

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.

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).

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 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.

SOWK 629 COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1

Topic: Course Overview and Introductions; Introduction of scientific inquiry in social work

Week 2

Topic: The ethical, political and cultural context of social work research; Writing research proposal and reports

Week 3

Topic: Problem formulation and measurement

Week 4

Topic: Designs for practice evaluation

Week 5

Topic: Data collection methods with large sources of data

Week 6

Topic: Qualitative research methods

Week 7

Topic: Comparative analysis and critique of posted research articles

Week 8

Topic: Analysis of quantitative data

Week 9

Topic: Practical application of data analysis

Week 10

Topic: Course evaluation