Basic Social Work Research
SW-522-004
Winter 2006 – Tuesday 11:30 – 2:30
734-484-3211 (home)
Deborah Willis, MSW, Ph.D.
Room 2228 SEB
dwillis@guidance-center.org
734-785-7769 (work)

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.

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.

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.

Course Design
Many different methods will be used for acquiring knowledge and skills including: discussion, lectures, projects, exercises, 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.

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**

Grades will be based on a 100 point scale. In addition to a midterm, final exam and a group project, students will be required to complete 3 short assignments based on work completed in class related to work in the lab. The following grading scale will be used:

- 95 – 100   A
- 90 – 94    A-
- 85 - 89    B+
- 80 - 84    B
- 75 – 79    B-

*Midterm examination* (25 points):

There will be an in-class midterm examination covering the content through Session 5. This will be a relatively brief combination multiple choice and short answer exam. Mid-term exam is scheduled for February 14.

*Group Project* (30 points):

Each group must formulate one major hypothesis, develop a plan to test the hypothesis, operationalize the plan, conduct appropriate statistical and non-statistical analyses, locate relevant research, and present the findings in class. You will be provided with an SPSS data set for this purpose. Each presentation will be limited to a time frame based on how many students are in the class. You and members of your group will decide on the best way to present your findings to the rest of the class including time to answer questions. While all group members will receive the same grade, if a particular member is identified by the group as a nominal participant, a grade adjustment will be made. **NOTE**: Your analyses must explore issues related to gender and race. Presentations will take place on April 18.

*Final Examination* (30 points):

There will be a take home final examination in which you will be asked questions about three selected research articles I will give you one week prior to the due date of the examination. There will be a page limit for the exam and it is expected that you will be able to answer the questions using your materials from course lectures and discussions as well as from the text. The take home exam is due on April 25 by 5:00 P.M.

*In-class exercises* (15 points)

There will be three short exercises that begin in class and are finished after class is over by each individual student. These exercises will allow you to practice techniques or apply research tenets that you will need to understand if you are to be successful in the course. In-class exercises are indicated on the session breakdown of topics. Each exercise is worth 5 points.
Attendance:
All students are expected to attend class and participate in discussions and group activities. While you don’t need to let me know when you will miss class, you will need to let members of your group know so they can bring you up to date before the next class period. You are responsible for making up any in-class exercises you may miss and connecting with your group members in order to fulfill your group obligations.

Required Texts

In addition to the text, articles will be posted on course-tools related to the weekly topics. Posted articles could either be applied (articles that are good examples of the research tenet being discussed that week) or provide additional information or an alternative viewpoint on the subject matter for the week. Power point presentations for the session will also be posted before class begins and a hard copy of any power point presentations will be provided to students in class.

Weekly Outline

Session 1 – January 10: Introduction and overview of class
Introduction to the course. Discuss questions for group projects. Form initial groups. The relationship of social work to research; research, social work and ethics
Rubin & Babbie, Chapters 2 & 3

Session 2 – January 17: Social Work, Research and ethics
Theory, concept, hypothesis, operational definition, cause and effect, inductive/deductive reasoning, ethics, politics.
Rubin & Babbie, Chapter 4
Group activity
Download codebook
Develop tentative research questions

Session 3 & 4 – January 24 & January 31: Measurement and related issues
Level of measurement, measurement error, reliability & validity, scale construction, measurement strategy
Rubin & Babbie Chapters 5,6,7

In-class exercise (session 4)
Group activity:
Work on literature review
formulate one specific hypothesis
begin to operationalize the hypothesis with particular variables in data set

Session 5 – February 7: Single case designs and specificity
Design options, clinical/statistical significance, defining outcomes, specifying treatment, data analysis, baseline and measurement issues

Rubin & Babbie, Chapter 12, Appendix I (pp. 683-690)

Group activity:
continue literature review
elaborate and consider secondary analyses around hypotheses
Group should submit formal hypothesis to me by February 7 (end of class)

Session 6 – February 14: Midterm examination

Group activity:
more reviews of literature around hypotheses
Beginning data analysis techniques

Session 7 – February 21: Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Design options:
Design options, internal/external validity; impact on analyses and ability to generalize

In-class exercise

Rubin & Babbie, Chapters 10 & 11

Group activity:
begin analyzing the data

February 28: SPRING BREAK

Session 8 and 9: March 7 & March 14: Data analysis and interpretation:
Univariate, bivariate, & multivariate analyses, elaboration, selected statistical tests, significance issues, effect size, issues on data interpretation

In-class exercise (Session 9)

Rubin & Babbie, Chapters 18, 19, 20, 21

Group activity:
Continue analyzing the data
Discuss statistical tests with me as a group
Session 10 – March 21: Samples, surveys and culturally competent research
Populations, sampling frames, samples, sampling strategies, survey methods, questionnaire construction

Rubin & Babbie, Chapters 8, 9, 16

Group activity:
continue analyses

Session 11 – March 28: Qualitative methods
Methods of study, analysis, mixed methods

Rubin & Babbie, Chaps. 14

Group activity:
Begin to come to some conclusions

Session 12 – April 4: Evaluating programs and writing reports
Politics of evaluation, formative/outcome evaluation, utilization issues, needs assessment, program planning

Rubin & Babbie, Chapters 13, 22

Group activity
Preparation for group projects

Session 13 – April 11: Tying it all together
We will spend all of our time in the lab today

Group activity
Final preparations

Session 14 – April 18: Group presentations
Final examination materials will be passed out

The final exam is due (via email) by April 25 at 5:00 P.M. – no late exams will be accepted