Course Description

This course provides content on the logic of inquiry and the necessity for an empirical approach to practice. We will address 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. 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.

Course Content

This course covers 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.

Course Objectives

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

1. Frame research questions and develop problem statements that reflect assessment, implementation, monitoring, and outcome issues.
2. Select research designs, methodologies, and measurement strategies used in social work research, and be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each, including sensitivity to ethical, multicultural, and diversity issues.
3. Understand ethical issues in the conduct of research and evaluation and their relevance and applicability in working with disadvantaged and disenfranchised populations.
4. Understand research concepts to permit a critical analysis of research and evaluation studies with respect to quality, bias, ethics, and potential applications.
5. Apply research concepts and principles in the development and use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and analytical approaches.
6. Critically examine the processes by which research and evaluation findings can be used to enhance social justice, social change, promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation.
7. Construct simple indices, questionnaires, and measures relevant to the evaluation of practice.
8. Use computers to conduct selected descriptive and inferential statistical analytic procedures.

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.

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.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Research paper: (DUE BY NOON ON FRIDAY, APRIL 22; 40% of grade) Each student will be required to conduct a research project using available data sets and the concepts and skills learned in the course. Papers should be approximately 15-20 pages double-spaced and include the components common to most journal articles: a title, abstract, introduction and literature review, a methods section, a section describing the results of the analyses, a discussion and conclusion section, and a list of references. 

Appropriate referencing using APA style is required. Please refer to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (4th edition) for proper format and to the Student Handbook to make sure that you cite other’s work properly and avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism will result in severe penalties!

Draft sections of the paper will be due at various points throughout the term as listed below and will contribute independently to the grade for the course. Students are encouraged to meet with me about their projects throughout the semester and to consult with one another (collaboration is, after all, part of the research process, too). Students with common interests can work together if they like; however, each student will need to write their own paper and you will be required to meet with me before February 1 to ensure that the project is structured appropriately for group work.

- **Research question:** (DUE FEBRUARY 1; 10% of grade) One page statement of your research question and the data set you will use

- **Draft introduction and literature review:** (DUE FEBRUARY 22; 10% of grade) Should include a working title for the paper, two or three sentences stating the scope of the problem, some background (i.e., literature review) of why the study is important and the relevant research that has already been done, and a paragraph or so stating your research question or hypothesis.

- **Draft of methods section:** (DUE MARCH 22; 10% of grade) Should include a description of your sample, measures, the data collection procedures, and the statistical procedures you will use to analyze the data. About 1-4 pages.

- **Preliminary results:** (DUE APRIL 5; 10% of grade) One to 4 pages describing the results of your analysis.

IMPORTANT:

- Please turn in a hard copy of your assignment at the beginning of class.
- **Late assignments are accepted only with a penalty.** A late assignment will be assessed a 20% penalty (this means a 10 point assignment will get a maximum of 8 points). Assignments cannot be turned in more than one week late. If an assignment is more than one week late, 0 points will be given.
- In the case of emergency (e.g., severe illness, family emergency), an extension of up to 2 days may be given if you inform me of the situation 24 hours before the due date. Computer problems (e.g., printing problems, internet connection), heavy workload in other classes and at the field placement will not be accepted as a legitimate excuse for late submission.

Attendance and class participation: (10% of grade) As always you are expected to attend each class and will get more out of the class if you participate. There will be in-class exercises and regular work in the
computer lab during the second half of the class period to help you gain additional hands-on experience with the material. If you know in advance that you will miss a class, please let me know ASAP so that we can discuss options for you to make up the participation points for that day.

**Presentation** (10% of grade) The last two days of class will focus on student presentations of research projects. Each student will have a set time to present their research with some additional time for questions and comments from the class. This is a last chance for students to get feedback on their final paper. Guidelines for the presentation will be given later in the semester.

**Grading Scale**

A+ = 98-100, A = 94-97, A- = 90-93, B+ = 87-89, B = 82-86, B- = 78-81, C+ = 75-77, C = 70-74, not passing = <70

**Required Texts**


Other readings will be available online through CTools or provided by the instructor.

**Data Sets**

You will need to use an existing dataset for your required research paper. Two SPSS data sets are available on the CTools website. Both data sets were collected using mail questionnaires sent to a random sample drawn from the NASW Membership Directory. One focuses on Social Work ethics; the other on job satisfaction.

Other data sets are available through the SDA Online Data Analysis System through the Inter University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) housed at the University of Michigan (http://www.icpsr.org/ACCESS/sda.htm). These cover a wide range of topics that may be of interest. Data from the General Social Survey is also available via the textbook website.

**PLEASE NOTE:** I will do my best to provide technical support to each of you as you are working on your projects. However, given the time it takes to become familiar with a dataset, if you use data other than those on CTools, my ability to do so will be more limited. Please keep this in mind as you’re thinking about what to work on.
Schedule & Readings

1. **January 11: Introduction to course**

2. **January 18: Theory, research, and ethics**
   
   Rubin & Babbie:  
   - Chapter 1—Scientific Inquiry and Social Work
   - Chapter 2—Philosophy and Theory in Science and Research
   - Chapter 3—The Ethics and Politics of Social Work Research


3. **January 25: Culturally competent research, finding a research question, and introduction to SPSS and data sets**

   Rubin & Babbie:  
   - Chapter 16—Culturally Competent Research
   - Chapter 4—Problem Formulation


4. **February 1: Measurement issues**

   ***Statement of research question due***

   Rubin & Babbie:  
   - Chapter 5—Conceptualization and Operationalization
   - Chapter 6—Measurement
   - Chapter 7—Constructing Measurement Instruments


5. **February 8: Sampling**

   Rubin & Babbie:  
   - Chapter 8—Sampling
   - Chapter 22, pp.658-668—Writing Social Work Research Reports

6. **February 15: Data Analysis I**

   Rubin & Babbie:  
   - Rubin & Babbie:  
   - Chapter 18—Quantitative Data Analysis
Chapter 19—Constructing and Interpreting Bivariate and Multivariate Tables

7. **February 22: Data Analysis II**
   
   ***Draft of introduction and literature review due***

   Rubin & Babbie: Chapters 20—Inferential Data Analysis: Part 1

8. **March 1**  SPRING BREAK

9. **March 8: Data Analysis III**

   Rubin & Babbie: Chapter 21—Inferential Data Analysis Part 2

10. **March 15: Surveys**

    Rubin & Babbie: Chapter 9—Survey Research

11. **March 22: Research design I**

    ***Draft of methods section due***

    Rubin & Babbie: Chapter 10—Experimental Designs for Evaluating Programs and Practice
    Chapter 11—Quasi-Experimental Designs for Evaluating Programs and Practice


12. **March 29: Research design II**

    Rubin & Babbie: Chapter 12—Single-Case Evaluation Designs
    Chapter 13—Issues in Program Evaluation


13. **April 5: Research Design III**
***Preliminary results due***

Rubin & Babbie: Chapter 14—Qualitative Research Methods
Chapter 15—Analyzing Available Records: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods


14. April 12: Student presentations

15. April 19: Student presentations

***Final research paper due by Noon on Friday, April 22***