

**THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

Course Number: SOWO 510 (Section 1, Friday 9:00 to 11:50, TTK, Room 500)

Course Title: Introduction to Research Methods

Semester and Year: Fall 2008

Instructor

Deborah (Debbie) Barrett, PhD, MSW

School of Social Work, UNC-CH

325 Pittsboro Street CB3550,

Chapel Hill NC 27599-3550

919/843-5818 phone

Office: TTK 417

dbarrett@email.unc.edu (best type of contact)

Office hours: by appointment, Mondays and Fridays

Course Web sites:

<http://blackboard.unc.edu>

http://www.lib.unc.edu/coursepages/sowo/S08_sowo510

A web site created specifically for this class by Angela Bardeen, Social Sciences Reference Librarian in Davis Library, presents an excellent introduction to the library's offerings, including information on finding articles, browsing the major journals in social work, and accessing tutorials in APA format requirements.

Course Description

This course introduces the student to scientific research methods. Topics include: problem formulation and definition; hypothesis formulation; measures of central tendency; causality; research designs; measurement; data collection and data analysis.

Required Texts

- **Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (2007) *Essential research methods for social work*. Pacific Grove, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole. (Referred to in syllabus as "R&B.")**
- **Rubin, A. (2007). *Statistics for evidence-based practice and evaluation*. Pacific Grove, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole. (Referred to in syllabus as "R.")**
- Additional readings are listed below, and can be found on-line.

Accessibility

To obtain disability-related academic accommodations, students with disabilities must contact the instructor and the Department of Disability Services as soon as possible. You may reach the Department of Disability Services at 919-962-8300 (Voice/TDD) or

<http://disabilityservices.unc.edu>

Course Objectives

By the end of this course the student will be able to:

- 1) List and describe each of the steps of the scientific approach to human inquiry, the accumulation of knowledge, and social work research.
- 2) Compare and contrast scientific approach with other ways of obtaining knowledge, and understand how the methods differ with regard to causality and generalizability.
- 3) Compare major research designs and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each.
- 4) Articulate the advantages of the scientific approach to practice.
- 5) Define basic statistical terms and concepts, and discuss the concepts of measurement, sampling and data collection.
- 6) Explain how the scientific approach may be affected by ethics, and issues relating to diversity, minority status and oppression.
- 7) Describe how the scientific approach may be used to test the efficacy of social interventions.
- 8) Use appropriate professional journal styles and formats in writing.
- 9) Critique published studies in the social work literature using objective standards.

Schedule and Course Outline

Part I – Introduction to Research (evaluating a practice intervention)

Week 1 / January 11 / Introduction

Reading due for this class:

- R&B Ch1: The Utility of Research in Social Work
- R&B Ch2: How Do Social Workers Know Things?

Reflection for this class: Using your own personal thoughts and opinions, reflect on the relevance of research to good social work practice. **Written submissions are due NEXT week by the start of class (1/18).**

Week 2 / January 18 / Introduction to basic statistics, tables, and using SPSS in lab

Reading due for this class:

- R Ch 1: Why Study Statistics?
- R Ch 3: Descriptive Statistics
- R Ch 4: Graphs and Charts
- R Ch 5: Measures of Central Tendency
- R Ch 6: Measures of Dispersion
- R Ch 7: Normal Distributions

Reflection/reflection paper: Using terminology from the readings, reflect on the findings from the in-class survey. Include relevant graphs or tables generated during lab section of class (not included in page limit). **Written submissions are due NEXT week by the start of class (1/25).**

Week 3 / January 25 / Literature search

- Meet in Davis Library Instructional Lab (on second floor, room 247).

- Tutorial on available resources, databases, searching terms
- Social Science Reference Librarian, Angela Bardeen (contact info: 919-962-1151; bardeen@email.unc.edu).
- UNC Library Resources:
http://www.lib.unc.edu/coursepages/sowo/S08_sowo510

Reading due for this class:

R&B Ch6: Reviewing Literature and Developing Research Questions

Reflection/reflection paper: Discuss the role of literature searches in your practice. Under what circumstances would you turn to “the literature”? What factors would you consider in making practice decisions based on what you read? **Written submissions are due NEXT week by the start of class (2/1).**

***APPLICATION PAPER #1 IS DUE BY WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6 by NOON. ***

Part II – Being a responsible social work practitioner (learning from mistakes and wisdom)

- Handout on Application Paper #2 will be distributed (due by Friday, March 7th at 9am).

Week 4 / February 1 / Some horror stories and the role of research in practice

Reading due for this class:

- Tuckey M. R. (2007). Issues in the debriefing debate for the emergency services: moving research outcomes forward. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 14, 106–116.

Reflection/reflection paper: How would YOU decide whether and when to use critical incidence stress debriefing with your clients? **Written submissions are due by the start of TODAY’S class.**

Reminder: Email your application paper by Wednesday to dbarrett@email.unc.edu

Week 5 / February 8 / Ethics, cultural competence, science, and epistemology – ethical problems (the “who,” “what,” “why,” and “how” studied); ways to increase cultural competence; and types of knowledge (“how do we know what we know?”).

Reading due for this class:

- R&B Ch3: Factors Influencing the Research Process
- R&B Ch4: Ethical Issues in Social Work Research
- R&B Ch5: Culturally Competent Research
- Harris, R., Jones, L., Finnegan, D. (2001). Using TANF sanctions to increase high school graduation. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 28, 211-222.

Reflection/reflection paper: Regarding the article on TANF:

1. What is the purpose of the research?
2. The strengths and weaknesses of its “cultural competence.”
3. Any political or ethical issues, including the use of incentives?
4. Consider that you have been hired as a consultant, what would YOU advise to increase retention rates in high schools (given the considerations you identify above)?

Written submissions are due by the start of TODAY’S class.

Week 6 / February 15 / Sampling and generalizability – who to study and what this means

Reading due for this class:

- R&B Ch 11: Sampling: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches?
- Hollingsworth, L. D. (2004). Child custody loss among women with persistent severe mental illness. *Social Work Research, 28*, 199-209.

Reflection/reflection paper: Answer the following regarding the article on custody loss:

1. Did this study use a probability or non probability sample?
2. What sampling method did it use? (e.g., simple random sample, “snowball” sampling)
3. Who was “over-sampled” and why?
4. How well do you think the sample reflects the larger population of interest?
5. Based on sampling, to what population do YOU think you can generalize the study findings?

Written submissions are due by the start of TODAY’S class.

Week 7 / February 22 / Research designs and threats to internal validity

Reading due for this class:

- R&B Ch12: Group Designs for Evaluating Programs and Practice
- R&B Ch 13: Program Evaluation
- Harris, M.B. Franklin, C.G. (2003). Effects of a cognitive-behavioral, school-based, group intervention with Mexican American pregnant and parenting adolescents. *Social Work Research, 27*, 71-83.

Reflection/reflection paper: Consider the susceptibility of Harris & Franklin’s research to each of the “threats to internal validity” described in R&B Ch 12. How might these threats affect their findings? **Written submissions are due by the start of TODAY’S class.**

Week 8 / February 29 / Making sense of “the case” (single subject, qualitative research)

Reading due for this class:

- R&B Ch 14: Single-Case Evaluation Designs
- R&B Ch 15: Additional Methods in Qualitative Inquiry
- Segool, N. K., Brinkman, T. M., & Carlson, J. S. (2007). Enhancing accountability in behavioral consultation through the use of single-case designs. *The International Journal of Behavioral Consultation and Therapy, 3*, 310-321.

Reflection/reflection paper: Consider the case studies in the Carlson et al. article and discuss any benefits that come from including an explicit research framework along with their intervention. Next, consider applying a single-case framework to a problem you are addressing with a client system. (If you do not have a relevant case in your field placement, substitute any personal goals for growth you may have). Discuss the advantages/disadvantages of approaching your problem as a “single case study.” **Written submissions due by the start of TODAY’S class.**

Week 9 / March 7 / Survey construction - reliability and validity, measurement

Reading due for this class:

- R&B Ch 8: Measurement in Quantitative and Qualitative Inquiry
- R&B Ch 9: Quantitative and Qualitative Measurement Instruments
- R&B Ch 10: Surveys

Reflection/reflection paper: Please bring in a copy of any intake tools that you use in your field placement! (We'll be evaluating these instruments in class today). Drawing from the discussions in the R&B chapters, assess the content and format of your tool. Consider ways you might improve your instrument(s). **Written submissions due by the start of TODAY'S class.**

APPLICATION PAPER #2 IS DUE BY THE START OF CLASS

Spring Break / March 14 / NO CLASS

Have a wonderful break!

Good Friday / March 21 / NO CLASS

Part III - Interpreting and Critiquing Research (via group projects)**Week 10 / March 28 / Devising research questions (from paradigm to hypothesis)**

Reading due for this class:

- R&B Ch5: Culturally Competent Research [revisit]
- R&B Ch6: Reviewing Literature and Developing Research Questions [revisit]
- Wells, R. (2006). Managing child welfare agencies: what do we know about what works? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28, 1181-1194.
- Harris, M.B. Franklin, C.G. (2003). [revisited]
- Hollingsworth, L. D. (2004). [revisited]

Reflection/reflection paper: For each of the three empirical articles assigned for today, identify (a) the "research question," (b) any contributions to the literature, and (c) any contributions to social work practice. Specify for each whether these are stated explicitly or implicitly. For written submissions, consider creating a 3x3 table rather than discursive piece. **Due by the start of TODAY'S class.**

We will be starting a "group project" activity that will continue through the remainder of the course. Come to class with several ideas of interventions (micro or macro) that you would be interested in researching further. Each group (of four-five students) will be charged with formulating one research question. Over the next week, then, you are to search for research articles that address your group's question. For next week, your group is to select one article that involves quantitative methods that you identify as a strong article. You will be using this article as the basis of your final paper and presentation.

Week 11 / April 4 / Operationalization and measurement

Reading due for this class:

- R&B Ch7: Conceptualization in Quantitative and Qualitative Inquiry
- Harris, M.B. Franklin, C.G. (2003). [revisited]

- Hollingsworth, L. D. (2004). [revisited]
- Browne, D. & Moloney, A. (2002). Contact irregular: a qualitative analysis of the impact of visiting patterns of natural parents on foster placement. *Child and Family Social Work*. 7, 35-45.
- Leung, P, Erich, S & Kanenberg, H. (2005) A comparison of family functioning in gay/lesbian, heterosexual and special needs adoptions, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27, 1031– 1044.

Reflection/reflection paper: Skim each assigned article and identify the (a) hypotheses, (b) dependent and (c) independent variables in each. What pieces of information do you feel are missing about how the authors have measured their concepts? **Written submissions are due by the start of TODAY'S class.**

Reflection/reflection paper: Consider the article that your group has selected. Identify its (a) hypothesis, (b) concepts, and (c) independent and dependent variables. Which of these are explicitly specified? Describe how the variables are measured? What pieces of information do you feel you are missing about how the author(s) have defined or operationalized the concepts? **Written submissions due by the start of TODAY'S class.**

Week 12 /April 11 / Introduction to statistical significance and statistical testing – A “quick and dirty” everything-you-need-to-know to understand and decode inferential statistics

Reading due for this class:

- R&B Ch 17: Quantitative Data Analysis
- R Ch 10: Hypothesis Testing and Statistical Significance
- R Ch 12: The t-Test
- R Ch 13: Analysis of Variance
- R Ch 14: Cross-Tabulation and Chi-Square
- R Ch 17: Regression Analysis
- Harris, M.B. Franklin, C.G. (2003). [revisited]
- Hollingsworth, L. D. (2004). [revisited]
- Browne, D. & Moloney, A. (2002). [revisited]
- Leung, P, Erich, S & Kanenberg, H. (2005). [revisited]

Reflection/reflection paper: Skim each assigned article and identify the statistical tests they use in each. Focus on the tables. Be inquisitive and critical. Try your hand at interpreting what the tables mean. (Bring in your questions!) **Written submissions due by the start of TODAY'S class.**

Reflection/reflection paper: Continuing with your group's article, identify the statistical methods being used. Then drawing on the relevant R&B chapters, explain why the author(s) selected the particular statistical tests and do your best to interpret the statistical results. **Written submissions due by the start of TODAY'S class.**

Week 13 / April 18 / More fun with statistics

Reading due for this class:

- R Ch 8: z-Scores, Percentiles, and Effect Size

- R Ch 11: Type I and Type II Errors and Significance Levels
- R Ch 16: Interpreting the Strength and Importance of Relationships

Reflection/ reflection papers: We will be continuing with the projects from last week. You may submit a new or more refined reflection papers based on last week's exercises.

Week 14 / April 25 / LAST CLASS! Group presentations and celebration

Each group will have 15 minutes to present on the process and content of their group projects.

- FINAL EXAMS ARE DUE FRIDAY, MAY 2ND BY 3pm. You may submit by email, or c'mon by my office (417) and let me congratulate you!

Description of assignments

Reflection / reflection papers: Nearly each week, I provide topics for reflection on the readings for the assigned class. These are intended to help you to prepare for class and for later assignments. You are **required** to submit **three written responses** during the semester. (It's your choice which ones). All reflection papers will be "graded" on a pass/fail basis only. Papers that demonstrate engagement with the material will receive one point toward your final grade. You also have the option of submitting **additional** reflection papers throughout the semester. Each, if appropriately thoughtful, will add **"one bonus point"** to your final grade. Reflection papers are not intended to exceed one page (single or double spaced) and are due at the start of class on the day specified. NO late papers accepted.

Application paper #1: This paper is intended to summarize your learning from the first module. Its content/format, briefly: (1) Begin with a thesis about the importance of research in assessing intervention effectiveness. (2) Illustrate your thesis by comparing your findings from our class survey (include table/graph) with your findings from the article(s) you located on the effectiveness of Scared Straight. Three-five pages, double-spaced (APA format).

Application paper #2: This is a mini article critique that applies the skills you have been practicing throughout the second module. You will be assessing the ethics, research design (including any threats to internal validity), and sampling choices used in the following article: Slonim-Nevo, V. (2001). The effect of HIV/AIDS prevention intervention for Israeli adolescents in residential centers: Results at 12-month follow-up. *Social Work Research*, 25(2), 71-87. In addition, describe what you feel you can take from this article to your practice, and why. More detailed information will be distributed at the start of second module.

Group presentation: The third module will revolve around your group's identification of a research question and identification of an article that addresses this question. On the last day of class, each group will have 15 minutes to present on the article selected – both the process of selecting it, and its findings.

Final exam: This will be a critique of the article from your group project. You will receive a handout with specific questions to consider at the start of the third module.

Course Evaluation

Final grade is based on the total accumulation of points out of 100. Each assignment will provide detail on what is expected and point distribution. The overall breakdown of course points is as follows:

Application Paper 1 (Evaluating <i>Scared Straight</i>)	25 points
Application Paper 2 (Mini article critique)	20 points
Group presentation	15 points
FINAL article critique	25 points
Reflection papers (including bonus points for additional submissions)	3 points
Participation	12 points
Course TOTAL	100 points

Course grades will be assigned as follows:

H: 94-100	L: 70 - 79
P: 80 – 93	F: 69

Format for Written Assignments

All written assignments must be typed and follow APA format (including, but not limited to APA guidelines regarding spacing, margins, punctuations, within-text citations, reference list, and headings). Grades will be lowered for poor grammar, syntax, spelling, and if APA guidelines are not followed. Several writing resources are posted on the Blackboard site. Students should also refer to the following:

- American Psychological Association. (2002). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th ed.* Washington, DC.
- *UNC School of Social Work Style Guide: A Writing Manual for Social Work Students* (posted on Blackboard)

Late or Incomplete Assignments

Late assignments are strongly discouraged. Students must notify the instructor via e-mail BEFORE the due date if an assignment is going to be submitted late. If this policy is not followed, the instructor will not accept late assignments, unless there is an extraordinary circumstance. All late assignments will lose 10% of the available points for that assignment for each 24 hour period that an assignment is late beyond the due date and time.

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to complete assigned readings, contribute to the development of a positive learning environment, and demonstrate their learning through written assignments and class participation. Original written work is expected and required. The University of North Carolina has a rich and longstanding tradition of honor. All submitted work must conform to the Honor Code of the University of North Carolina. If you have not yet done so, please see the Student Code of Honor. For information on the Honor Code, including guidance on representing the words, thoughts, and ideas of others, please see: <http://instrument.unc.edu>