Social Work 522: Basic Social Work Research

Winter 2012

Section 003 (Tuesday 6:00-9:00), B684 SSWB
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Email: enicklet@umich.edu
Office Hours: Mondays 1-3 and by appointment

1. **Course Description:**

This course will provide content on the logic of inquiry and the necessity for an empirical approach to practice. The process of formulating appropriate research questions and hypotheses, techniques for testing relationships and patterns among variables, methods of data collection, methods to assess and improve the validity and reliability of data and measures, and the ethics of scientific inquiry will be addressed. This course will help students understand practice through the critical examination of methods associated with decision-making, critical thinking, and ethical judgment. The course content will integrate the core themes related to multiculturalism and diversity; social justice and social change; promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation; and behavioral and social science research.

2. **Course Content:**

This course will cover qualitative and quantitative research methods, commonly used statistical procedures, and approaches to the evaluation of practice. Students will learn how to understand and appreciate a scientific approach to building practice knowledge and for evaluating practice. Special emphasis will be placed on increasing one’s ability to critique theoretical foundations of research, form research questions, apply research methods, conduct statistical analysis, and interpret research reports. The latest statistical, graphical, and display technologies will be used.

3. **Course Objectives:**

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Critically evaluate the design, methodology, and conclusions of social work and social and behavioral science research publications.
- Apply appropriate research designs and methodologies of the scientific method to social work practice issues that affect the diverse populations at risk [e.g., ability, age, class, color, culture,
ethnicity, family structure, gender (including gender identity and gender expression), marital status, national origin, race, religion or spirituality, sex, and sexual orientation].
- Identify the value and ethical considerations of sound social work research.

4. Relationship of This Course to Curricular Themes:

| Multiculturalism & Diversity: | This course will include material on methods to improve the cultural inclusiveness and cultural sensitivity of research methods. This content will cover culturally sensitive measures, inclusion of diverse groups of adequate size in sampling, culturally aware interpretations of data, and culturally responsible dissemination of results. The basic purpose of research and practice evaluation will also be analyzed from culturally bound perspectives. |
| Social Justice: | Students will gain an understanding of the ways in which research and evaluation have sometimes been used against oppressed groups, for example through unethical practices, distortion of results, or fabrication of data. Examples will be given of ways in which research can be used to empower socially disadvantaged individuals, groups, and communities. These examples will include studies in which the research participants were involved in the study during all of its stages. |
| Promotion, Prevention, Treatment & Rehabilitation: | Studies reviewed in the course will include examination of projects aimed at enhancing well-being and preventing problems. The methodological and ethical problems unique to studies of promotion and prevention efforts will be described. The social work values consistent with promotion/prevention research will be analyzed. |
| Behavioral and Social Science Research: | The unique challenges in applying social science knowledge and methods to social work settings will be covered. These challenges include the practical and ethical dilemmas of applied research. Emphasis will be placed on the way established theories and methods influence the selection of research questions and methods. Studies will be critiqued for their ability to advance social science theory and knowledge and to improve social work practice. |
| Social Work Ethics and Values: | The research and evaluation section of the NASW Code of Ethics and other professional codes will be applied throughout this course. Examples of common ethical dilemmas will be presented. Among the areas of ethics to be covered will be informed consent procedures, protection of research participants from harm, confidentiality, and accurate reporting of results. Emphasis will also be placed on the social workers' ethical obligation to use scientifically sound practice and to continually evaluate practice and programs. |

5. Required Text and Software:


**Additional readings—posted on CTools—will be assigned throughout the term.

**Students are expected to read the assigned readings prior to class
We will use Excel and SPSS for Windows in the computer lab and classroom. Purchase of these programs is not required for the purpose of this course. Access is also available in various labs on campus.

6. Course Design

The final grade in the course will be assessed based on several components:

- **Quizzes**
  There will be a total of four quizzes throughout the semester. Each covers non-cumulative content which includes the session prior to the quiz. The quizzes will be in multiple choice content and will be given in the first half hour of class (9:00-9:30am). If you will not be able to attend a quiz, it is advisable to notify the instructor well in advance so alternate arrangements can be made (i.e., taking the quiz in the instructor’s office or during another section of the course). Solutions are posted shortly after the quizzes are taken, so it is imperative to be on top of things. The four quizzes are scheduled for 2/6/12, 3/5/12, 3/19/12, and 4/9/12.

- **Written Assignments**
  There will be five written assignments required in the course. They are designed to be cumulative in the sense that each builds on the previous one, and all of them will be components of your final paper/proposal. In each written assignment, standard margins and font size (1” margins, double-spaced, APA style, Times New Roman 12 point font) is required.
    - Assignment #1 (Due 1/31) – Describe a social problem that interests you. Identify a research question/s relevant to that problem. State one or more propositions that can represent your best guess for the likely answer to this question (3 pages maximum)
    - Assignment #2 (Due 2/21) – Propose a general theoretical framework that is relevant to your research questions and derive a series of hypotheses from that framework that allow you to address your research questions. Note that the theory does not have to be a “formal” theory but should represent an overarching perspective, story or orientation that provides a point of view for your research and guides the empirical approach taken to the study (5 pages maximum)
    - Assignment #3 (Due 3/13) – Propose a research design for your study including a discussion of potential threats to internal validity and how your design will deal with these (5 pages maximum)
    - Assignment #4 (Due 3/27) – Propose a sampling strategy for your study, discuss data sources and formulate a set of measures for assessing the key variables and controls (5 pages maximum)
    - Final Paper (Due 4/17) – This paper will represent the cumulative efforts and synthesis of the first four assignments plus additional components, including analysis strategy and limitations. It should take the form of a research proposal and include the following elements: problem statement, research question(s), abbreviated literature review, theory and hypotheses, research design, measurement and a discussion of methodological limitation. This paper should draw extensively on the assignments during the course, as modified by the critiques from your classmates and your evaluation of the research of others. This research proposal is not to exceed 20 pages. The term paper will be due the last day of class in hard copy (early papers gladly accepted).
• Group Statistical Assignment and Group Presentation
  o You should partner with two other students to complete an assignment that
demonstrates technical and conceptual understanding of the quantitative analysis
portion of the course. You will be provided with a data set for this purpose, but you are
welcome to use any data that interests you. This assignment could be conducted using
either Excel or SPSS. A handout for instructions will be available. The Group Statistics
Assignment is due 4/3/12.
  o Your group will present key findings, interpretation, and limitations. I suggest you use
PowerPoint slides and/or handouts to help you present materials. Think of this as a
conference presentation and be prepared to answer questions. Each presentation is
limited to 15 minutes plus 5 minutes for discussion (20 minutes total). Presentations are
scheduled for 4/3/12 and 4/10/12

• Attendance and Participation
  All students are expected to arrive on time and stay throughout all class sessions. If you are
unable to attend a particular class for some reason, please take responsibility to update yourself
by (a) doing the assigned reading, (b) studying the lecture notes on CTools, (c) asking other
students to fill you in, and (d) reviewing material taught prior to your absence and making sure
you master them well. I strongly encourage you not to miss any class session as the materials
are connected. You will learn more if you participate; therefore, you will be expected to be
engaged during all class lectures, discussions, and activities. Full attendance and participation
will be rewarded when calculating the final grade.

7. Grading Criteria for Assignments (please note grades are rounded up or down)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>99-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A or A-</td>
<td>94-98 A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-87</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+ or C</td>
<td>78-79 C</td>
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<tr>
<td>C- to F</td>
<td>C-: 70-73</td>
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</table>
Summary of Written Assignments and Grading

- Quizzes: 40%
- Written Assignments (4): 20%
- Final Paper: 20%
- Group Statistical Assignment: 5%
- Group Presentation: 5%
- Attendance and Participation: 10%

(100% total course grade)

7. Additional Course Details:

Accommodations / Special Needs
If you have a disability or impairment that requires an accommodation, please contact the instructor in the first two weeks of class to discuss what modifications are necessary. Any information you provide will be treated as private and confidential. For more information and resources, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities office at G664 Haven Hall (734-763-3000)

Assignment Submissions and Late Work
All assignments should be handed in (hard copy) the day they are due in class. Email attachments will not be accepted. If you are unable to come to class that day, please find alternate arrangements to hand in the assignment. All students are expected to submit their work according to deadlines. To be fair, I have adopted the following policy: Late work will be graded down by 10 points out of 100 for (or ‘into’) each day it is late unless prior arrangements for an extension have been made with me. Assignments are due at the beginning of class. An example of this policy is if the student turns in the assignment after class, in which case the original grade (let’s say 92%) would instead be 82%, and so on. Extenuating circumstances may arise which make it difficult to turn in work on time. In such cases, I expect you to communicate that an extension is needed so a mutually agreeable extension can be made.

Academic Honesty
Policies governing plagiarism can be found in the 2011-2012 Student Guide. Plagiarism is taken very seriously at the University of Michigan and is grounds for expulsion from the University. It is the student’s responsibility to become familiar with the information presented at:
http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic_and_professional_integrity/.

Availability and Contact
The best way to reach me is via email. Please place “SW522” in the subject line. Please also note that—due to the nature of my work—I am not able to check my email every day, and therefore, I might not be able to respond to your email right away. However, I will try my best to respond to your email within 48 hours of receipt. Please call my office and leave a message for urgent matters.

I am available to meet with students outside of the classroom. Students are encouraged to meet with me during arranged times to 1) ask questions about course material or assignments, 2) review graded work, 3) obtain suggestions for additional reading, and 4) discuss other topics related to the course or to social work research in general.
Cell phones/PDAs/Laptops
I expect that students will turn off (or mute, not “vibrate”) any cell phones, and will not respond to text messages or calls during class. These can be used during the break or after class. Use of laptops is discouraged. However, I recognize that some students take notes more efficiently using laptops or have purchased electronic versions of the text. Students who choose to use laptops should arrive a few minutes early to turn off the wireless function. Use of laptops for non-course related activities (i.e. web surfing, online shopping, emails, facebook) is distracting to yourself, fellow students, and the instructor. Engaging in such activity will adversely affect your grade in this course.

Grades
I feel that honesty about the work you do will serve you better in the long term than false praise and reward. Further, I will explain my grading clearly and document explanations. If you ever have a question regarding a grade you receive, you are welcome to come by and discuss the grade with me.
7. **Tentative Semester Schedule:**

Readings from the text are indicated as RB (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). All other readings are available on CTools. Items marked with an asterisk (*) are optional readings and are also available on CTools. You will not be tested on these readings, but discussion regarding these readings is fair game for quizzes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/10/12</td>
<td>Introduction to Scientific Inquiry in Social Work</td>
<td>RB: Ch. 1, 2, 3 Rosen et al. (1999), *Pardeck (1992)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1/17/12</td>
<td>Research in Theory and Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1/24/12</td>
<td>Ethical, Political, and Cultural Context of Social Work Research</td>
<td>RB: Ch. 4, 5, 10 Hornblum (1997), pp. 1437-41 Two Feathers et al. (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1/31/12</td>
<td>Problem Formulation, Conceptualization, and Operationalization</td>
<td>RB: Ch. 6, 7, 10 Goldstein: Ch 11 Weiner (2008): Ch 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/14/12</td>
<td>Designs for Evaluating Programs and Practice</td>
<td>RB: Ch. 10, 11, 12</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>2/21/12</td>
<td>Program Evaluation and Writing Research Proposals and Reports</td>
<td>RB: Ch. 13, 23 Charlesworth &amp; Rodwell (1997)</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>2/28/12</td>
<td>Winter Break – No Class</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>3/6/12</td>
<td>Quantitative Data: Data Collection Methods with Large Sources of Data</td>
<td>RB: Ch 14, 15 Nicklett &amp; Burgard (2009)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>3/13/12</td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>RB: Ch. 16, 20</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>3/20/12</td>
<td>Inferential Data Analysis</td>
<td>RB: Ch. 21, 22 Gitlin et al. (2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>3/27/12</td>
<td>Qualitative Research Methods</td>
<td>RB: Ch. 17, 18 Fine &amp; Holyfield (1996)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>4/3/12</td>
<td>Qualitative and Mixed-Method Data Analysis</td>
<td>RB: Ch. 19 Stekler et al. (1992)</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>4/10/12</td>
<td>Life Histories</td>
<td>Axinn et al. (1999) Yoshihama (2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>4/17/12</td>
<td>Wrap up</td>
<td></td>
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