Social Work 522: Basic Social Work Research  
Winter 2014

Section 002: Monday 2-5 pm, Rm. B684 SSWB  
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Office Hours: Thursday 2-4pm

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 Competencies and Practice Behaviors:**

   This course addresses the following competencies and practice behaviors:

   COMPETENCY 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:
2.1 recognize and manage personal values in a way that allows professional values to guide practice;
2.4 apply strategies of ethical reasoning to arrive at principled decisions.

COMPETENCY 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:

3.1 distinguish, appraise, and integrate multiple sources of knowledge, including research-based knowledge, and practice wisdom;
3.2 analyze models of assessment, prevention, intervention, and evaluation; and

COMPETENCY 4—Engage diversity and difference in practice.

Social workers understand how diversity characterizes and shapes the human experience and is critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, political ideology, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation. Social workers appreciate that, as a consequence of difference, a person’s life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. Social workers:

4.1 recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power;
4.3 recognize and communicate their understanding of the importance of difference in shaping life experiences;

COMPETENCY 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:

6.1 use practice experience to inform scientific inquiry and
6.2 use research evidence to inform practice.

COMPETENCY 7—Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.

Social workers are knowledgeable about human behavior across the life course; the range of social systems in which people live; and the ways social systems promote or deter people in
maintaining or achieving health and well-being. Social workers apply theories and knowledge from the liberal arts to understand biological, social, cultural, psychological, and spiritual development. Social workers:

7.2 critique and apply knowledge to understand person and environment.

COMPETENCY 10—Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

Professional practice involves the dynamic and interactive processes of engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation at multiple levels. Social workers have the knowledge and skills to practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Practice knowledge includes identifying, analyzing, and implementing evidence-based interventions designed to achieve client goals; using research and technological advances; evaluating program outcomes and practice effectiveness; developing, analyzing, advocating, and providing leadership for policies and services; and promoting social and economic justice.

COMPETENCY 10(b)—Assessment
Social workers:
10.b.4 select appropriate intervention strategies.

COMPETENCY 10(d)—Evaluation
Social workers:
10.d.1 critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate interventions.

4. Course Objectives:

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

1. Act as a critical consumer and contributor of 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, and of selected measures and measurement strategies.
   c. assess the cultural sensitivity of measures and measurement strategies.
   d. assess the biases and implications of conclusions drawn in the research studies. (Practice Behaviors 3.1, 3.2, 6.1)

2. Locate, assess and critique research studies so as to draw appropriate inference, particularly as it affects 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. (Practice Behaviors 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.3, 6.1, 6.2, 7.2, 11.4, 13.1)

3. Know the NASW Code of Ethics and appropriately apply it in the conduct of 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 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).
   c. examine the processes by which research and evaluation findings can be used to enhance social justice, social change, promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. (Practice Behaviors 2.1, 2.4, 7.2, 13.1)

5. Course Design:

   Many different methods will be used for acquiring knowledge and skills including: lecture, in-class activity, group project, homework and lab work. We will use instructional technology to facilitate communication and collaboration. 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.

6. 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.

7. **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.

8. **Accommodations / Special Needs:**

   If you have a disability or impairment that requires an accommodation, and/or if religious observances conflict with class or due dates for assignments, please contact the instructor within two weeks after the class starts to discuss what modifications or appropriate arrangements are necessary. Any information you give will be treated as private and confidential.

9. **Assignments (see a separate handout):**

   1) **Conduct a survey.** You are asked to form a team of about 3 students. Your team is going to design and carry out a study to address a research question. The overall purpose of this assignment is to provide you an opportunity to obtain hands-on experience about the research process and apply newly learned research concepts. To make sure your proceed in a timely fashion, due dates for deliverables are as follows:

      (1a) Topic and bibliography (2%. Due: 1/27)
      (1b) Research question, literature review and hypothesis (5%. Due: 2/3)
1c) Variables and measures (4%. Due: 2/10)
1d) Sample and data collection plan (4%. Due: 2/17)
1e) Questionnaire (5%. Due: 2/24)
1f) Data collection completion (5%. Due: 3/17)
1g) Set up dataset (5%. Due: 3/24)
1h) Class presentation (20%. Due: 4/21)

2) Quiz and Exam. You will have two quizzes and one exam.
(2a) Quiz #1 (10%. Date: 2/10)
(2b) Quiz #2 (10%. Date: 3/17)
(2c) Exam (15%. Date: 4/28)

3) Homework
(3a) PEERES module: Human Subject—Social and Behavioral Sciences
(http://my.research.umich.edu/peerrs/) (3%. Due: 1/27).
(3b) Critique article 1 (4%. Due: 3/31)
(3c) Critique article 2 (4%. Due: 4/7)

4) Teammate evaluation (4%). At the end of the course, I will ask each of you to reflect how you and your teammates contribute to the way your team has worked. You will have a chance to evaluate other members of your team.

10. Attendance and citizenship:

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) making up your contribution to the team project. I strongly encourage you not to miss any class session as the materials covered in each session are connected to each other. Full attendance will be rewarded when calculating the final grade.

Students in this class are likely to have different levels of experience in research methods. As a member of this class, I ask you to do the followings.
(a) Prepare for each class session by reading the assigned reading (with the help of study guide). Ask questions and sharing your understanding of issues raised by the instructor or other students during class.
(a) Have a good attitude about learning something that maybe new and challenging. You should expect feeling frustrated at some points, so learn to deal with such emotions as a mature adult.
(c) Support your classmates in and out of the classroom. A supportive environment enhances learning effectiveness. Please be generous to offer instrumental and emotional support to your peers.
(d) Seek help from the instructor as early as possible if you experience difficulties in this class.

11. 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.

12. Grading Scale: Points from all assignment are summed. The minimum percentage required for each grade is as follow.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Minimum Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>50 or lower</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>95</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>73</td>
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<td>D</td>
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13. Required Text:


Recommended Reference:


** Additional readings will be assigned throughout the term.

14. Software:

SPSS for windows will be used for data analysis. You will have access to school laptops during classroom sessions. You can use the software through connecting to vitualsites.umich.edu anywhere as long as you have internet connection. You can purchase the software from the University of Michigan Computer Showcase (http://showcase.itcs.umich.edu/). Use SPSS as keyword to search the product) for $35.0.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date (Session)</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Required Reading</th>
<th>In-class Team Activity</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Jan. 13 (Session 1) | -Introduction to course  
-Scientific Inquiry  
-Research ethics | Chapters 1 & 4 | -Explore research interest  
-Form teams  
-Set tentative topics |
| Jan. 20 | **MLK Day (no class)** | PEERRS module: Human Subject—Social and Behavioral Sciences ([http://my.research.umich.edu/peerrs/](http://my.research.umich.edu/peerrs/)) | |
| Jan. 27 (Session 2) | -Quantitative & qualitative inquiry  
-Problem-formulation  
-Conceptualization and operationalization | Chapters 3 (pp. 60-71), 6 & 7 | -Specify research question  
-Formulate hypothesis |
| Feb. 3 (Session 3) | -Measurement theory  
-Scale and index  
-Level of measurement | Chapters 8 & 9 (pp.229-239) | -Specify variables and their measures |
| Feb. 10 (Session 4) | -Quiz 1  
-Collect data from large number of people  
- Survey research  
- Sampling  
- External validity | Chapters 15, 14, | -Develop sampling plan |
| Feb. 17 (Session 5) | -Construct measurement instrument  
-Cultural competency | Chapters 9 (pp. 215-228) & 5 | -Develop a questionnaire |
| Feb. 24 (Session 6) | -Review plan for fieldwork | | -Finalize data collection procedure  
-Finalize questionnaire |
<p>| March 3 | <strong>Spring Break (no)</strong> | | -Fieldwork (out of |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Chapters/Readings</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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| Mar. 10   | (Session 7) | Evaluate interventions  
• Internal validity  
• Experimental designs  
• Quasi-experimental designs  
• Pre-experimental designs | Chapters 10 & 11                                                                | Fieldwork (out of classroom)                                                |
| Mar. 17   | (Session 8) | Quiz 2  
-Quantitative data analysis (1)  
• Intro to SPSS  
• Coding  
• Data entry and cleaning  
• Univariate analysis  
• Bivariate analysis | SPSS Guide Chapter 20 (pp. 500-519) |
| Mar. 24   | (Session 9) | Quantitative data analysis (2)  
• Inferential statistics  
• Selecting test of significance | Chapters 21 & 22 (pp. 553-569) | Data analysis for your study |
| Mar. 31   | (Session 10) | Quantitative data analysis (3)  
-Critique empirical research |                                                                  | Discuss homework articles  
-Data analysis for your study |
| Apr. 7    | (Session 11) | Critique empirical research  
-Quantitative data analysis (4) |                                                                  | Discuss Homework articles  
-Data analysis for your study |
<p>| Apr. 14   | (Session 12) | Quantitative data analysis (5) |                                                                  | Prepare for class presentation |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Apr. 21</td>
<td>Presentation of your study</td>
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<td>Apr. 28</td>
<td>Final exam (critique of empirical studies)</td>
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<td>(Session 14)</td>
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