

**SOWO 510.956 – Introduction to Research Methods in Social Work
Spring 2008**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work

Fridays, 9:00am – 11:50am

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Office Hours Before or after class, and by appointment

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*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole. (Referred to in syllabus reading assignments as “R&B.”)

Rubin, A. (2007). *Statistics for evidence-based practice and evaluation*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole. (Referred to in syllabus reading assignments as “R.”)

Required texts are available through the UNC Health Affairs bookstore. Additional readings will be provided or placed on the UNC Blackboard site: <http://blackboard.unc.edu/>

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 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 the 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 social work 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 related 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.

Course Evaluation

Your final grade in the course will be based on the total accumulation of points earned on class participation, written assignments, lab assignments, quizzes, midterm exam, and final exam. The total number of points possible is 100. The breakdown of points is as follows:

Assignment I	5
Assignment II	5
Assignment III	5
Lab 1	10
Lab 2	10
Quizzes	20
Midterm exam	20
<u>Final</u>	<u>25</u>
Course total	100

Course grades will be assigned as follows:

<u>Points</u>	<u>Grade</u>
94-100	H
80-93	P
70-79	L
< 69	F

Course Assignments

Detailed instructions and/or a grading matrix for each assignment will be discussed and handed out in class one or more weeks before the assignment is due.

Weekly Quizzes

Most (10) classes will begin with a quiz on the assigned readings for that class session. This is how attendance and participation are graded for this course. Each quiz is worth two points. These quizzes cannot be made up at a later time. Combined, the quizzes will comprise 20% of your grade. Two quiz points will automatically be given to students in attendance on each of the two days when quizzes are not given. Given students may have excused absences or miss points on some of the quizzes, any points earned on quizzes over 20 will be considered extra credit and may contribute up to 4 points toward the final course grade.

Assignment I

Using your own personal thoughts and opinions, answer the following three questions in a two page (double-spaced) paper:

1. What is your area(s) of interest within social work?
2. What, if any, experience have you had with research?
3. What does research mean to you?
4. Why do you (or don't you) think research is important to social work and, specifically, your area(s) of interest?

Assignment I is due at the beginning of class on January 18 and is worth 5% of your grade.

Assignment II

Complete the NIH Human Subjects web-based training at <www.citiprogram.org/default.asp> and turn in a Certificate of Completion. Assignment II is due at the beginning of class on January 25 and is worth 5% of your grade.

Assignment III

Find a research article from a social work or other scholarly journal addressing a topic of interest to you. Read the article and answer the following questions in a 2-page (double-spaced) paper:

1. How has this research article contributed to the field of social work?
2. What were the ethical issues associated with this research? Were there ethical issues that should have been addressed but were not?
3. Were the researchers culturally competent in conducting their research? Please explain how or how not.

Staple a hard copy of your article to your assignment to turn in. Assignment III is due at the beginning of class on February 1 and is worth 5% of your grade.

Labs

Two labs will be conducted during class time in the computer lab. Each lab and lab report is worth 10% of your overall grade. Lab reports are due at the beginning of the next class session as listed in the Course Outline.

Midterm Exam

The midterm will be comprised of two parts: (1) In-class midterm of March 7; and (2) Take home midterm (article critique) due at the beginning of class on March 28. The midterm is worth 20% of your grade.

Final Exam

A take home exam will be distributed in class on April 18. The final exam is due via email no later than 5pm on May 2. No exceptions. The final exam is worth 25% of your grade.

The Honor Code

The Student Honor Code is always in effect in this course. The Instrument of Student Judicial Governance requires that you vouch for your compliance on all your written work. We expect you to write the following pledge in full on each document. Sign and date your statement.

I have neither given nor received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment.

The crucial thing to remember is that you must credit ideas that are not your own, whether or not those ideas have appeared in print. If you use an example from someone else in a paper, then you must cite that person in your references.

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. 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)

Accessibility

To obtain disability-related academic accommodations, students with disabilities should contact the instructor and the Department of Disability Services. You may reach the Department of Disability Services at 919-962-8300 (Voice/TDD) or <http://disabilityservices.unc.edu/>

Late or Incomplete Assignments

Late papers/assignments are strongly discouraged. In case of a dire emergency, a late paper may be accepted at the discretion of the instructor. To obtain permission to submit a paper after the deadline, the student must seek approval from the instructor before the beginning of class on the day the assignment is due. If permission for late submission is not granted before the deadline, the grade will automatically be reduced 10% of the available points on an assignment for each 24 hour period that assignment is late beyond the due date and time.

Course Outline & Assignments

- Week 1/ January 11:** Introduction to course & review of syllabus
Evidence-based practice & scientific inquiry
- Assignment I:** Using your own thoughts and opinions, answer the following three questions in a two page (double-spaced) paper to be turned in at the beginning of class next week:
1. What is your area(s) of interest within social work?
 2. What does research mean to you, and how is it useful (or not)?
 3. Why do you (or don't you) think research is important to social work and, specifically, your area(s) of interest?
- Week 2/ January 18:** Developing an orientation to research & understanding the context
How to conduct an effective literature search
- Week 2 Readings:** R&B Ch. 1: The Utility of Research in Social Work
R&B Ch. 2: How Do Social Workers Know Things?
R&B Ch. 3: Factors Influencing the Research Process (only pp. 23-29)
R&B Ch. 4: Ethical Issues in Social Work Research
R&B Ch. 6: Reviewing Literature and Developing Research Questions (only pp. 73-80)
Article: Gibbs, L., & Gambrill, E. (2002). Evidence-based practice: Counterarguments to Objections. *Research on Social Work Practice, 12*, 452-476. (this article is posted on Blackboard under "Course Documents").
- Assignment Due:** Assignment I due today at the beginning of class
- Assignment II:** Complete NIH Human Subjects web-based training and turn in the Certificate of Completion at the beginning of class next week.
- Week 3/ January 25:** Developing research questions
Culturally competent research
- Week 3 Readings:** R&B Ch. 3: Factors Influencing the Research Process (pp. 29-35)
R&B Ch. 5: Culturally Competent Research
R&B Ch. 6: Reviewing Literature and Developing Research Questions (pp.80-83)
- Assignment Due:** Assignment II due today at the beginning of class.

- Assignment III:** Find a research article from a social work or other scholarly journal addressing your topic of interest. Read the article and answer the following questions in a 2-page (double-spaced) paper:
1. How has this research article contributed to the field of social work?
 2. What were the ethical issues associated with this research? Where there ethical issues that should have been address but were not?
 3. Were the researchers culturally competent in conducting their research? Please explain how or how not.
- Bring a hard-copy of the article and your paper with you to class next week to be discussed and turned in for credit.
- Week 4 / February 1:** Stating social work constructs in measurable ways
Assigning “labels” and “values” to phenomena of interest
Constructing measurement instruments
- Week 4 Readings:** R&B Ch. 7: Conceptualization in quantitative and qualitative inquiry
R&B Ch. 8: Measurement in qualitative and qualitative inquiry
R&B Ch. 9: Quantitative and qualitative measurement instruments
R Ch. 1: Why Study Statistics? (only pp. 7-10)
- Assignment Due:** Assignment III due today at the beginning of class
- Week 5 / February 8:** **NO SOWO 510 TODAY (FULL DAY SOWO 501)**
- Week 6 / February 15:** **FULL DAY SOWO 510 (NO SOWO 501 TODAY)**
Studying a few to learn about many: Issues relating to sampling in research
How do we know if our services are effective: Searching for “cause” and “effect”
- Week 6 Readings:** R&B Ch. 10: Surveys
R&B Ch. 11: Sampling: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches
R&B Ch. 12: Group designs or Evaluation Programs and Practice
R&B Ch. 13: Program Evaluation
- Week 7 / February 22:** Single case evaluation
Qualitative research
- Week 7 Readings:** R&B Ch. 14: Single-Case Evaluation Designs
R&B Ch. 15: Additional Methods in Qualitative Inquiry

Week 8 / February 29: Critiquing Research Articles
Review for Midterm

Week 8 Readings: **Article:** Carter, V., & Myers, M. R. (2007). Exploring the risks of substantiated physical neglect related to poverty and parental characteristics: A national sample. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 110-121. (NOTE: You are to use your savvy literature search skills to find this article on your own through the UNC Library's e-journals collection and read this article for today's class!)

Week 9 / March 7: In-class midterm

Assignment: Take home portion of midterm due at the beginning of class on March 28 (article critique)

Week 10 / March 14: **NO CLASS.** Have a wonderful spring break!!

Week 11 / March 21: **NO CLASS.** University holiday.

Week 12 / March 28: Welcome back!
Managing data during research and introduction to univariate statistics
Lab One

Week 12 Readings: R&B Ch. 17: Quantitative Data Analysis (only pp. 275-277)
R Ch. 1: Why Study Statistics? (only pp. 3-7, 10-12)
R Ch. 3: Frequency Distributions
R Ch. 4: Graphs and Charts
R Ch 5: Measures of Central Tendency
R Ch 6: Measures of Dispersion
R Ch. 7: Normal Distribution

Assignment Due: Take home portion of midterm due today at the beginning of class

Assignment: Lab One report due at the beginning of class next week

Week 13 / April 4: Bivariate and multivariate statistics and Statistical significance

Week 13 Readings: R Ch 8: z-Scores, Percentiles, and Effect Size
R Ch 9: Probability and Sampling Distributions
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

Assignment Due: Lab One report due at the beginning of class

Week 14 / April 11: **NO SOWO 510 TODAY (FULL DAY SOWO 501)**

Week 15 / April 18: **FULL DAY SOWO 510 (NO SOWO 501 TODAY)**
Statistical Testing, and the difference between “significant” and
“important”
Lab Two
Final exam distributed

Week 15 Readings: R Ch. 15: Correlation
R Ch. 16: Interpreting the Strengths and Importance of
Relationships

Assignment: Lab two report due at the beginning of class next week

Week 16 / April 25: Course Review
Last class celebration!!

Assignment: Final exam due next week (May 2)

Assignment Due: Lab Two report due at the beginning of class

Final / May 2: **Final exam due via email no later than 5pm on May 2**

List of Relevant Readings

The following articles represent a sampling of the social work research literature. Some of the articles are about methods, per se, and others are examples of research that rely on particular methods. Some of the articles exemplify the use of research results to investigate practice effectiveness. The articles are annotated “minimally,” and in most cases italicized key words or content follow the reference. These key words or concepts are (bold and in parentheses).

- Abel, E. M. (2000). Psychosocial treatments for battered women: a review of empirical research. *Research on Social Work Practice, 10*(1), 55-77. (***review of relevant literature on a particular topic, in this case battered women; examining outcomes of practice research; drawing conclusions from a body of research studies***)
- Anderson, D. G. (2000). Coping strategies and burnout among veteran child protection workers. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 24*(6), 839-848. (***quantitative analysis; cross-sectional analysis, self-report methodology; scaling of affective dimensions; using results of research to design interventions***)
- Benda, B. B. (1999). Testing the problem syndrome among males in boot camp: Use of theoretical elaboration with reciprocal relationships. *Social Work Research, 23*, 28-41. (***testing measures themselves – how well do particular measures work in a given research endeavor; this article has an understandable theoretical question that is addressed with factor analysis; results clearly support an answer to the question; factor analysis results are clearly presented***)
- Berrick, D. J. & Frasch, K. Fox, A. (2000). Assessing children's experiences of out-of-home care: methodological challenges and opportunities. *Social Work Research, 24*(2), 119-127. (***evaluation; administrative, practical, legal and pragmatic barriers to research; obtaining a sample; developing research instruments; training research staff***)
- Borduin, C. M., Mann, B. J., Cone, L. T., Henggeler, S. W., Fucci, B. R., Blaske, D. M., & Williams, R. A. (1995). Multisystemic treatment of serious juvenile offenders: Long-term prevention of criminality and violence. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 63*, 569-578. (***design issues; determining what to measure and how to measure it; good discussion of data analysis; good example of empirically based intervention and high quality research design***)
- Bowen, N. K. (1999). *The Blue Ridge mentor program: Effectiveness analysis*. (Unpublished agency report). Raleigh, North Carolina: Willie M. Program Evaluation, NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services. (***power analysis; effect sizes; non-parametric statistics; example of study carried out without sufficient statistical power; discussion of how an underpowered study may undermine good practice with null findings speculated to be due to the research rather than the practice model under investigation***)

- Collins, P. M., Kayser, K. & Platt, S. (1994) Conjoint marital therapy: A practitioner's approach to single-system evaluation. *Families in Society*, 75(3), 131-141. (***deciding the operational definition of a clinical problem; instrument design for a specific study; using research measures as part of a clinical intervention; directly measuring case practice effectiveness on a single case***)
- de Anda, D. (1999). Project Peace: The evaluation of a skills-based violence prevention program for high school adolescents. *Social Work in Education*, 21, 137-149. (***pretest/posttest design; issues of causal inference; difference testing using t-test; statistical significance; differences relating to gender and ethnicity***)
- Gabor, P. (1988). Increasing accountability in child-care practice through the use of single case methodologies. Paper presented at the International Child and Youth Care Conference of the Child Welfare League of America, Washington, DC. (***good introduction to single-s methods; use of single-s methods in case practice evaluation; defining the "s" in single-s: individual person, group, neighborhood, etc.; selecting measures appropriate for single-s applications***)
- Gambrill, E. (2001). Social work: An Authority-Based Profession. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 11, 166-175.
- Gibbs, L., & Gambrill, E. (2002). Evidence-based practice: Counterarguments to objections. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 12(3), 452-476. (***evidence-based practice***)
- Gorey, K. M. (1996). Effectiveness of social work intervention research: Internal versus external evaluations. *Social Work Research*, 20, 119-128. (***this article precedes Gorey, Thyer & Pawluck (1998) and covers similar topics; measuring differences among practice approaches based on different theoretical models***)
- Gorey, K., M., Thyer, B. A., & Pawluck, D. E. (1998). Differential effectiveness of prevalent social work practice models: A meta-analysis. *Social Work*, 43, 269-278. (***meta-analysis: looking at effect sizes; using research to demonstrate effectiveness of social work practice; internal evaluations/external evaluations; theoretical orientations affecting research***)
- Healy, K., & Mulholland, J. (1998). Discourse analysis and activist social work: Investigating practice processes. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 25(3), 3-27. (***discourse analysis; investigation of 'activist practice processes'***)
- Hill, M.R., & Thomas, V. (2000). Strategies for racial identity development: Narratives of black and white women in interracial partner relationships. *Family Relations*, 49(2), 193-200. (***qualitative research; diversity/racial issues; use of interviews and focus groups to research racial issues; grounded theory methodology***)

- Hughes, M. (1998). Turning points in the lives of young inner-city men forgoing destructive criminal behaviors: A qualitative study. *Social Work Research*, 22, 143-151. (***this was just an interesting study using qualitative methods.***)
- Kirk, R. S. (1996). A colloquial discussion of the development of measures and measurement systems. Paper prepared for recipients of E. McC. Clark Foundation grants on Community-Based CPS Reform. (***primarily single-s but also generalizable; structure for assessing intended measures in relation to the clinical problem, assuring adherence to "rules of measurement" such as reliability, validity, directness, non-reactivity, etc.***)
- Martin, J. I. & Knox, J. (2000). Methodological and ethical issues in research on lesbians and gay men. *Social Work Research*, 24(1), 51-59. (***ethical issues and methodology; defining the study population; sampling; generalizability of results; preventing harm to subjects***)
- Myers, L. L., & Thyer, B. A. (1997). Should social work clients have the right to effective treatment? *Social Work*, 42, 288-298. (***argues for evaluating treatment efficacy, using research results to raise standards of social work profession***)
- Robinson, F.F., Morran, D. K., & Hulse-Killacky, D. (1998). Single-subject research designs for group counselors studying their own groups. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 14(2), 92-97. (***application of single-s methods in the group work practice setting; discussion of variations on single-s designs; analysis of single-s data***)
- Twine, F. W. & Warren, J. (2000). *Racing research, researching race: Methodological dilemmas in critical race studies*. New York: New York University Press. (***This collection of ethnographic essays examines the political, methodological and ethical dilemmas of conducting research in racially stratified societies. These diverse case studies demonstrate how the "racialized" position of social scientists affects their findings and interpretations***)
- Webster-Stratton, C. (1997). From parent training to community building. *Families in Society*, 78, 156-171. (***problem formulation; experimental design; data analysis; using research findings to improve interventions***)