University of Minnesota School of Social Work
Syllabus

SW 8841-Social Work Research Methods

Part I: Course information

SW 8841-Social Work Research Methods
2 credits

Faculty Contact:
- Name:
- Email:
- Phone:
- Office Location:

Short Description:
Develops foundational research methods knowledge and skills fundamental to evidence-based social work practice.

Long Description:
Knowledge of fundamental social research skills is required of professional social workers practicing at the case, program, and policy levels in all realms of social work practice. Such knowledge is necessary for both understanding and utilizing research findings to inform practice as well as planning and carrying out research related to social work practice and social welfare issues. This course is designed to teach the foundational research knowledge and skills fundamental to evidence-based social work practice at the case, program, and policy levels. Major course topics include: ethics in social research, development of research questions, sampling, measurement, research design, and data collection and analysis. This course introduces quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research methods, with a primary focus on quantitative research. The semester-long systematic review project is designed to teach students how to critically appraise a body of research within a particular practice area as a key component of evidence-based practice.

Pre-requisites:

This is a required course for full-program (53-credit) students enrolled in the M.S.W. Program. You must be enrolled as a degree-seeking student in the M.S.W. Program or have permission from the instructor in order to be enrolled in this class.

Clinical Licensure Hours:
This course contains some clinical content, as required by the Minnesota Board of Social Work for eligibility for the Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW). The number of hours in each required category is listed below:
Part II: Course outcomes

Course Objectives

The goal of this course is for students to develop an understanding of social research as practitioners and consumers of research. Students successfully completing this course will be able to:

1. Understand the conceptual foundations and methodological tools of quantitative and qualitative social research and their applications to social work/welfare.
2. Locate, comprehend, critically analyze and evaluate research articles in social work and related disciplines and apply the findings to practice.
3. Develop beginning research skills necessary to plan and carry out all phases of quantitative research to build knowledge related to the practice of social work at the case, program, and policy levels.
4. Identify and describe the ethical, political, and values issues related to social research in general and social work research in particular.
5. Demonstrate an understanding of diversity and social justice issues in research (i.e., research with marginalized populations).

Social Work Practice Competencies

Successful completion of this foundation course implies that the student has achieved competency in the following practice behaviors:

**Competency 2.1.1 – Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly**
Social workers serve as representatives of the profession, its mission, and its core values. They know the profession's history. Social workers commit themselves to the profession's enhancement and to their own professional conduct and growth. Social workers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice Behaviors</th>
<th>Covered in class through (i.e., activity, reading, content)</th>
<th>Assessed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Attend to professional roles and boundaries</td>
<td>• Tutorial on ethical issues in social work research</td>
<td>• Online quiz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Competency: 2.1.2 – Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice**
Social workers have an obligation to conduct themselves ethically and to engage in ethical decision-making. Social workers are knowledgeable about the value base of the profession, its ethical standards, and relevant law. Social workers:

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Identify and analyze value-based and ethical dilemmas that arise in their</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Policy Analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
area of practice, using professional
codes of ethical standards and
through appropriate professional
consultation.

### Competency: 2.1.3 – Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments
Social workers are knowledgeable about the principles of logic, scientific inquiry, and reasoned discernment. They use critical thinking augmented by creativity and curiosity. Critical thinking also requires the synthesis and communication of relevant information. Social workers:

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Distinguish, appraise, and integrate multiple sources of knowledge, including research-based knowledge, and practice wisdom</td>
<td>In-class case example exercises</td>
<td>In-class feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analyze models of assessment, prevention, intervention, and evaluation</td>
<td>Weekly quizzes</td>
<td>Quiz grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Demonstrate effective oral and written communication in working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and colleagues</td>
<td>Systematic Research Review (SRR) project</td>
<td>SRR Presentation and SRR Final Paper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### EP 2.1.5 – Advance human rights and social and economic justice
Each person, regardless of position in society, has basic human rights, such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education. Social workers recognize the global interconnections of oppression and are knowledgeable about theories of justice and strategies to promote human and civil rights. Social work incorporates social justice practices in organizations, institutions, and society to ensure that these basic human rights are distributed equitably and without prejudice. Social workers:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Gain a full comprehension about disparities and their development, contribute to knowledge about institutional barriers to equality and apply concentration-appropriate strategies to advance social and economic justice.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Competency 2.1.6 – Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research
Social workers use practice experience to inform research, employ evidence-based interventions, evaluate their own practice, and use research findings to improve practice, policy, and social service delivery. Social workers comprehend quantitative and qualitative research and understand scientific and ethical approaches to building knowledge. Social workers:

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Use practice experience to inform scientific inquiry and</td>
<td>In-class case examples</td>
<td>In-class feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use research evidence to inform practice</td>
<td>Systematic Research Review (SRR) project</td>
<td>SRR Presentation and SRR Final Paper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Competency: 2.1.8 – Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being
Social work practitioners understand that policy affects service delivery, and they actively engage in policy practice. Social workers know the history and current structures of social policies and services; the role of policy in service delivery; and the role of practice in policy development. Social workers:

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Understand, compare, analyze, formulate and advocate for policies in an area of practice</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Policy Analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Competency: 2.1.9 – Respond to contexts that shape practice**

Social workers are informed, resourceful, and proactive in responding to evolving organizational, community, and societal contexts at all levels of practice. Social workers recognize that the context of practice is dynamic, and use knowledge and skill to respond proactively. Social workers:

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Assess the impact of historical and contemporary contexts on practice and policy in their area of practice.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Policy Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are responsive to dynamic changes in society and in their areas of practice.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Policy Brief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organize and advocate with community members, program participants, service providers, community organizations, policy makers and the public to improve practice and service delivery in their area of practice.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Policy Analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Part III: Course requirements**

**Required Reading Materials**

**Textbook**

**Journal Articles**
Required and recommended articles will be available via the Moodle course page (see course outline for specific reading assignments). *NOTE: The instructor may periodically distribute copies of additional readings or make substitutions from those listed here. In all cases, these readings will be available via Moodle or otherwise provided to the students by the instructor in advance of the reading due date.*

**Assignments**
More assignment information and instructions is available on the Moodle course page.

Quizzes
This course will have short weekly quizzes which will be taken online via our Moodle course site. For the most part, quizzes will correspond to the specific material covered that week in class, but these quizzes do build on one another to some extent. Each quiz will be available online from 5pm Thursday (after class) until midnight on Sunday. Students will have 20 minutes in which to complete each online quiz.

Systematic Research Review (SRR) Project
Students are required to complete a written systematic research review (SRR) and an oral presentation of the project findings. This is a small group project that will require you to select your group members early in the semester, so be thinking about potential partnerships (e.g., students with similar practice interests) in the first few weeks of class. The SRR project is carried out in five steps throughout the semester. Detailed instructions for completing each step of the SRR project will be handed out and discussed in class. The SRR project will contain the following elements:

- **Step 1**: Determine the practice problem, question, or topic that will be the subject of the research review.
- **Step 2**: Submit a reference list of research articles that will be analyzed in your systematic review, other useful resources on your topic, the sources and methods used to locate them, and, if applicable, a description of how your topic/research question has changed as a result of your search.
- **Step 3**: Summarize the methodological characteristics of the studies using Tables 1 & 2 then assess the effectiveness of each intervention using Table 3.
- **Step 4**: Present the findings of your SRR project to the class and participate on a Response Panel for other groups' presentations.
- **Step 5**: Submit your written research review (15 typed, double-spaced pages plus references and appendices in APA format)

Class Participation
Class participation includes completing specific assigned tasks, raising questions and making comments, engaging in classroom discussions and exercises, and facilitating discussion by responding to and asking questions of other class members. Students are expected to attend all class sessions. Students missing more than three classes will not meet minimal course requirements and may not pass the course.

Grading Structure for Semester Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Dates*</th>
<th>Percent of Final Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in class activities</td>
<td>Each session</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quizzes

Completed by midnight on the following Sundays:

- Quiz 1: January 30th
- Quiz 2: February 6th
- Quiz 3: February 13th
- Quiz 4: February 20th
- Quiz 5: February 27th
- Quiz 6: March 6th (5 pts.)
- Quiz 7: March 13th
- Quiz 8: March 27th
- Quiz 9: April 3rd (5 pts.)
- Quiz 10: April 10th
- Quiz 11: April 17th
- Quiz 12: April 24th

50
(4 pts. each except as indicated)

Systematic Research Review (SRR) Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Project Question/Topic</td>
<td>Feb 3rd</td>
<td>(S/NS)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2-A: Preliminary List of Articles</td>
<td>Feb. 24th</td>
<td>(S/NS)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2-B: Final List of Articles</td>
<td>Mar. 10th</td>
<td>(S/NS)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3-A: Excerpt of Tables 1&amp;2</td>
<td>March 31st</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3-B: Table 3—April 21st</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4: SRR Oral Presentation</td>
<td>April 28th or May 5th</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5: Final SRR Paper—May 9th</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* If Not Satisfactory, you may redo until acceptable for SRR assignment (must get OK before moving on)

Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>74-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>64-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>60-63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: To complete the course successfully all students must complete and receive a passing grade for each assignment.

Course Policies

There are many University and School of Social Work policies that govern this course. Please go to [http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/Documents/SSWCoursePolicies.pdf](http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/Documents/SSWCoursePolicies.pdf) to see a complete description of all the policies.
Part IV: Course content

**Session 1: January 20**

**Introductions & Course Overview**  
**Evidence-based Practice**

**Topics:**  
The role and function of research in social work  
Integration of research and practice  
What is EBP?

**Readings:**  
R&B Chapter 2: Evidence-based practice (pp. 19-31)

**Session 2: January 27**

**Frameworks for Social Work Research**

**Topics:**  
Getting started: What am I interested in studying?  
An introduction to philosophy and theory in science and research

**Readings:**  
R&B Chapter 3: Factors influencing the research process (pp. 33-48)

**Activities:**  
We'll begin discussing possible topics for the SRR; use the handout “Selecting a Practice-focused Problem/Question/Topic for an SRR” to help guide your thinking. Note that you must submit a topic for the SRR next week!

**Session 3: February 3rd**

**Forming a Research Question or Problem**

**Guest Speaker:** Scott Marsalis, Reference Librarian for Social Work, Magrath Library

**DUE:**  
Step #1 of SRR Project

**Topics:**  
Using the U of M libraries and online resources for research and practice  
Formulating social work research problems, topics, and questions  
Purposes of research: explore, describe, explain  
The time dimension and units of analysis in research

**Readings:**  
R&B Chapter 4: Reviewing literature and developing research questions (pp. 51-64)

**Activities:**  
Lecture & discussion; We'll explore the strategies for searching, identifying, and locating appropriate articles for your SRR projects using U of M library resources

**Session 4: February 10th**

**Conceptualization and Operationalization**
Topics: Research questions and hypotheses; identifying research variables
Quantitative and qualitative approaches to conceptualization and operationalization

Readings: R&B Chapter 5: Conceptualization in quantitative and qualitative inquiry (pp. 65-78)

**Bring this article to class every week starting here

Activities: Lecture & discussion
Small group exercise using the Wright & Perry article

Session 5: February 17th Measurement

Topics: Measurement: validity and reliability; measurement error; quantitative and qualitative approaches and contributions to measurement; issues in the construction and adaptation of instruments

Readings: R&B Chapter 6: Measurement in quantitative and qualitative inquiry (pp. 65-78)
R&B Chapter 7: Quantitative and qualitative measurement instruments (pp. 93-109)


**Bring this article to class every week starting here

Activities: Lecture & discussion;
Viewing of research interview clips;
Small group exercise using the Mitchell article

Session 6: February 24th Sampling

DUE: Step #2-A of SRR Project
Topics: Measurement (continued)
Sampling: history; quantitative versus qualitative approaches; probability and non-probability samples; sampling designs
Review of weeks 1-7

Readings: R&B Chapter 9: Sampling: Quantitative & qualitative approaches (pp. 131-151)

**Bring this article to class every week starting here

Activities: Lecture & discussion;
Individual and small group exercises using the Mitchell article

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Session 7: March 3rd Ethics in Social Work Research

Topics: Values, ethics, bias, and politics in research

Readings: R&B Chapter 15: Ethical issues in social work research (pp. 255-272)

Activities: Complete online ethics training and turn in a copy of your completion certificate at next class session.

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Session 8: March 10th Causality & Inference in Experimental & Quasi-Experimental Designs

DUE: Step #2-B of SRR Project

Topics: Criteria for inferring causality; Internal and external validity
Correlational designs and experimental designs (begin)

Readings: R&B Chapter 10: Experiments and quasi-experiments (pp. 155-176)

**Bring this article to class every week

Activities: Lecture & discussion
Small group using the St. Lawrence article
March 17th

HAVE A GOOD SPRING BREAK!!

Session 9: March 24th

Experimental & Single-Case Designs

Topics:
Experimental designs (continued)
Single case designs: A tool for direct practice evaluation

Readings:
R&B Chapter 11: Single-case evaluation designs (pp. 177-198)

Bradshaw, W., & Roseborough, D. (2004). Evaluating the effectiveness of
cognitive-behavioral treatment of residual symptoms and impairment in
schizophrenia: Research on Social Work Practice, 14 (2), 112-120.

Activities:
Lecture & discussion
Small group exercise using the Bradshaw & Roseborough article

Session 10: March 31st

Qualitative and Mixed Method Research Approaches

DUE:
Step #3-A of SRR Project

Topics:
Principles and strategies of qualitative and mixed-method research; key qualitative approaches

Readings:
R&B Chapter 13: Additional methods in qualitative inquiry (pp. 215-236)
R&B Chapter 14: Analyzing available records: Quantitative & qualitative methods (pp. 237-251)


Activities:
Lecture & discussion
Large group qualitative research exercise

Session 11: April 7th

Quantitative Data Analysis (Part 1)

Topics:
Foundations of quantitative data analysis: descriptive & inferential statistics;
methods of univariate and bivariate analysis

Readings: R&B Chapter 17: Quantitative data analysis (pp. 289-302)

Activities: Lecture & discussion
Small & large group data analysis exercises

Session 12: April 14th
Quantitative Data Analysis (Part 2)

Topics: Inferential statistics (continued); common approaches to bivariate and multivariate analysis (e.g., correlation, regression, ANOVA)


Activities: Lecture & discussion
Small group exercise: Interpreting findings from journal articles

Session 13: April 21st
Qualitative Data Analysis
Cultural Competence in Social Work Research

DUE: Step #3-B of SRR Project

Topics: Data analysis (continued)
Cultural competence in research

Readings: R&B Chapter 18: Qualitative data analysis (pp. 303-313)
R&B Chapter 5: Culturally competent research (pp. 273-286)

Activities: Lecture & discussion
Large group review of weeks 8-13

Session 14: April 28th
SRR Presentations & Respondent Panels (week 1)
DUE: SRR Presentations (groups assigned to week 1)

Activities: Respondent Panels (non-presenting students)

Session 15: May 5th

SRR Presentations & Respondent Panels (week 2)

DUE: SRR Presentations (groups assigned to week 2)

Activities: Respondent Panels (non-presenting students)
Additional Bibliography

Books


Articles


**Websites**


"4 Researchers: Practical Advice from Working Researchers" website: [http://www.4researchers.org/](http://www.4researchers.org/)