

Assignments:

Quizzes (10 quizzes at 5% each)	50%
Discussion Board Participation (10 discussion boards at 2% each)	20%
Grant critique	10%
Article critiques (6 critiques at 3% each)	18%
Ethics Certificate	<u>2%</u>
Total:	100%

- *Quizzes:* Students will have a quiz for each module in the class for a total of 10 quizzes. All quizzes are located under the modules in "Course Documents". The quizzes are open book and open note, but you are not permitted to share answers or discuss the quiz with other students. Sharing answers or helping each other constitutes cheating and will result in disciplinary action. The quiz will be timed and you have 5 hours to complete the each quiz. Once you open a quiz, you must complete the quiz within 5 hours. Do not open the quiz until you have reviewed the material for that module and you are ready to take the quiz. Each quiz will cover all readings, lecture materials, handouts, and websites for that particular module. If you fail to take the quiz during the designated time, you will receive a penalty of two points for a make-up quiz. Please do not wait until the last minute to submit your answers for the quiz. *Topics of quizzes are as follows:*

Quiz 1: Recognize and explain differences between an evidence-based helping professional and one guided by tradition, authority, dogma, and speculation (CT/EBP F.1, F.3,F.4; Practice F.6) [*Content: role, history, knowledge acquisition, and current status of research in social work; basic assumptions, concepts, foundations, and limitations of the traditional scientific approach and challenges to these foundations; principles, logic, limitations, and alternative conceptualizations of qualitative and quantitative research designs*];

Quiz 2: Access relevant data bases for research evidence to support or refute social work practice, program and policy decisions (Research: F.1) [*Content: evidence based practice, purpose of a literature review, sources of literature, and assess the quality of available literature*]

Quizzes 3-5: Critically evaluate the methodological rigor of different kinds of qualitative and quantitative research and use this information to prioritize knowledge into a hierarchy of evidence from the most to the least rigorous (Research- F.2, F.3; CT/EBP- F.3) [*Content: research questions/hypotheses, practice problems (and transitions to research questions and hypotheses from these practice problems), principles and methods of sampling, measurement, design; descriptive and inferential statistics; and framework for evaluating research studies*]

Quiz 6: Critically evaluate the strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative research in reference to race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, family structure, relational status, national origin, age, and religion (Diversity- F.1, F.3, F.5, F.6; Pops at- risk & SJ- F.2) [*Content: principles and methods of sampling, measurement, and design; data interpretation; and culturally competent research*]

Quiz 7: Prepare, enter, and manipulate data using a spreadsheet or other software programs (Research- F.4) [*Content: Level of measurement, hypothesis testing, compute and interpret basic descriptive and inferential statistics; and selecting statistical tests*];

Quiz 8: Apply appropriate empirical techniques to evaluate process and outcomes with program evaluation and single client systems (Research- F.5) [*Content: case level research designs; univariate and bivariate statistics*]

Quiz 9: Articulate the core values and ethical standards of the social work profession (based on the NASW Code of Ethics and the International Federation of Social Work Code of Ethics) to research in settings with diverse constituencies across multiple systems (Values/Ethics- F.1, F.3, F.4) [*Content: NASW code of ethics, historical overview of ethics in research, voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and cultural competent research*];

Quiz 10: Effectively communicate empirically-based knowledge (or lack thereof) (Research- F.6) [*Content: writing a research report, APA style, research proposal components; framework for evaluation of research studies*]

- *Grant Critique*: Students are required to complete a critique of an NIH grant proposal provided by the instructor. The critique will involve all parts of the grant application, and will require students to formulate a plan for evaluating quality research studies and do the following:

Assessment Questions for Overall Scientific Credibility

- Does the study make sense the way it is conceptualized?
- Are the methods employed appropriate for answering the research question?
- To what extent does the research design control for bias?
- How does the study establish its validity?
- How do study conclusions fit with other sources of evidence?

Assessment Questions for Background/Introduction Section

- What is the issue this study attempts to address? Is study question clearly stated ?
- How current is the literature reviewed?
- Is the cited literature relevant to the topic? Is it from credible sources?
- What gaps in the literature does the review identify? How effectively could this research fill those gaps?
- Does the literature referenced in the article provide a rationale for the study's research questions?
- Is there a theoretical basis of the research? If so, on what theory is this research based?
- Do the theories and/or prior research cited provide reasonable justification for the hypotheses?
- Were the hypotheses developed before the study was conducted?
- Are the concepts to be researched clearly articulated?

Assessment Questions for Methods Section

- Is the study design appropriate to address the research questions guiding the study? Is the design qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods?

- Is the sample broadly representative of the client/population of the research question? If not, is there sufficient rationale for recruiting “special” cases?
- What were the sampling eligibility criteria? What was the sampling method used? How was the sample recruited?
- What are the plans to prevent or address subject attrition (subject dropout/loss to follow-up)?
- Were the data collection and analysis plans relevant to answering the research question(s) and/or testing the hypotheses?
- What information is provided about the plan for data analysis, and is it sufficient?

Assessment Questions for Methods: Quantitative Studies

- Were the independent and dependent variables measured carefully?
- Was a carefully selected sample used?
- Did the sample size have sufficient statistical power for analysis?
- Did the authors control for extraneous factors through randomization or some other method?
- What were the primary independent and dependent variables identified?
- Did the authors collect standardized data?
- What measures were used in the study? Were they appropriate to measure the study concepts? Are they valid and reliable?
- Were the statistical analyses of the data designed to determine the likelihood that sampling error might have produced an apparent relationship between or among variables?
- What was the response rate (number of people who chose to participate compared to total number recruited)? Were there differences between people who chose not to participate in study and those who did? How were these differences accounted for?
- What was the sample attrition (i.e., study participants who dropped out)? How were attrition data handled?
- Did the authors address bias due to low response rates or high sample attrition?

Assessment Questions for Methods: Qualitative Studies

- Was the sample size large enough to meet the study’s goals but not so large that it appears unfeasible?
- Did the data collection method appear to encourage research participants to discuss their experiences and perceptions honestly and candidly?
- Were any potential researcher biases noted?
- Did the researcher specify the theoretical perspective(s) employed?
- Did the researcher specify the type(s) of qualitative methods used?
- Did the researchers use a formal coding process or other qualitative analysis method?
- Did the researchers use “strategies for rigor” such as triangulation, member checking, and negative case analysis?
- Do the data reflect the “richness” that is sought when using qualitative methods?

- Did the study yield information that can be evaluated in relation to existing knowledge found in the professional literature?
- Did the research indicate meanings and themes for better understanding the study populations' experiences?

Assessment Questions for Overall Quality

- Do the authors describe the limitations of the research design and study?
 - In your opinion is this research worthy of funding? Why or why not?
 - Is the report cohesive?
 - Do the authors discuss the implications that the findings might have for future research, practice and/or policy?
 - Is the research likely to inspire additional research?
 - Is the research likely to help in decision-making and policy making?
 - Can the findings from this research be generalized or applied to the target population of interest?
 - Do the authors indicate how future research can build on this study in order to advance scientific knowledge?
- *Article Critiques:* Students are required to do a series of 6 article critiques. Students are expected to critically evaluate the methodological rigor of different kinds of qualitative and quantitative research studies, The articles cover the following topics: reliability and validity research; meta-analysis, experimental research; program evaluation; survey research; qualitative research; and a variety of descriptive and inferential statistics. Below is a list of the articles required for the critiques:
 - Module #5: Gump, L.S., Baker, R.C. & Roll, S. (2000). *The Moral Justification Scale: Reliability and Validity of a New Measure of Care and Justice Orientations*. *Adolescence*, 35, 67-76.
 - Module #7: West, S.L. & O'Neal, K.K. (2004). *Project D.A.R.E. Outcome Effectiveness Revisited*. *American Journal of Public Health*, 94, 1027-29.
 - Module #8: Retting, M. & McCarthy-Rettig, K. (2006). *A Survey of the Health, Sleep and Development of Children Adopted from China*. *Health & Social Work*, 31, 201-207.
 - Module #9: Umana-Taylor, A.J. & Yazedjian, A. (2006). *Generational Differences and Similarities among Puerto Rican and Mexican Mothers' Experiences with Familial Ethnic Socialization*. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 23, 445-464.
 - Module #10: Schram, P.J. & Gaines, L.K. (2005). *Examining Delinquent Nongang Members and Delinquent Gang Members: A Comparison of Juvenile Probationers at Intake and Outcome*. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 3, 99-115.
 - *Discussion Boards:* Students are expected to participate in a discussion board with their classmates for each module covered in this course in a timely fashion. All discussion boards are located under the modules in "Course Documents". You are required to actively engaging in thoughtful discussions with your classmates. Your comment(s) can either be a new thread or a detailed response to other

students' comments. A simply "Yes, I agree" or "No, I don't agree" is not an acceptable comment. Your grade for the discussion board will be dependent on the quality and appropriateness of your comments. It is important to remember that this is a classroom environment. Therefore, your language and tone on the discussion board should reflect this environment. I want to encourage you to challenge and disagree with each other, but this must be done in a respectful manner. The discussion boards will cover the following topics:

- Module 1: Recognizing flaws in unscientific sources of social work practice
 - Module 2: NASW & IFSW code of ethics for social workers
 - Module 3: Searching relevant databases using the Boolean Method
 - Module 4: Developing a research question and operationalizing the variables
 - Module 5: Cultural relevance and competency of standardized measurement scales
 - Module 6: Strengths and weaknesses of sampling techniques
 - Module 7: Strengths and weaknesses of research designs
 - Module 8: Developing and critiquing surveys for research via Survey Monkey
 - Module 9: Comparing and contrasting qualitative and quantitative research
 - Module 10: Strengths and weakness of descriptive and inferential statistics
- **Ethics Certificate**: In order to clearly articulate the core values and ethical standards of the social work profession in order to conduct research in settings with diverse constituencies across multiple systems, students are expected to take the National Cancer Institute web-based course about the rights and welfare of human participants in research. This two-hour tutorial is designed for those involved in conducting research involving human participants. It satisfies the NIH human subjects training requirement for obtaining Federal Funds. Upon successful completion, you will be given a certificate of completion. You need to print this certificate from your computer upon completing the course, and put a copy of the certificate in my box (you may also email, mail or fax me a copy of the certificate).

Further information about all assignments is located under “Assignments” in Blackboard.

Course Outline

Date	Topic/Readings
Week 1	Module 1: Introduction to Social Research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubin & Babbie: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chp #1: Why Study Research? ○ Chp #2: Evidence-Based Practice ○ Chp #3: Philosophy in Social Work Research
	Module 2: Ethics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubin & Babbie <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chp #4: Ethics and Politics of Research

Week 2 Module 3: Review of the Literature

- Rubin & Babbie:
 - Chp #23: Writing a Research Report
 - Appendix A: Using the Library
- Davis, C. (2004). Hospital social work: Are we conducting the right type of research? Social Work in Health Care, 38,3, 67-79.

Module 4: Problem Formulation

- Rubin & Babbie
 - Chp #6: Problem Formulation
 - Chp #7: Conceptualization & Operationalization

Week 3 Module 5: Measurement

- Rubin & Babbie
 - Chp #8: Measurement
 - Chp #9: Constructing Measurement Instruments
 - Chp #5: Culturally Competent Research

Module 6: Sample

- Rubin & Babbie
 - Chp #14: Sampling
 - Chp #5: Culturally Competent Research

Week 4 Module 7: Research Designs & Hierarchy of Research

- Rubin & Babbie
 - Chp #10: Causal Inference & Correlational Designs
 - Chp # 11: Experimental Designs
 - Chp #12: Single-Case Evaluation Designs
 - Chp # 13: Program Evaluation
- Proctor, E.K. (2004). The search for social work treatments of choice: What interventions work better than others? Social Work Research, 28, 2, 67-69.
- Reid, W.J., Kenaley, B.D. & Colvin, J. (2004). Do some interventions work better than others? A review of comparative social work experiments. Social Work Research, 28, 2, 71-81.

Week 5 Module 8: Survey Research

- Rubin & Babbie
 - Chp #15: Survey Research
- Sieber, D.C. (2004). Depression in North Carolina social workers: Implications for practice and research. Social Work Research, 28,1, 30-40.

Week 6 Module 9: Qualitative Methods

- Rubin & Babbie
 - Chp #17: Qualitative Research: Generalist Principles
 - Chp #18: Qualitative Research: Specific Methods
 - Chp #19: Qualitative Data Analysis
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- Yoshihama, M. (2002). Breaking the web of abuse and silence: Voices of battered women in Japan. Social Work, 47, 4, 389-400.

Week 7 Module 10: Principles of Data Analysis, Descriptive & Inferential Statistics, Using SPSS

- Rubin & Babbie
 - Chp #20: Analysis of Quantitative Data
 - Chp #21: Inferential Data Analysis (Part 1)
 - Chp #22: Inferential Data Analysis (Part II)
 - Appendix C: Proportion under Normal Curve Exceeded by Effect-Size Values
 - Appendix D: Learner's Guide to SPSS
 - LeCroy, C.W. & Stinson, E.L. (2004). The public's perception of social work: Is it what we think it is? Social Work, 49,2, 164-174.
 - Letteney, S. & LaPorte, H.H. (2004). Deconstructing stigma: Perceptions of HIV-Seropositive mothers and their disclosure to children. Social Work in Health Care, 38,3, 105-123.
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