This course is about developing a preventive intervention. Preventive interventions are activities designed to prevent the development of problems or to reduce the causes of problems by identifying risk factors and/or by promoting factors that enhance well-being and the adaptive functioning of individuals, groups, and larger social systems. This is course is intended to move students toward effective doing.

The question, of course, is “do what” and, further, how do we know what is likely to work? This seminar provides an advanced introduction to how social scientists think about prevention research with particular attention to the consequences of theory and conceptualization for what can be learned from an intervention. The key goal of this seminar is to enable students to think critically and innovatively about social problems in ways that integrate insights from social cognition and motivation research and that allow for development of an intervention that could plausibly influence proximal and more distal outcomes of interest.

To facilitate class discussion, every week two students will submit questions, ideas, and problems for discussion by loading them onto Coursetools by noon Sunday. Each class member should think about these submissions and be prepared for discussion.

Because participation is integral to the learning process, 40% of your grade is based on participation. In addition to participating in discussion, you will write a paper, broken into two components. First, in a short paper (6-8 pages) due March 17, you will (briefly) present your ideas about a prevention program in an area of interest to you and then lay out a logic model (process model) describing how such a program would be implemented. (Additional detail about the paper will be provided during the semester.) The goal of this paper is to get you to put to paper an idea that you can get feedback on and build on for the final paper.

The final paper is to build on the short paper. The final paper will include: identifying a problem or disorder and the extent to which it occurs in the population; a targeted review of relevant risk and protective factors with an eye toward crossing disciplinary boundaries to search for relevant
empirical and theoretical perspectives; a description of a plausible process model of the course of an intervention – targeting any part of the prevention cycle (universal, targeted, selected). You could choose to outline, in detail, a proposed process model for a preventive intervention, based on the logic model developed for your short paper. Outline how implementation and fidelity would be monitored and change assessed. You can develop a flow chart detailing the process by which a problem evolves and the natural intervention points in the process. You can choose to write a draft proposal to pilot a preventive intervention. You can choose to work alone, but students are encouraged to work in groups of 2 or 3. To make the process a useful one for your own development, pick something that you are actually interested in possibly carrying out and follow NIMH guidelines as if you are writing a proposal. NIMH website is located at: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms.htm. Forms themselves are at: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html. To make sure that you get useful feedback on your efforts, please raise issues relevant to your project as we discuss each week’s topic.

In addition, it is important to integrate your social science discipline with your prevention interests. Students are encouraged to go to departmental symposia and brown bags and bring topics of interest into class discussions.

Classroom time will involve informal lecture and discussion; some weeks we will have guest speakers who are currently engaged in preventive interventions. Speakers will provide a personalized sense of the process of translating problems and social science theory into effective doing. Your grade will be based on class participation (40%), the short paper (20%) and your final project (40%). If the first paper grade is not one you are happy with, you can revise the process model in the final project following our feedback to raise your grade.

In the first session, we will discuss student background and interests and the instructors will tailor subsequent sessions, to the extent possible, to suit student interests and previous coursework. Topics attempt to balance general perspectives with topic-specific examples to provide an optimal mix.

Readings for all sessions are located on our Coursertools site.

A number of you may already have received the message announcing the Quantitative Methods seminar; this might be an interesting way of hearing how others on campus are thinking about their analysis issues. It meets every other week on the sixth floor of ISR, faculty instructors are Susan Murphy, Rich Gonzalez, Yu Xie, and Steve Raudenbush.

1. January 6  Ideas, theories and a point of view

This session will provide a general frame for prevention research, situating this form of social program and this process of evaluation within the larger framework of field-based research.

Readings will can be useful for obtaining a larger picture.


2. January 13 What to study – some ideas on having ideas

Unfortunately, there are no foolproof recipes for good ideas, although some advice is available. McGuire's chapter discusses creative hypothesis generating in psychological research, complete with some advice on how to have an idea, whereas the anticreativity letters edited by Nisbett offer tongue-in-cheek recommendations on how to ensure that graduate students do not have any useful ideas.

After reading these articles, think about the framework suggested as it intersects with your own interests. We will use this session to think broadly about ideas each student will brainstorm as part of the group on general issues of interest and creative hypotheses that could be generated from them.

Read these two on how to have ideas:


Read 1 or both of these on thinking like a prevention researcher:


Read this if you have not had prior coursework on prevention and mental health:

January 20 NO CLASS MLK DAY

3. January 27 Thinking like a prevention researcher. Guest speaker Marc Zimmerman

Marc Zimmerman is director of the CDC-funded prevention research center at the School of Public Health. He will describe how the center got set up, the core longitudinal study of at risk
youths on which the center’s preventive intervention for teen and young fathers is based, and the
process of setting up a community-based prevention program, including ways of partnering with
community agencies to assess need and the types of social problems that they are interested in
addressing.

Reading:

process, and father involvement on psychosocial outcomes among African-American
adolescents. Family Relations, 47, 331-341.

levels of analysis. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), Handbook of Community Psychology,
Chapter 2 (pp. 43-63). New York: Plenum Press.

Additional optional readings

4. February 3 Using evidence to develop a preventive intervention. Guest speaker: Rick Price

Rick Price is director of the NIH-funded prevention research center at the Institute for Survey
Research. He will describe the process of developing a preventive intervention, translating theory
about antecedents of a social problem and mechanisms for human change into an evaluatable
intervention. He will describe the growth of the core intervention, from initial pilot testing
through worldwide dissemination.

Readings:
Bickman, L. (1987). The functions of program theory. New Directions for Program Evaluation, #
35, 5-18.


Evaluation, #87, 47-55

Read one or two of the following:
Evaluation, 20(2), 227-238.


5. February 10 Translating developmental theory into preventive intervention

In this class we will explore the interface between the action focus of social work and the theory focus of prevention as a field. The readings make the case that theory-based work is necessary but remind us of the pitfalls of simplistic approaches to evaluation.

Read both of these:


Choose one of these:


6. Feb 17 General process theories – Motivation and persuasion

In the next sessions, we will discuss some of the current theories of motivation and persuasion that can be useful in thinking about developing an intervention. Theories of motivation and persuasion are typically implicit in interventions. As a prevention researcher, a key question to ask in developing an intervention is ‘What is the overarching goal of the intervention?’
Typically, overarching goals focus on changing beliefs and attitudes, altering behavior, or providing information (or some combination of these). Simply put, our behavior is likely to be influenced by what happens to be contextually salient, what easily comes to mind in the moment, unless we are highly motivated to do an exhaustive information search or have been cued in to the fact that what easily comes to mind may not be relevant. So the question we must ask as prevention researchers is ‘What is likely to come to mind without the intervention versus as a result of the intervention?’ The readings for today discuss how this process occurs.

The first set of readings reviews what we know about attitudes and attitude change:

Read one of these:


The next set of readings focuses on motivation and attempts to lay out a variety of possible motivational forms:

Read all three of these:


FEB 24 Winter Break

7. March 3 Continuation of Motivation and Persuasion – connecting the self and self-change

In this class we will continue to discuss theories of self-concept, motivation, and behavioral change, adding efforts to connect theories to interventions

Choose two of these:


8. March 10  Preventive Intervention Examples: How does one transfer an intervention with one population to another population? Guest speaker: Larry Gant

Gant will present an overview of his plans for a preventive intervention to reduce risky behavior among drug using, African American men. This NIDA-funded intervention will translate an intervention successfully used with African American teens to African American, drug-using men. Dr. Gant will share the process by which he found what appeared to be a translatable intervention and his efforts to date in making the translation.

Choose two of the following suggested readings:


9. March 17  Preventive Intervention Examples: Does it ever work really well?  Guest speaker: Amiram Vinokur
Short paper is due.

Vinokur will present a successfully implemented, evaluated and disseminated preventive intervention – the JOBS program. This NIMH-funded intervention was first developed to work with individuals who lost their jobs to help them get back into the job market while reducing risk of common negative sequela of job loss – primarily depression. The intervention proved successful in both the short and long term evaluations. The model was expanded to include a COUPLES focus, to work with live-together partners and spouses in households where a partner lost a job. The model has been successfully implemented in locations throughout the globe.
Current development focuses on creating a JOBS program for women who must develop job skills to enter the job market after welfare reform.


10. March 24 What works with youth and teens? How can we tell? Guest speaker: Joseph Durlak

Readings to be assigned, based on suggestions of our guest speaker.

11. March 31 Examples of preventive interventions: Working with families who are bereaved; Guest speaker: Irwin Sandler

This class will focus on another example of a preventive intervention, focused on families and understanding mediating processes:


Also, commentary articles which follow by C.H. Brown, R.A. Caldwell, R.E. Emory, R.P. Lorion, and I.N. Sandler et al.

12. April 7 Asking questions and assessing fidelity. Guest speaker: Tracy Hirachi

Previous weeks focused on prevention research as a framework, gave examples of prevention research, and connected prevention research to theories of behavior change. This session seeks to consider the nuts and bolts of assessing whether the intervention actually occurs as planned and whether behaviors actually change as planned.


Optional additional article – another example of the use of fidelity measures in interpreting results:

**13. April 14  Final Class – student presentations**

This is our final class; students should come prepared to present their work in progress toward the final project. The goal of this class is to obtain group feedback, to revise, refine, or shift course as needed.

On the next page, some additional bibliographic resources are listed.
List of Available Bibliographies on Preventive Trials:


List of preventive interventions in mental health and substance use:


Websites:
Robert Putnam’s Social Capital around America: http://www.cfsv.org/communitysurvey/
Other websites linked to our coursetools site include:
Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice
Health and Behavior
How to read and summarize a research article
International Registry of Preventive Interventions
John Hopkins Prevention Research Center
NIMH strategic plan
Putnam's Social Capital By State and Region
Putnam - The social capital community benchmark survey
Reducing risk of mental disorders
Social Science Information Gateway - Social Welfare
The Better Together Website
The Future of Children Web Newsletter
The Internat'l Social & Public Policy Research Info Gateway
The Roper Center - Social Capital Benchmark Survey - U.S. Census Bureau

Examples of preventive interventions:

The John Hopkins group also focuses on outcomes of interventions with children and youth


