A. **FRAMEWORK**

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. 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.

4. **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.

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.
**B. SUBSTANCE**

1. **Course Outline**

   A. Social Work, Social Science, and Ethics
   B. Coming Up with Research Questions and Turning Questions into Testable Propositions
   D. Obtrusive and/or Unobtrusive Data Collection Methods
   E. Quantitative and/or Qualitative Data Analysis Techniques
   F. Moving Outside the Box of Research Design, Part I: Managing the Research Process and Presenting the Research to Stakeholders
   G. Moving Outside the Box of Research Design, Part II: How Does Who We Are Affect the Research We Do (and Vice Versa)?

2. **Weekly Itinerary**

   (* = Required Readings)

   **Introductions**

   (January 8)

   - Introductions all around, or, as James Stockdale asked half-rhetorically in the 1992 vice presidential debates, “Who am I and what am I doing here”?
   - On a piece of paper, answer those questions you would feel comfortable sharing with your colleagues: Where are you from? Why are you here at the UMSSW? What are the best and worst things you’ve heard about SW 522? What do you hope to do with your MSW degree? What will you be doing five years down the road? How might this class help (or hurt) your future prospects?
   - Review of students’ prior experience with research methods
     - In class, voluntary survey
   - Preview of the class: framework; substance; and process
   - A first reminder on the pace of the course: this class is a sprint, not a jog

   **A. Social Work, Social Science, and Ethics**

   (January 22)

   - Why is a course like this one necessary to the profession of social work?
   - Are there areas of concern to social workers that have been understudied (or overstudied) by
researchers? How can we tell?

- What is theory and what is its value to social work research?
- What sorts of ethical frameworks exist? What is the value of applying ethical principles to social work research? Is there any research that absolutely must not (or must) be done?


B. *Coming Up with Research Questions (1/29) and Turning Questions into Testable Propositions (2/5)*

(January 29)

- What differentiates lay questions from research questions?
- Where do research questions come from?
- Operationalization

*Rubin and Babbie, chapters 5-6.

(February 5)

- Levels of measurement
- Measurement error
- Reliability and validity
- Designing instruments that (effectively and efficiently) measure the stuff you’re interested in
*Rubin and Babbie, chapters 7-8.

C. Research Design: Sampling (2/12), Causal Inference and Experiments (2/12), Quasi-Experimental Group Designs (2/19), and Single and Small N Case Designs (2/19)

(February 12)

• Why sample? If sampling is necessary, then on what grounds or criteria should we sample?
• Causality; inferring causality; the logic of causal order


(February 19)

• Quasi-experiments and potential threats to internal and external validity
• Small N case designs: case studies and comparative case studies


D. Obtrusive (3/5 and 3/12) and/or Unobtrusive (3/12) Data Collection Methods
(March 5 and half of March 12)

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Structured and participant observation

*Rubin and Babbie, chapters 12-13.


(March 12)

- Secondary data
- Content analysis
- Historical research

*Rubin and Babbie, chapter 14.


E. Quantitative and/or Qualitative Data Analysis Techniques (March 19-April 9)

(March 19)
• Preparing data for analysis
• Data work using the 1994 survey of UM SSW graduates

*Rubin and Babbie, chapter 15.

(March 26)
• Interpreting qualitative data
• Data work using the 1994 survey of UM SSW graduates


(April 2)
• Interpreting quantitative data I: descriptive statistics and basic graphics
• Data work using the 1994 survey of UM SSW graduates

*Rubin and Babbie, chapter 16.

(April 9)
• Interpreting quantitative data II: basic inferential statistics
• Data work using the 1994 survey of UM SSW graduates
F. Moving Outside the Box of Research Design, Part I: Managing the Research Process and Presenting the Research to Stakeholders

(April 16)

• Since most textbooks don’t talk about managing the research process, we should therefore presume that the management of research is an inconsequential topic, right? Wrong, and here’s why.

• What are the benefits of clear communication—written or otherwise—in the research practice process? How do we present our research clearly?

• An argument for the value of regular feedback to stakeholders during the research cycle, as opposed to the traditional model of design study→carry out study→analyze data→provide feedback to stakeholders.


G. Moving Outside the Box of Research Design, Part II: How Does Who We Are Affect the Research We Do (and Vice Versa)?

(If time, April 16)

C. PROCESS

I. The “Feel” of SW 522

I haven’t got this all worked out, since much of how we’ll approach the materials will depend on your optimal learning style and your preparation. However, I can safely say a few things.

First, the reading load is admittedly and unfortunately rather aggressive. Each week we’ll be moving quickly through a couple of chapters from the Rubin and Babbie. I’ll also, on occasion, assign readings from the optional reading list in order to broaden our perspective beyond the meat and potatoes in the textbook. And we’ll have a few self-selected readings to do for your class assignments. Should I notice that we’re not retaining knowledge in an optimal manner (and not for lack of effort), I’ll slow down the pace of the readings.

Second, class time will be a mixture of lecture, roundtable discussions, and small group work, in hopefully equal proportions each. I don’t enjoy lecturing all that much, so I hope that we will come to class having read the material and ready for more pleasant ways of walking through the day’s topic. When I lecture, I’ll try to start with the Rubin and Babbie in order to highlight basic points and clarify confusing aspects of each chapter. But I’d prefer to use my lecture time to bring in perspectives that are missing in the Rubin and Babbie.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that the prospect of learning research methods at 8AM on Monday mornings is far from tantalizing. I have no gimmicks to offer us, frankly. But I have faith in our ingenuity as a class to cover the material in a high quality and friendly way.

2. Logistics Regarding the Readings

I’ve ordered the Rubin and Babbie, but I can’t guarantee that it’ll reach Ulrich’s by January 15. Therefore, during the first class session, we’ll discuss possible plans for ensuring that we all get copies of the reading to be done for the January 22 session ASAP.

This week I’ll also put the great proportion of the optional readings on UMSSW library reserve.

Should I add any required articles to the reading list that are not available via ProQuest, I’ll make copies gratis.
3. Assignments

There are three major assignments for the class:

- A research design, composed of three parts (50% of the total class grade);
- A set of seven article reviews (25% of the total class grade); and
- A data analysis exercise (25% of the total class grade).

I’ll provide separate information sheets well in advance of the due dates for each of these three assignments. However, it may be helpful for us to have some basic idea of the amount of effort each assignment will require.

The research design will be on a topic of your choosing. The central goal of this assignment is to help you improve your skills as a producer of social work research.

There will be three parts of the design; each part may be up to five pages in length. The first part, due in early February, will focus on your research question, its relevance to social work, and any prior literature on your topic. The second part, due in early March, concerns the research design you choose to answer your chosen question. The final part, due in early April, requires you to propose a data collection and data analysis strategy.

Here’s the rub: I will not grade the first two parts of the research design. Rather, I’ll give you a sheet of typed feedback for each of the sections. You’ll thus have a chance to revise the first two parts of your research design before you turn in the complete design in early April.

For the series of article reviews, you will choose five empirical articles from leading social work research journals. (Social Work Research, Research on Social Work Practice, and Social Service Review are the best known of these journals). The primary value of this set of assignments is to sharpen your abilities as a consumer of social work research.

By January 22, you’ll send me a list of your five articles. In order to preserve some diversity of article choice throughout the class, I won’t allow any article to be used by more than two people.

There will be five short, individually graded assignments. I anticipate that each assignment will be roughly two pages. First, you’ll summarize and critically evaluate each of the five studies’ research questions and research hypotheses. Second, you’ll critically review the studies’ research designs. Third, you’ll summarize the studies’ data collection methods. Fourth, you’ll examine the studies’ data analysis methods. And finally, you’ll comment on the way the studies’ results were presented. Each of these assignments will be due relatively soon after we have covered the relevant topic in class.

The data analysis exercise will take place near the end of class, and will draw upon our class work using the 1994 survey of UM SSW graduates. I will hand each of you an individualized set of qualitative and quantitative data output and a series of questions regarding the output. You’ll
then be given a reasonable number of days to complete the take home assignment. I anticipate that your write up should be around 10 pages.

4. Grading

The research design and the data analysis exercise will each be given a letter grade. The criteria for letter grades are as follows:

**A or A-** Mastery of subject content, demonstration of critical analysis, creativity and/or simplicity in completion of assignment. The difference between an A and an A- is based on the degree to which these skills is demonstrated.

**B+** Mastery of subject content beyond expected competency, but has not demonstrated additional critical analysis, creativity or complexity in the completion of the assignment.

**B** Mastery of subject content at level of expected competency—meets course expectations.

**B-** Less than adequate competency, but demonstrates student learning and potential for mastery of subject content.

**C or C-** Demonstrates a minimal understanding of subject content. Significant areas needing improvement to meet course requirements.

**E** Student has failed to demonstrate minimal understanding of subject content.

However, each of the five article reviews will simply be marked as deserving full credit, half credit, or no credit. I will *not* comment on reviews earning full marks, but I will offer limited comments for article reviews earning less than full credit.

Both content and format will be considered in assigning grades. In terms of format, please double-space your submissions, using 12-point font and a one-inch margin all around. Feel free to use APA, Chicago School, or some other standard style manual; be sure that you use the style uniformly.

Finally, in order to maximize the quality of your work, do outline and redraft your papers beforehand, don’t write the assignments the night before they’re due, and do get a trusted pair of eyes to review your manuscripts.

5. Policies Regarding Written Work

*Tardiness*
I will not accept later papers.

**Extensions**

Individual extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances. Should the pace of class get too frantic and compromise our ability to do high quality work, however, I may push an assignment due date back for the entire class.

**Grading Complaints**

Feel free to question how and why I assign grades. I do request that (a) you schedule a meeting with me to discuss these matters and (b) you make a reasoned question or complaint regarding your grade in writing prior to our meeting, and provide me with all class materials I may need in order to fairly review your case.

**Academic Dishonesty**

Plagiarism, regardless of whether it is willful or unintentional, will force me to report you to my superiors. We will spend time in class discussing when and how to cite various source materials.

**Classroom Behavior**

**Attendance**

I have no attendance policy. We are all adults here. I therefore presume that anyone who misses class understands how difficult it is to stay on top of the material even without missing class. Should you be unable to make it to class, please arrange with a classmate to catch up on what you missed.