Social Work 522: Basic Social Work Research, Fall 2012

Section 001 (last updated 9/16/12)
Instructor: Professor E. Nicklett
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Email: enicklet@umich.edu
Meeting: Mondays 9:00am-12:00pm, Room 1804 SSWB
Office Hours: September-October 1-3:00 or 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 and commonly used statistical procedures. 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.

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 and electronic materials are assigned throughout the term. These are available on CTools by week. CTools also provides information also for additional references and resources.**

**Students are expected to read the assigned readings prior to class.**
We will use SPSS for windows during a required computer lab assignment and optional statistics assignment. Purchase of this program 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. The lowest grade of the 4 quizzes will be dropped. Each quiz covers non-cumulative content which includes the session prior to the quiz (but does not include the readings for the day of the quiz). The quizzes will be in multiple-choice and true-false format and will be given in the first half hour of class (9:10-9:40am). If you do not take the quiz, the instructor will assume that you have opted to drop this quiz score.

- **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. Chapter 15 of the text is a particularly helpful guide through this process.

  - **Assignment #1** – Describe a social problem that interests you. Identify a research question/s relevant to that problem. State one or two propositions that can represent your best guess for the likely answer to this question (3 pages maximum)
  
  - **Assignment #2** – 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** – 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** – 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** – 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).
• Peer Feedback/Evaluation
  o You should partner with at least one other student in the class. It is not required that you have the similar topic or a similar approach toward data analysis.
  o Throughout the semester, it is expected that you will meet with your partner outside of class time (either in-person or electronically) to discuss each written paper assignment. If possible, also come to office hours and meet with the instructor together.
  o There will be some opportunities during class to discuss the assignments (such as conceptualization of the problem, etc.) with your partner or in groups. Peer feedback (both giving and receiving) is a strong predictor of success in this class.
  o Peer feedback for the final submission should be provided to the instructor and to one’s partner at least one week prior to the submission of the final assignment. These suggestions should be more than superficial grammatical suggestions and should relate to research design and sampling strategy, for example.
  o At the end of the semester, each student will fill out an evaluation of their peer’s feedback over the course of the semester.
  o The final paper feedback and evaluation will be part of each student’s final grade.

• Research Methods Assignment
  o A Stats Lab/Module will be provided in class on 11/5/12. You will receive full credit if you attend and follow the module throughout. For those of you who have experience in SPSS or Stata datasets and feel you do not need this module, please contact me.
  o You are responsible for completing 1 of 4 options for a Research Methods Assignment. More details are provided in CTools under SW 522 001 F12 Resources / Assignments.
    ▪ It is important that you receive proof or certification for any of the workshops or module you attend, whether through PEERRS certification (a printable certificate is provided) or attending a workshop through the library or Research Office (signed and dated by the facilitator at the end of the workshop) so that completion can be verified. Hard copies are due to the instructor by 12/3/12.

• Attendance, Participation, and Reflection
  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.

Part of your attendance and participation grade is handing in a 1-page (non-graded) paper reflecting how any (minimum 1, maximum 3) concepts or methods learned in this course could influence your future social work practice, policy work, or community organizing strategies. This is due the last day of class. Please bring one copy to hand in and one to reference during the wrap-up session.
7. **Grading Criteria for Assignments** (please note grades are rounded up or down)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+ 99-100</td>
<td>The grade of A+ will rarely be used and, in general, students should not expect to receive this grade on an assignment. This grade signifies work that goes beyond the content of the course and the expertise students are expected to master. An A+ is rare to obtain but not impossible.</td>
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<td>A or A- A: 94-98 A-: 90-93</td>
<td>The grade of A is used for assignments that demonstrate excellence. These grades are reserved for student work which not only demonstrates excellent mastery of content but which also shows that the student has undertaken a complex task, has applied critical thinking skills to the assignment, and/or has demonstrated creativity in his or her approach to the assignment. The difference between these two grades is determined by the degree to which these skills have been demonstrated by the student.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+ 88-89</td>
<td>A grade of B+ is given to work determined to be very good. This grade denotes that a student has demonstrated a more-than-competent understanding of the material.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B 84-87</td>
<td>A “B” grade is given to student work meeting the basic requirements of the assignment. It denotes that the student has done adequate work and meets basic course expectations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B- 80-83</td>
<td>The grade of “B-” denotes that a student’s performance was less than adequate on an assignment, reflecting only a moderate grasp of expectations and/or content.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+ or C C+: 78-79 C: 74-77</td>
<td>A grade of C reflects a minimal grasp of the assignment, poor organization of ideas and/or several significant areas requiring improvement.</td>
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<td>C- to F C-: 70-73</td>
<td>Grades between C- and F are reflect a failure to meet the minimum standards, reflecting serious deficiencies in all aspects of performance on the assignment.</td>
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**Summary of Written Assignments and Grading**

- Quizzes: 30%
- Written Assignments (4): 20%
- Final Paper: 20%
- Peer Feedback / Evaluation: 10%
- Statistical Lab Assignment: 5%
- Assignment for Research Methods: 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. Unless otherwise indicated on the syllabus, 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 address the email in a formal manner and 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 TD (Trochim & Donnelly) or Z (Zavella). All other readings are available on CTools. Items marked with an asterisk (*) are optional readings and are provided for additional depth or explanations of the materials. You will not be tested on optional 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</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9/24</td>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>TD: Ch. 2 *Z: Chapter 1 Z: Chapter 2</td>
<td>Quiz 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10/01</td>
<td>Measurement Theory</td>
<td>TD: Ch. 3 Lincoln et al. (2003)</td>
<td>Paper 1 Due</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>10/15</td>
<td>FALL BREAK</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>10/22</td>
<td>Designs Qualitative, Unobtrusive Measures Qualitative / Mixed Method Design</td>
<td>TD: Ch. 6, 7, 8 Z: Ch. 4 Steckler et al. (1992) Terling (1999)</td>
<td>Paper 2 Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10/29</td>
<td>Designs, cont. Experimental Design, Quasi-Experimental Design, Advanced Design</td>
<td>TD: Ch. 9, 10, 11 *Marczyk et al.</td>
<td>Quiz 3 Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>11/05</td>
<td>SPSS Module: Guest Facilitator Advanced Topics Revisited</td>
<td>TD: Ch. 12 Smith (2006)</td>
<td>Paper 3 Due By email to instructor</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11/12</td>
<td>Analysis Qualitative and Mixed Methods</td>
<td>TD: Ch. 13 Z: Ch. 5; Gutek et al. 1991</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11/19</td>
<td>Analysis, cont. Analysis for Research Design</td>
<td>TD: Ch. 14</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>11/26</td>
<td>Culturally Competent Research and Ethics</td>
<td>Ruben &amp; Babbie, Ch. 4-5 Z: Ch. 5; Two Feathers (2007) *Hornblum (1997)</td>
<td>Quiz 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>12/10</td>
<td>Wrap up</td>
<td></td>
<td>Final Paper Due; 1-page reflection due</td>
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</table>