APPLIED SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH
SOWK 629
Minnesota State University, Mankato
Department of Social Work

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

The purpose of this course is to enable students to understand the rationale for and application of a variety of quantitative and qualitative research techniques commonly used in generalist social work practice. The content in this course presumes that students are in an applied social service field as all examples and activities will be based on Social Work practice. Students become more skilled at reading and critically evaluating research studies, including studies that are designed to empirically test theory, as well as in conducting independent research. Students understand how issues of diversity, including age, class, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation, is applicable to conducting and evaluating research and to engaging in effective, culturally competent social work practice. Students recognize the values, ethical issues, and social and economic justice issues that underlie research in general and Social Work research in particular. Research at the macro level into community needs and agency effectiveness can provide powerful data needed by populations-at-risk and groups experiencing oppression to change agency and governmental policies in order to promote social and economic justice. Research on practitioner effectiveness at the micro level with individuals and families and at the mezzo level with groups can facilitate client growth and achievement of objectives, as well as ensure that social work practitioners are engaging in effective, evidence-based social work practice.

PLACE IN THE MSW CURRICULUM

SOWK 629 is taken during the summer semester of the foundation year for those pursuing the MSW. Students should have completed first and second semester foundation year coursework prior to enrollment. SOWK 629 is taken in conjunction with SOWK 625 Foundation Practicum and Seminar II. This course is the first of two research courses taken in the MSW program and lays the foundation for the concentration year research course SOWK 669 Applied Social Work Evaluation which focuses on direct practice and program evaluation.

INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

SOWK 629 Applied Social Work Research contributes to the Mission of Minnesota State University, Mankato, which is to promote learning through effective teaching and scholarship. Furthermore, the course supports the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences’ mission to promote exploration, understanding, explanation, and transformation of the social world through graduate teaching and learning.
MSW PROGRAM GOALS

This course also directly supports the achievement of three of the four MSW Program goals, specifically: 1) To prepare competent and effective graduates to be advanced generalist social work practitioners with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities, emphasizing rural and small communities; 2) To prepare graduates who apply and promote at an advanced level the values, ethics, theory, and perspectives of the social work profession, and; 3) To promote scholarship, professional development, and community involvement of faculty and graduate students within the local, region, state and global communities.

The course objectives are in support of several of the departmental goals and learning objectives. Specifically, this course will provide students the opportunity to meet the following MSW program objectives. In the following section, each of the departmental objectives is linked to specific course objectives.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

As a result of successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

1) Understand the connections between research and advanced generalist social work practice at the micro, mezzo and macro levels (MSW 1.1, 1.3).

2) Understand research ethics and recognize the importance of ethical research with populations-at-risk and the role of values in research (MSW 2.3).

3) Understand how issues of diversity, including age, class, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation, is applicable to conducting and evaluating research and to engaging in effective, culturally competent social work practice (MSW 1.3, 1.4).

4) View human service organizations as research centers and appreciate the importance of clear program design, goals, and objectives to evaluation (MSW 1.3, 1.6).

5) Demonstrate the ability to choose appropriate sampling strategies, to develop a useful survey instrument, and to apply alternative research strategies including qualitative methods to social welfare research (MSW 1.3, 4.1).

6) Accept responsibility to evaluate the impact of one’s own practice and understand strategies for practice evaluation and the potential for enhancing evidence-based advanced generalist social work practice (MSW 1.1, 1.3).

7) Apply knowledge to the reading and critique of research reports found in the social work and related literatures in order to enhance skills as a consumer of research and engage in evidence-based practice (MSW 1.1, 1.3).
REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS AND READINGS


Additional assigned readings, as well as course requirement guidelines, supplemental resources, exercises, and research articles will be available via Desire2Learn (D2L) which can be accessed on the Internet.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Achievement of course objectives is predicated upon preparation for and attendance of class sessions, participation in class exercises and discussions, reading course material, working effectively and efficiently with small group members, completion of the course assignments, and taking two tests as scheduled. Student who may miss any deadlines should discuss this in advance with the instructor to avoid losing points. New jargon, challenging assignments and reading, and high expectations for upper division work may make this course more difficult than other courses. Students should commit sufficient time and priority to their coursework to enable them to recognize early in the semester whether they will need additional help. The group projects require commitment to classmates and some skills in group work skills.

Preparation, Attendance, and Participation: Students are responsible for reading assigned material *prior to* each class session. Students are expected to be prepared for and to participate in class discussions and exercises. You will not meet the learning objectives for the course if you fail to read the assigned chapters and articles. Regular attendance is also expected to receive points for this area.

Text/Lecture-Based Quizzes: Three quizzes will be administered throughout the term to assess each individual student’s grasp of the major concepts covered in the text and lectures.

Research Article Critiques: Students will be asked to prepare five research article critiques using a format provided to them. These critique assignments are designed to help students learn to be critical consumers of research reports and to provide an opportunity to apply course content. The lowest graded critique will be dropped.

Personal Assessment: Students will complete a weekly personal assessment on his/her research related progress throughout the semester. This project will allow the students to apply their understanding and to synthesize the course concepts, as well as provide an opportunity to conduct research. A complete set of guidelines will be provided, including the survey instrument. Additional supportive handouts for the assignment will be made available during the term.

Group Research Proposal: Students will apply their knowledge of research methods by

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planning a research proposal on a social work intervention. Students will formulate answerable research questions for evidence-based practice, review and critically appraise existing research literature, select the appropriate research design, describe planned data collection methods, select appropriate measures, and describe the data analysis plan. A complete set of guidelines will be provided. Additional supportive handouts for the assignment will be made available during the term.

**TEACHING METHODS**

This course will be taught using a combination of lecture, discussion in large and small groups, case examples, experiential learning, Desire-2-Learn course-support technology. Using the students’ field practicum sites as a learning laboratory will also be emphasized.

**EVALUATION OF STUDENT LEARNING**

A total of 279 points can be earned in this course. Points will be accumulated through the following requirements:

1. Participation – 10 points
2. Text/Lecture-Based Quizzes (3 at 25 points each) – 75 points
3. Research Article Critiques (4 at 16 points each) – 64 points
4. Personal Assessment – 50 points
5. Group Research Proposal – 80 points

Students will be evaluated in accordance with the following system of letter grades: A, B, C, D, and F.

- **A** – 90% to 100% of possible points represents work of definitely superior quality
- **B** – 80% to 89% of possible points represents a level of performance that is above average
- **C** – 70% to 79% of possible points represents a below-average performance
- **D** – 60% to 69% of possible points represents unacceptable performance
- **F** – 59% or below represents unacceptable performance

A grade of “incomplete” will only be awarded under rare circumstances. Students must meet with the instructor to request an “incomplete” as soon as possible in the semester, but at least two weeks before the last day of the semester. The request must include a plan with a timeline for completing and having evaluated all coursework prior to the first day of the subsequent semester.

**COURSE, DEPARTMENT, AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

*NOTE:* For complete policies please refer to the MSW Program Graduate Student Handbook as well as the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, College of Graduate Studies and Research, and Minnesota State University, Mankato policy documents for Graduate Students.

**STATEMENT OF NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY**

The University and Department of Social Work is committed to providing equal education and employment opportunities to all persons and does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, and veteran’s status. National origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, physical
and mental disabilities, creed, status due to receipt of public assistance, or any other groups against which discrimination is prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Minnesota Statute Chapter 363, and other applicable state or federal laws or State University System policy. Complaints of discrimination are filed with the Office of Affirmative Action located at 112 Armstrong Hall.

ACCESS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY

In accordance with University Policy, the Department of Social Work is committed to ensuring equal educational opportunity and full participation for qualified persons with disabilities as is legally required under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 including section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. All students with a disability may request accommodation through the Office of Disability Services. Visit the Office of Disabilities Services at 132 Memorial Library or call 507-389-2825 (V/TTY). Student disability accommodations will be made by faculty based upon the advisement of the Office of Disability Services.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES POLICY AND ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY

Students are expected to comply with the Student Responsibility Policy and Academic Honesty Policy stipulated in the MSW Program Graduate Student Handbook.

APA STYLE WRITING POLICY

Students are expected to comply with the stylistic guidelines of the American Psychological Association, fifth edition. The APA manual is available at the MSU Memorial Library reference desk, call number BF 76.7.P83 2001) or at http://www.apastyle.org/. The reference for the APA manual is:


SOWK 629 COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1
Topic: Course Overview and Introductions; Introduction of scientific inquiry in social work
Delivery Method: In-class
Required Readings
Course Syllabus
Rubin & Babbie, Chapters 1: Why Study Research?
Chapter 2: Evidence-Based Practice
Chapter 3: Philosophy and Theory in Social Work Research
Rubin, Chapter 1: Introduction to Evidenced-Based Practice
Week 2
Topic: The ethical, political and cultural context of social work research; Writing research proposal and reports
Delivery Method: Online
Required Readings
Rubin & Babbie, Chapters 4: The Ethics and Politics of Social Work Research
Chapter 5: Culturally Competent Research
Chapter 23: Writing Research Proposals and Reports
Rubin, Chapters 2: Steps in the EBP Process
Chapter 3: Research Hierarchies

Week 3
Topic: Problem formulation and measurement
Delivery Method: In-class
Required Readings
Rubin & Babbie, Chapters 6: Problem Formulation
Chapter 7: Conceptualization and Operationalization
Chapter 8: Measurement
Chapter 9: Constructing Measurement Instruments
Rubin, Chapter 4: Criteria for Inferring Effectiveness

Week 4
Topic: Designs for practice evaluation
Delivery Method: In-class
Required Readings
Rubin & Babbie, Chapters 10: Causal Inference and Correlational Designs
Chapter 11: Experimental Design
Chapter 12: Single-Case Evaluation Designs
Chapter 13: Program Evaluation
Rubin, Chapters 5: Critically Appraising Experiments
Chapter 6: Critically Appraising Quasi-Experiments: Nonequivalent Comparison Groups Designs

Week 5
Topic: Data collection methods with large sources of data
Delivery Method: In-class
Required Readings
Rubin & Babbie, Chapters 14: Sampling
Chapter 15: Survey Research
Chapter 16: Analyzing Existing Data: Quantitative and Qualitative Methods
Rubin, Chapters 7: Critically Appraising Quai-Experiments: Time-Series Designs and Single-Case Designs
Chapter 8: Critically Appraising Nonexperimental Quantitative Studies

Week 6
Topic: Qualitative research methods
Delivery Method: In-class
Required Readings
Rubin & Babbie, Chapter 17: Qualitative Research: General Principles
Chapter 18: Qualitative Research: Specific Methods
Chapter 19: Qualitative Data Analysis
Rubin, Chapter 10: Critically Appraising Qualitative Studies

Week 7
Topic: Comparative analysis and critique of posted research articles
Delivery Method: Online
Required Readings
Rubin, Chapters 8: Critically Appraising Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
Chapter 11: Critically Appraising and Selecting Assessment Instruments

Week 8
Topic: Analysis of quantitative data
Delivery Method: In-class
Required Readings
Rubin & Babbie, Chapter 20: Quantitative Data Analysis
Chapter 21: Inferential Data Analysis: Part 1
Chapter 22: Inferential Data Analysis: Part 2

Week 9
Topic: Practical application of data analysis
Delivery Method: In-class
Required Readings
Rubin, Chapter 12: Monitoring Client Progress

Week 10
Topic: Course evaluation
Delivery Method: In-class
Required Readings: None

SUPPLEMENTAL BIBLIOGRAPHY


Minnesota State University, Mankato, SOWK 629, 2009-2010


