

**UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
SW 8601 - Social Work Research Methods
(3 credits)**

Course Description:

Introduction to quantitative and qualitative social work research skills fundamental to the development and critical use of information relevant to social work practice decision-making and evaluation at case, program, and policy levels. Social research ethics, development of research questions, sampling, measurement, research design, data collection and analysis.

Knowledge of fundamental social research skills is important for social workers who practice at the case, program, and policy levels. Such knowledge increases social workers' ability to understand and utilize research findings to inform and enhance their practice and provides the skills necessary to plan and carry out research related to social work practice. Following SW 8601, students will take either SW 8602 (Direct Practice Evaluation) or SW 8603 (Program Evaluation), which will build on this foundation level research course.

Course Objectives:

The goal of this course is for students to develop an understanding of social research as practitioners and consumers of research. Students completing this course will develop the following competencies:

1. Develop a beginning understanding of the conceptual foundations and methodological tools of quantitative and qualitative social research and its applications to social work;
2. Locate, understand, critically analyze, and utilize professional social work research reports and articles;
3. Develop beginning research skills necessary to plan and carry out all phases of quantitative and qualitative research to build knowledge related to the practice of social work at the case, program, and policy levels;
4. Understand and articulate ethical, political, and values issues related to social research, in general, and social work research with vulnerable populations; and
5. Demonstrate an understanding of research issues specifically of concern to groups distinguished by race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, age, and/or national origin.

Course Requirements and Grading:

To receive a passing grade in the course, students are required to complete two written assignments, a midterm exam, a presentation, and a comprehensive final research proposal. These are all required to receive a grade in the course. In addition, students are expected to consistently attend class, complete all reading assignments, and participate in class discussions and exercises. Students who miss three class sessions or do not complete all written assignments will not receive a passing grade for the course, regardless of the points that they

earn. Classroom participation includes raising questions and making comments, participating in classroom discussions and exercises, facilitating discussion by including other class members, and building on the comments of other students. Assignment due dates and contributions to the final grade are outlined below. Detailed assignment instructions will be handed out in class. The course will be graded in accordance with the University's Uniform Grading and Transcript Policy.

The two written assignments in this course will build to a final research proposal due week 15 (the last day of the class). These assignments will likely be completed individually, although a group project with two students **may** be approved but only with special permission from the instructor. The following is a breakdown of the course points for each specific assignment:

Assignment One (due week 6): Assignment 1 asks students to construct a basic literature review that leads to an original research question or a set of questions worthy of further investigation. The purpose of this assignment is to apply the knowledge you have gained in the first segment of the course and to build toward writing your final research proposal. Through this assignment you will practice identifying a research problem, conducting a literature review, and constructing solid research question(s) with clear relationships between variables or concepts.

Midterm Examination (Week 10): An in-class midterm examination will test students' knowledge of the concepts covered weeks 1-8 through analysis of research vignettes. Practice questions will be distributed in preparation for the exam.

Assignment 2 (Due week 12): Assignment 2 asks students to apply their knowledge of basic research design components a specific set of research questions, leading up to a proposal. Completion of this assignment will help you to successfully develop your final course project. The assignment will also give students an opportunity to submit revised research questions.

Class Presentations: Students will sign up to deliver a 10-15 minute overview of their final assignment (see below) the last 3 weeks of class.

Final Project (Due week 15): The final project is a comprehensive research proposal that integrates all of the fundamental components of this course. Details regarding the format of this assignment and its essential requirements will be distributed in class.

Required Texts and Materials:

Rubin, A., & Babbie, E. (2005). *Research methods for social work* (5th edition). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole. (Referred to as R & B in syllabus)

Padgett, Deborah. (1998). *Qualitative methods in social work research: Challenges and rewards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Referred to as Padgett in the syllabus)

Other required readings listed in the syllabus are available either on-line through the university library system <http://www.lib.umn.edu/articles/ej.phtml> (**denoted by ***) or through electronic course reserve <http://www.lib.umn.edu/borrowing/reserves.phtml> (**denoted by ****).

NOTE: There is no course packet to purchase in this course.

Course Outline

Week 1:

Topics: Introductions
Course overview
The role and function of research in social work
Wearing a “research hat”

Readings: R & B, Chapters 1: “Scientific inquiry and social work” (pp. 2-33).
Padgett, Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-24).

Week 2:

Topics: Paradigms of knowledge and epistemologies
Basic purposes of research: Explore, describe, explain
Introduction to multicultural social work research

Readings: R & B Chapter 2 “Philosophy and theory in social work research” (pp. 34-68).

Padgett, Chapter 2: “The researcher as instrument” and Chapter 3: “Getting started: Choosing a topic and designing the study” (pp. 18-32).

**Gold, N., & Bogo, M. A. (1992). Social work research in a multicultural society: Challenges and Approaches. *Journal of Multicultural Social Work*, 2(4), 7-22.

Week 3:

Topics: Ethics, politics, and values in social work research
Institutional Review Boards (IRB) and human subjects issues
Search tools for effective and focused literature reviews

Readings: R & B, Chapter 3: The ethics and politics of social work research (pp. 69-106).

Padgett, Chapter 4: Ethical issues in qualitative research (pp. 33-44).

**Rollins, J. (1982). Introduction. In *Domestics and their employers*, (pp. 5-17). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

*National Association of Social Workers (1996). *Code of ethics*. Standard 5.02 “Evaluation and research.” Washington, D.C.: Author (available <http://naswdc.org/pubs/code/code.asp>)

Sample literature reviews and research questions will be distributed in class or on-line for analysis in class week 4.

Week 4:

Topics: Ethics and human subjects issues (continued)
Conducting and writing a comprehensive literature review
Formulating meaningful research questions, aims, and hypotheses
Class trip to McGrath Library for search tools (second half)

Readings: R & B, Chapter 4: Problem formulation (pp. 107-139).

**Yegidis, B. L., Weinbach, R. W., & Morrison-Rodriguez, B. (1999). Using existing knowledge. In *Research methods for social workers*, (pp. 61-78). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

**York, O. (1997). Writing the research hypothesis. In *Building basic competencies in social research* (pp. 367-369). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

York, R. O. (1997). Developing the literature review for a research study. In *Building basic competencies in social research* (pp. 349-358). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Task One Due (un-graded): University of Minnesota informed consent tutorial http://www.research.umn.edu/consent/menu_soc.html

Week 5:

Topics: Conceptualization and operationalization of variables
Validity and reliability
Measurement

Readings: R & B, Chapter 5: Conceptualization and operationalization and Chapter 6: Measurement (pp. 140-166; 167-205).

*El-Bassell, N., Ivanoff, A., Schilling, R., Gilbert, L, Borne, D., & Chen, D. R. (1995). Preventing HIV/AIDS in drug-abusing incarcerated women through skills building and social support enhancement: Preliminary outcomes. *Social Work Research*, 19 (3), 131-141. ***This article will be used in class as an example weeks (5-11)***

Brodsky, A. (1999). Making it: The components and process of resilience among urban, African-American single mothers. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 69 (2), 148-160. *This article will be used in class as an example weeks (5-11)***

Week 6:

Topics: Quantitative designs
Causal inference and group designs
Experiments and quasi-experiments
Internal and external validity

Readings: R & B, Chapter 10: Experimental Designs for evaluating programs and practice and Chapter 11: Quasi-experimental designs for evaluating programs and practice (pp. 311-364).

**Ashford, J.B., & Sohng, S. (1993). Are traditional empirical research methods inherently biased against people of color? In W. Hudson & P. Nurius (eds.), *Controversial Issues in Social Work Research* (pp. 22-37). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Assignment 1 due at the beginning of class

Week 7:

Topics: Qualitative research designs
Trustworthiness and rigor
Outsider vs. insider statuses in qualitative methods

Readings: Padgett, Chapter 8: Rigor and relevance in qualitative research (pp. 88-102).

R & B, Chapter 14: Qualitative research methods (pp. 427-468).

*Gibson, P., and Abrams, L. S. (2003). Getting their stories: Engaging, recruiting, and interviewing African-American women in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work* 2(4), 457-476.

Week 8:

Topics: Sampling:
The logic of sampling
Probability and non-probability samples

Readings: R & B, Chapter 8: The logic of sampling (pp. 239-281).

Padgett, Chapter 5: Entering the field and sampling strategies (pp. 45-54).

*Land, H., & Hudson, S. (1997). Methodological considerations in surveying Latina AIDS caregivers: issues in sampling and measurement. *Social Work Research*. 21(4): 233-246.

Week 9: *March 25 In-Class Midterm exam will be given. Take time to review -- no reading assigned.*

Week 10:

Topics: Data collection techniques
Constructing measurement instruments, assessments, and scales

Readings: R & B, Chapter 7: Constructing measurement instruments (pp. 206-238).

R & B, Chapter 9: Survey research (pp. 281-310).

Padgett, Chapter 6: Data Collection (pp. 55-71).

Week 11:

Topics: Introduction to research applications and advanced courses
Direct practice evaluation
Program evaluation

Readings: R & B, Chapter 12: Single-case evaluation designs (pp. 365-393).

**Bradshaw, W. (1997). Evaluating cognitive-behavioral treatment of schizophrenia; Four single-case studies. *Research in Social Work Practice*, 7 (4), 419-445.

R & B, Chapter 19: Issues in program evaluation (pp. 394-426).

*Reid, B. D., 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.

Assignment 2 due at the beginning of class

Week 12:

Topics: Mixed methods research
Unobtrusive methods: archival research, secondary analysis, meta-analysis, and document review
Class Presentations on Research Proposals

Readings: Padgett, Chapter 10: Multi-method research: The synergy of combining qualitative and quantitative methods (pp. 126-140).

R & B, Chapter 15: Analyzing available records: qualitative and quantitative measures (pp. 469-495).

*Wenger, C. G. (1999). Advantages gained by combining qualitative and quantitative data in a longitudinal study. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 13(4),

369-376.

Week 13:

Topics: Dissemination and use of findings
Working with agencies to use research knowledge
Cultural competence throughout the journey
Class Presentations on Research Proposals

Readings: *Herie, M., & Martin, G. W. (2002). Knowledge diffusion in social work: A new approach to bridging the gap. *Social Work, 47*(1), 85-95.

**Minkler, M., & Roe, K. M. (1993). Hearing the voices, telling the stories: The grandparent caregiver story. *Grandparents as caregivers: Raising children of the crack cocaine epidemic* (pp. 43-52). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

R & B, Chapter 16: Culturally competent research (pp. 496-523).

Week 14:

Topics: Analysis of qualitative data
Using themes and codes
Class Presentations on Research Proposals

Readings: Padgett, Chapter 7: Data management and analysis (pp. 72-87).

R & B, Chapter 17: Qualitative data analysis (pp. 525-550).

*Lister, P. G. (2003). Feminist dilemmas in data analysis. *Qualitative Social Work, 2*(1): 45-59.

Week 15:

Topics: Descriptive statistics
Introduction to inferential statistics
Class Presentations on Research Proposals

Readings: R & B, Chapter 18: Quantitative data analysis (pp. 551-573).

R & B, Chapter 20: Inferential data analysis, part 1 (pp. 594-616).

Final assignments are due by 5:00pm ...congratulations!!