SWK 500

Social Work Research Methods

Office Hours: Mon: 11:00 am – 1:30 pm
Tues: 8:30 am – 4:00 pm

Prerequisite: Graduate standing
Co-requisite: None

COURSE SYLLABUS

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

SWK 500 is the introductory course in social work research methods for the professional generalist practice. This course addresses the areas of critical thinking, understanding the social work research literature, conducting literature reviews appropriate for research proposals, applied research methods (quantitative and qualitative), evaluation methods, and formulation of research plans.

This course is the first in a series of three research courses including Social Work Research Process (SWK 520) and Research Practicum (SWK 530). The research sequence is designed to prepare students to think critically, to understand the professional literature, to evaluate practice, to collect and analyze data, and to conduct research in generalist and advanced generalist social work practice settings with individuals, families, groups, communities and organizations in a rural context. Issues of values, ethics, diversity, social and economic justice and populations at risk are examined from a rural context throughout this course. It is important that students develop a holistic view of the competencies.

REQUIRED TEXTS:


II. CURRICULUM DESCRIPTION

The MSW program of SFASU features a generalist practice and a single specialization/specialized practice: Advanced Generalist Practice in a Rural Context. Both are defined below.
It is important to note here that the BSW program and the MSW program have developed a shared definition of generalist practice, given below.

**Generalist practice** is grounded in the liberal arts and the person-in-environment framework. To promote human and social well-being, generalist practitioners use a range of prevention and intervention methods in their practice with diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities based on scientific inquiry and best practices. The generalist practitioner identifies with the social work profession and applies ethical principles and critical thinking in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Generalist practitioners engage diversity in their practice and advocate for human rights and social and economic justice. They recognize, support, and build on the strengths and resiliency of all human beings. They engage in research-informed practice and are proactive in responding to the impact of context on professional practice.

Briefly, generalist social work practice:

- Is multi-level to include individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities.
- Is multi-theory, allowing for the free selection of theories as appropriate.
- Utilizes problem identification and focus that follows a problem-solving framework.
- Addresses the complexity of individual, family, group, organizational and community system interactions.
- Requires an integration of awareness, competence, and professional response to issues of values, ethics, diversity, culture, social justice and populations-at-risk.

**Advanced generalist practice** builds on the generalist practice, incorporating the elements listed above, but characterized by a greater depth, breadth, and autonomy as demonstrated through specialized knowledge across problem areas, populations-at-risk and practice settings, with a greater selection of diverse interactions across practice levels.

Briefly, advanced generalist practice requires:

- The ability to engage and differentially assess complex problems with systems of all sizes, with a variety of advanced assessment skills.
- Specialized evidence-based interventions with systems of all sizes.
- Differential evaluation techniques with systems of all sizes.
- Strategies to advocate for clients and constituencies influenced by rural lifestyles.
- Readiness for leadership in a variety of areas including: program development, coordination and administration; clinical and organizational supervision; policy creation, reform and implementation; leadership in research development and utilization, particularly in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary practice settings; professional development.

The specialized practice for the MSW program is advanced generalist practice for rural contexts. Theories that describe and predict rural ecological systems and rural strengths, including the
incredibly rich interactions, simple and complex, formal and informal, wholesome and debilitating are emphasized. On this basis, the curriculum of the MSW Program emphasizes the ecological systems approach, the strengths perspective, and the social capital and social exchange theories.

Rural practice refers to social work with rural people and rural systems of all sizes within and outside of rural communities. There is no single accepted definition of rural. In fact, just as generalist practice in social work draws on multiple theories, generalist practice in a rural context recognizes the many definitions currently in use and their advantages and disadvantages for research, practice, and advocacy. The School of Social Work at SFA utilizes several of these definitions within the United States and globally including:

The United States Census Bureau (urbanized areas, urban clusters, and rural populations); Office of Management and Budget (metropolitan, micropolitan, and non-core), Economic Research Service (rural urban continuum codes); and The United Nations that defines urban and rural according to the census definition for each nation, but suggests a definition of rural areas as having a population of less than 2,000 for international comparisons.

III. PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES (CSWE CORE COMPETENCIES)

1. Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior
2. Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice
3. Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice
4. Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice
5. Engage in Policy Practice
6. Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
7. Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
8. Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
9. Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations and Communities

IV. COURSE OBJECTIVES (STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: (SLO))

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods. (competency 4)
2. Understand the role of quantitative and qualitative research in advancing a science of social work. (competency 4)
3. Describe how quantitative and qualitative research are used in evaluating social work practice. (competency 4)
4. Understand the principles of logic, scientific inquiry, and culturally informed and ethical approaches to building knowledge. (competency 4)

5. Understand that evidence that informs practice derives from multi-disciplinary sources and multiple ways of knowing. (competency 4)

6. Describe the processes for translating research findings into effective practice. (competency 4)

7. Describe how quantitative and qualitative research methods are used in social work practice with individuals, families, groups, communities and organizations. (Competencies 6, 7, 8, 9)

8. Understand research and the dimensions of diversity as the intersectionality of multiple factors including but not limited to age, class, color, culture, disability, and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, marital status, political ideology, race, religion/spiritually, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status. (Competency 2)

9. Describe the connection to research and strategies designed to eliminate oppressive structural barriers to ensure that social goods, rights, and responsibilities are distributed equitably and that civil, political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural human rights are protected. (Competency 3)

10. Apply the value base of the social work profession and its ethical standards, as well as relevant laws and regulations that may impact research and practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. (Competency 1)

11. Understand that human rights and social justice, as well as social welfare and services, are mediated by policy and its implementation at the federal, state, and local levels. (Competency 5)

V. INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

This is a face to face or hybrid class that will involve instructional supported learning. Content will be delivered both face to face (F2F) and via D2L/Brightspace. Methods of instruction will be based on active learning theories that will involve lecture by instructor, guest lecture, student discussion and presentations, small group activities and audio-visual presentations. Class discussions will add to and supplement the reading assignments and be based on the topics presented in the course materials. To be successful in the class, it is important that students take responsibility for their own academic performance, be active learners, read the assigned material, complete all assignments and respond to feedback. The course is organized into weekly learning sessions where students will be able to find the information to read and learn each week from assigned readings, class lecture and group exercises. PDF files and links to articles will be provided when available. Some content will be enhanced with online material and some examination may take place online.
VI. COMPUTER REQUIREMENTS

This course will utilize D2L/Brightspace to support the delivery of course content - go to https://www.sfactl.info/d2l

VII. COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction to Social Work Research
   The Research-Practitioner Paradigm
   A. Goals of research in social work
      1. Cultural variables/global perspectives
   B. Research-informed Practice, Practice-informed Research in Rural Areas
   C. Application to generalist practice
      1. Grand Challenges for Social Work
      2. Inter-professional social work and research
      3. Knowledge, values, skills and cognitive and affective processes
      4. The researcher and advocacy

   Readings:
   IASSW
   Rubin & Babbie - Chapter 1
   You, Gu and Yi. (2010)
   Williams (2016).
   Teixera (2018)

Week 2: Ethics in Practice-informed research and research-informed practice
   1. Diversity and difference in research
   2. Informed consent
   3. Social, economic and environmental justice
      IFSW Code of Ethics
      Human rights in research

   Readings:
   IASSW;
   Oliphant, Brown, Rubin & Babbie - Chapter 1
   You, Gu and Yi (2010)
   Thyer (2017)
   Reamer (2013)

Week 3: Epistemology and Critical Thinking
   A. Development of Knowledge
      1. Critical thinking
      2. Scientific method
         a. Empiricism
      3. Epistemology
         a. Positivism
   B. Development of theory
      1. Social science theory
2. Social work theory
3. Research and Practice Theory
C. Conceptualization

**Readings:**
Rubin & Babbie Chapter 2, 3;
Roestenburg & Oliphant
Lohmeier (2016)
Williams (2013 and 2016)

**Week 4: Conducting Literature Reviews in Research**
A. Literature reviews in social work research
   1. Definition
   2. Purpose
      a. Defining/Investigating research problem area
      b. Developing research questions
      c. Use as a consumer/application to practice
   3. Selecting a strategy
   4. Types of literature reviews

**Readings:**
Williams (2016)
Mason et al (2017)

**Week 5: Collecting Information through Literature Reviews**
A. Collecting information
   1. Rural resources for information
   2. Types of information
B. Screening literature for feasibility and quality
   1. Reliability
   2. Validity
   3. Appropriateness for inclusion in defining research problem area
   4. Trustworthiness of information
C. Summarizing
D. Literature and evidence

**Readings:**
Rubin & Babbie Ch 3;
Thyer, 2017;
Smith-Osborne

**Week 6: Introduction of Social Work Research Methods**
1. Quantitative research methods
2. Qualitative research methods
3. Utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study (mixed methodology)
4. Applications to practice and evaluation

**Readings:**
Rubin & Babbie, Ch 4, 5, & 6;
Roestenburg & Oliphant
Fifolt & Lander (2013)

**Week 7: Quantitative research methods**
1. Overview of quantitative methods
2. Purpose of quantitative methods
3. Development of quantitative data collection instruments
4. Analysis of quantitative data
5. Presentation of quantitative data
6. Applications to social work and inter-professional practice

**Readings:**
Rubin & Babbie, Ch 4, 5, & 6;
Archibald and Estreet (2017)
Sheppard, M. (2016)

**Week 8: MIDTERM EXAM**

**Week 9: SPRING BREAK**

**Weeks 10: Qualitative research methods**
1. Overview of qualitative methods
2. Purpose of qualitative methods
3. Development of qualitative data collection instruments
4. Analysis of qualitative data
5. Presentation of qualitative data
6. Applications to social work and inter-professional practice

**Readings:**
Rubin & Babbie, Ch 4, 5, & 6;
Roestenburg & Oliphant
Barusch, Gringeri and George (2011)
Kevany and MacMichael (2014)

**Weeks 11: Qualitative and Quantitative Designs used in Social Work**
1. Case studies
2. Group designs
3. Structured observation
4. Survey research

**Readings:**
Rubin & Babbie – Chapter 7, 8 & 9
Broadhurst (2016)
Oliver (2012)
Sheppard, M. (2016)

**Weeks 12: Qualitative and Quantitative Designs used in Social Work**
Participant observation
Secondary analysis
Utilizing existing statistics
Content analysis
Historical Research

Readings:
Rubin & Babbie – Chapter 7, 8 & 9
Csiernik & Birnbaum (2017)
Oliver (2012)

Week 13: Practice Evaluation
Program evaluation in Social Work
Purpose of evaluation in Social Work
Types of program evaluations
   Process
   Impact
   Outcome
Readings:
Rubin & Babbie – Chapter 7, 8 & 9
Moreau and Cousins (2014)

Week 14: Program and Practice Evaluation Methods
Methods to evaluate individuals, families, groups, communities and organizations
Program evaluations in research-informed practice and practice-informed research
Using existing program evaluation frameworks
Readings:
Roestenburg & Oliphant;
Rubin & Babbie – Chapter 10, 11 & 12
Csiernik & Birnbaum (2017)

Week 15: Revision

Week 16: Final Exam

VIII. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Class Attendance and Participation: In order for the class to discuss the readings, it is essential for you to read assigned material before coming to class, to attend class regularly, and to participate in class discussions both F2F and online. You are responsible for all material covered in class and assigned in the syllabus, whether or not you have attended class. Attendance is required. Excuse absences (i.e. illness, death or accident) will be considered case by case and granted by the instructor based on the merit and verifiability of the extenuating circumstance. Absences will be noted. Two or more unexcused absences will result in reduction of final grade.

Cell Phones/Pagers/Electronic Devices: Because such devices are disruptive to the classroom environment, I ask that you refrain from using them during class unless they are made a part of the classroom exercise. I also ask that you either place such devices on silent mode or turn them off during class. It is particularly offensive to an instructor to have a student texting while class is in session. Repeated interruptions will result in a deduction of points from the final average. You might also be asked to leave the class.
B. **Readings:** The course outline provides a list of required readings for each week. (you will receive a detailed schedule the first full week of class that will outline the readings to be covered each class). Since lectures and class discussions are designed to answer questions about the material and expand upon the basic concepts, you are expected to complete the assigned readings prior to class. Furthermore, you are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the information, as evidenced by active participation in class discussion and group learning exercises. For example, you should present well formulated questions and comments that demonstrate prior preparation.

C. **Exams:** There will be a midterm and a final exam administered online. Students are required to take the exams at the scheduled time. Makeup exams will be scheduled according to university policy with a university-approved excuse.

D. **Quizzes/Exercises:** There will be unannounced class exercises. Students are required to participate in the exercises at the scheduled time. Makeup exercises will be scheduled according to university policy with a university-approved excuse.

E. **Assignments/Presentations:** See Assignments for a listing of all assignments for this course. All assignments are due at the beginning of each class, unless the assignment is a class presentation which will be due in class. For all late assignments, one letter grade will be deducted after the beginning of class when the assignment is due, with an additional letter grade deduction for each day for which the assignment is late.

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**ASSIGNMENTS and GRADING CRITERION:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class preparation and participation</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #1: Empirical research</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #2: Critical thinking</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam 1</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>400</strong></td>
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**GRADING SCALE:**

The earned points will be averaged and a letter grade assigned as follows:

- A = 360 – 400
- B = 320 – 359
- C = 280 – 319
- D = 240 – 279
- F = Below 240

*Not applicable for credit toward graduate degree.*

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**IX. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Abiding by university policy on academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members must promote the components of academic integrity in their instruction, and course syllabi are required to provide information about penalties for cheating and plagiarism, as well as the appeal process. **Definition of Academic Dishonesty:** Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes, but is not limited to:

- using or attempting to use unauthorized materials on any class assignment or exam;
- falsifying or inventing of any information, including citations, on an assignment;
- helping or attempting to help other student(s) in an act of cheating or plagiarism.

Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were one’s own. Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:
- submitting an assignment as one's own work when it is at least partly the work of another person;
- submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from the Internet or another source;
- Incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper or presentation without giving the author credit.

**Penalties for Academic Dishonesty:** Penalties may include, but are not limited to, reprimand, no credit for the assignment or exam, resubmission of the work, make-up exam, failure of the course, or expulsion from the university. Procedure for Addressing Student Academic Dishonesty a faculty member who has evidence and/or suspects that academic dishonesty has occurred will gather all pertinent information and initiate the following procedure:

1. The faculty member will discuss all evidence of cheating or plagiarism directly with the student(s) involved.
2. After consideration of the explanation provided by the student(s), the faculty member will determine whether academic dishonesty has occurred. The faculty member may consult with the academic unit head and/or dean in making a decision.
3. After a determination of academic dishonesty, the faculty member will inform the academic unit head and submit a Report of Academic Dishonesty with supporting documentation to the office of the dean of the student’s major. This report will become part of the student's record and will remain on file with the dean's office for at least four years even if the student withdraws prior to receiving a grade.
4. For a serious first offense or subsequent offenses, the dean of the student’s major will determine a course of action, which may include dismissal from the university. The dean may refer the case to the college council for review and recommendations before making this determination.

A student's record of academic dishonesty will not be available to faculty members. The purpose of the record is for the dean to track a pattern of academic dishonesty during a student's academic career at Stephen F. Austin State University. Student Appeals A student who wishes to appeal decisions related to academic dishonesty should follow procedures outlined in Academic Appeals by Students (6.3). [http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/4.1-student-academic-dishonesty.pdf](http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/4.1-student-academic-dishonesty.pdf)

**Withheld Grades Semester Grades Policy (SFA Policy 5.5)**

At the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic unit head, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F, except
as allowed through policy [i.e., Active Military Service (6.14)]. If students register for the same course in future semesters, the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average. Please read the complete policy on grades: http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/course-grades-5.5.pdf

Acceptable Student Behavior

The MSW Student Handbook and MSW Academic and Professional Integrity Code outline acceptable student behavior. Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (see the Student Conduct of Conduct (SFA Policy 10.4). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, visits to agencies, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate or inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the Early Alert Program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance that is available to help SFA students succeed. Please see the following link for the complete policy: http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/student-code-of-conduct-10.4.pdf

X. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic-accomodation-for-students-with-disabilities.pdf
Assignment I: Integrating Research and Practice
Due Date:

Students will examine their roles as research-practitioners and consumers. This assignment will focus on the following aspects:

- The importance of becoming a research-practitioner
- The importance of becoming a research consumer
- The benefits of research-informed practice and practice-informed research

For this paper you need to select a problem from your practice experience. You will then develop a plan of how to use research to enhance your knowledge of the specific problem. For example: A student has difficulty managing a high caseload. In order to address their problem the student will research how social workers addressed the problem. By using current research (reading research reports, journal articles or conference proceedings) the study is able to come up with a solution to the problem.

Paper needs to be 4-5 pages in length. Students will also need to be prepared to discuss the assignment in class within the context of a small group and also to present a brief outline of the study and the findings.

- APA 6th edition style
- 4-5 typed pages
- Double spacing, 12 point font
- 5 references related to the problem identified from practice experience
Assignment II: Critical Thinking Exercise
Due Date:

This assignment is designed to expose students to various aspects of critical thinking. Students will use a specific taxonomy to identify the different aspects of critical thinking. Students will review different research studies and apply critical thinking skills. There are two parts of the assignment – written and oral.

The critical thinking discussion needs to be based on the student’s critical perspective. Example questions to guide the process of critical thinking are:

1. What is the main issue?
2. What is the conclusion?
3. What are the reasons/rationale for why we are to believe the conclusion?
4. What words or phrases are ambiguous?
5. What are the value conflicts and assumptions?
6. What are the descriptive assumptions?
7. Are there any fallacies in the reasoning?
8. How good is the evidence?
9. Are there rival causes?
10. Are the statistics deceptive?
11. What significant information is omitted?
12. What reasonable conclusions are possible?
13. Are there issues related to diversity that should be considered?
14. Are there social and economic justice issues that should be considered?
15. What considerations should be made regarding human behavior and the social environment?

Written Assignment:

1. Students will examine the research method for a topic of interest used in a specific study by using at least 3 sources as well as material from the textbook. Students will then prepare a 3 page written summary of the method as related to the topic.
2. Two journal articles using the same method are to be summarized as supportive examples of the method as applied to the topic in the primary article. The supporting evidence should also be 3-4 pages in length.
3. The total length of this assignment will be 6-7 pages and must include the selected article and three supporting articles in addition to the textbook.
4. Citations and reference list should be included.
5. APA style is required

**Oral Presentation:**

Students will make an oral presentation of the material they have prepared to the class on the two weeks following that the paper is submitted. An outline for one page HO will be provided in class. Presentations should not be longer than 10 minutes.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


