



**Social Work 522: Basic Social Work Research
Winter 2013**

Section 003: Tuesday 6-9 pm, Rm. B684 SSWB
Instructor: Shane R. Brady, PhD, LLMSW
Office: Make Appointment
Phone: 734-796-3017
Email: srbrady@umich.edu
Office Hours: 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:

- 1) Critically evaluate the design, methodology, and conclusions of social work and social and behavioral science research publications.
 - a. understand research concepts to permit a critical analysis of research and evaluation studies with respect to quality, bias, ethics, and potential applications.

- b. assess the strengths and weaknesses of selected research designs and methodology.
- c. assess the strengths and weaknesses of selected measures and measurement strategies.
- d. assess the cultural sensitivity of measures and measurement strategies.
- e. assess the biases and implications of conclusions drawn in the research studies.

2) Apply appropriate research designs and methodologies of the scientific method to social work practice issues relevant to the diverse populations at risk (dimension: 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).

- a. frame research questions and develop problem statements that reflect the issues under consideration.
- b. apply research concepts and principles in the development and use of selected qualitative and quantitative methodologies and analytical approaches.
- c. choose appropriate research designs and methodology given a particular research question.
- d. demonstrate the ability to select culturally appropriate measures and measurement strategies given specific populations.
- e. construct simple indices, questionnaires, and measures relevant to the evaluation of practice.
- f. conduct selected analytic and statistical procedures.
- g. demonstrate the ability to interpret and draw conclusions from selected analytic and statistical procedures.

3) Identify the value and ethical considerations of sound social work research.

- a. understand ethical issues in the conduct of research and evaluation.
- b. understand the relevance and applicability of research in working with disadvantaged, disenfranchised, and diverse populations.
- c. examine the processes by which research and evaluation findings can be used to enhance social justice, social change, promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation.

4. Course Design:

Many different methods will be used for acquiring knowledge and skills including: lecture, project, in-class exercise, peer instruction, homework and lab work. This course is designed to increase students' comfort level with research methods and statistical analyses and to increase their appreciation of the relevance of research and evaluation for social work practice.

5. Relationship of the Course to Four Curricular Themes:

- *Multiculturalism and 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 and Social Change.* 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, and 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.

6. Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values:

The research and evaluation section of the NASW Code of Ethics 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.

7. Accommodations / Special Needs:

If you have a disability or impairment that requires an accommodation, please contact the instructor within two weeks after the class starts to discuss what modifications are necessary. Any information you give will be treated as private and confidential.

8. Course Requirements:

- A. *Research Proposal (50%):* The major assignment for this course will be a research proposal that you will complete in sections throughout the semester with the final report being graded. The components and due dates are as follows:

- I. Research Justification/Problem Statement – **Due – January 29th**

- II. Research Question and Hypotheses – **Due – February 5th**
 - III. Comprehensive Literature Review with at least 10 references and APA works cited page. **Due – February 19th**
 - IV. Sampling – Who is your sample, how will you access your sample, recruitment discussion, and ethical considerations. **Due – February 26th**
 - V. Research Design – How will you conduct your study? What type of research design will you utilize? Also, discuss how you will collect your data. If you are using a questionnaire, interview template, etc. Reference the protocol in this section and include it as an appendix in the back of the proposal. **Due – March 19th**
 - VI. Analysis strategy – May be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, but provide an overview of how data will be analyzed. Your analysis should compliment your design, methods, and research question. **Due – April 9th**
 - VII. Human Subjects Protections – How will you protect human subjects? What are the potential threats to human subjects, and how will you address them? Think in terms of confidentiality, harm, protection and monitoring of data, and even aspects such as participant’s time. **Due – Final Report**
 - VIII. Anticipated strengths and weaknesses of your proposal – Discuss what the strengths and limitations of your research project are and defend your decision to move forward. **Due – Final Report**
 - IX. Final complete research proposal with table of contents, title page, references, appendices. **Due – April 23rd complete edited report with all components uploaded to C-Tools before class begins.**
- B. *Article Critique (10%)*: You will locate one article in an area of interest to you, possibly from your research proposal literature, and provide a brief oral synopsis of the article, strengths of the research, and critique of the research in regards to question, sampling, design, analysis, and conclusions. Each presentation will be an informal 10 minute conversation with the class. I would suggest taking down brief notes for this assignment, but you will probably not have time to use power point slides. The article critiques will be split up between two classes on **April 2nd and 9th**.
- C. *Take-home Final Examination (20%)*: There will be a take-home final examination which includes mostly short essay questions. All questions are designed to test your comprehension as opposed to memorization of social work research. The questions will ask you to pull together content learned over the course of the semester, use critical thinking, and synthesize material in ways that demonstrate a basic competency of the research process from start to finish, ethical considerations, and the purpose of research in social work. Example questions will be used in class to help prepare you for the types of questions that will be asked of you on the final exam.

D. *Participation, Attendance, Lab Assignments (20%)*: Throughout the course you will be asked to complete readings, mini quizzes, and lab assignments. There are no make-ups for missed participation or in-class assignments. It is up to you to get with another peer to catch up on missed lectures and in class work. I will base my final assessment of your participation based on your effort, attendance, and completion of work, not on whether you get it entirely right or not. We are here to learn together, and you pay good money to be here, so I expect you to attend all classes.

9. Honor Code:

Academic integrity should not be taken lightly. If you have any questions or comments regarding the class or assignments, please feel free to contact the instructor.

11. Grading Scale:

A = 96 –100	A- = 91 – 95	B+ = 86 – 90	B = 83 – 85
B- = 80 – 82	C+ = 76 –79	C = 73 –75	C- = 70 - 72

12. Required Text:

Rubin, A & Babbie, E. (2010). *Research Methods for Social Work* (7th Edition). Wadsworth/Thomson.

** Additional readings will be assigned throughout the term.

13. Software:

SPSS and Excel for windows will be used in the computer lab and classroom.

Schedule

Date (Session)	Content	Required Reading
Jan. 15 (Session 1)	Introduction to course Ethics & politics of research	Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 Lab: Human Subjects
Jan. 22 (Session 2)	Scientific Inquiry Problem formulation	Rubin & Babbie • Chapters 2, 3, 6, 17 Lab: Hypotheses
Jan. 29 (Session 3)	Conceptualization & operationalization Measurement	Rubin & Babbie • Chapters 7, 8 Lab: Conceptual order/Operationalization
Feb. 5 (Session 4)	Designs for evaluating program & practice: • Causal inference • Experimental & quasi-experimental design	Rubin & Babbie, • Chapter 10, 11, 18 Lab: Research Design and Methods
Feb. 12 (Session 5)	Developing Effective Questionnaires	Rubin & Babbie • Chapter 9 Lab: Scales/Questionnaires
Feb. 19 (Session 6)	Data collection with large sources of data: • Sampling • Survey Qualitative Data Collection	Rubin & Babbie • Chapter 14, 15 • Interview Reading
Feb. 26 (Session 7)	Quantitative data analysis (1) – Software Basics and Basic Analysis	Rubin & Babbie • Chapter 20 SPSS Guide
March 5 th	Spring Break No Classes	
Mar. 12 (Session 8)	Quantitative data analysis (2) – Inferential Statistical procedures (Brief Overview)	Rubin & Babbie • Chapter 21, 22
Mar. 19 (Session 9)	Qualitative Analysis – Basics of Thematic Analysis	Rubin & Babbie • Reading TBD
Mar. 26 (Session 10)	Qualitative Analysis – Constant Comparison	• Reading TBD
Apr. 2 (Session 11)	Article Critiques	
Apr. 9 (Session 12)	Article Critiques	
Apr. 16 (Session 13)	Final Exam Prep.	
Apr. 23 (Session 14)	• <i>Final exam</i>	In-Class or Take Home determined by Class Consensus.