

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

<b>Course Number:</b>	SW 385R	<b>Instructor's name:</b>	Namkee G. Choi
<b>Unique Number:</b>		<b>Office Number:</b>	3.122D
<b>Semester:</b>	Spring 2003	<b>Office Phone:</b>	(512) 232-9590
<b>Meeting Time/Place:</b>	Th 2:30-5:30 pm SSW 2.116	<b>Office Hours:</b>	Th 12:00-2:20 PM
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**SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH METHODS  
(Course Blackboard: <http://courses.utexas.edu>)**

**I. Standardized Course Description**

This foundation course is designed to help students gain an understanding of and appreciation for the use of research as a tool for professional practice. Students are introduced to the concepts and skills underlying a systematic approach to social work research, including basic research terminology, the scientific method in social work, the value of research in social work, research ethics and the social work value base, problem formulation and conceptualization, measurement, research designs, sampling, alternative quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analytic techniques, and preparation and use of research reports.

**II. Standardized Course Objectives**

Upon completion of this course the students will be able to:

1. Explain the logic of the research process and its relationship to social work knowledge and practice;
2. Define basic research concepts and describe the basic principles of causal inference, and their relationship to the various types of research designs;
3. Describe the concept of probability and its relationship to sampling procedures; the logic of measurement and the accompanying issues of sources of error, validity, and reliability, including the use of scales, indices and the principles and tools of library research;
4. Explain how research can be used to guide professional practice at all levels on the micro-macro continuum;
5. Describe how research can be used as a tool to define, design, monitor and evaluate the outcomes of program intervention in social work practice;
6. Critically evaluate research relevant to social work and assess the implications of research for professional practice;
7. Describe how particular values and a sensitivity to ethical issues influence the conducting of research;
8. Give examples of the issues that diversity, e.g. gender, ethnicity, culture, age, sexual orientation, race, class and physical or mental ability raise in the conduct of research; and
9. Describe how social work commitment to equity and social justice influences and differentiates the social work research process.

### **III. Teaching Methods**

The primary means of instruction will be informal lectures, in-class exercises in small groups, and class discussions from the assigned reading. Students will be expected to have done the assigned reading before class and to actively participate in class and collaborate with one another.

### **IV. Required Texts and Readings**

#### **Required texts:**

Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (2001). Research methods for social work (4<sup>th</sup> ed.), Pacific Grove, CA: Wadsworth, Inc..

Rubin, A. (2001). Practice-oriented study guide for research methods for social work (4<sup>th</sup> ed.), Pacific Grove, CA: Wadsworth, Inc. (This is a companion book for the text. Used in conjunction with the text book, this “guide” will facilitate your understanding of the course material with examples and exercise questions that are “practice-oriented.”)

The following **articles** are available for your use (1) in the School of Social Work, Learning Resource Center (LRC); and (2) the UT Libraries’ Electronic Reserve Services (<http://reserves.lib.utexas.edu/>). I will provide the password for the access to the pdf file copies of the articles on the electronic reserve services.

Brophy, G. (2000). Social work treatment of sleep disturbance in a 5-year-old boy: A single case evaluation. Research on Social Work Practice, 10(6), 748-758.

Delva, J., Allgood, J. Morrell, R., & McNeece, C. A. (2002). A statewide follow-up study of alcohol and illegal drug use treatment. Research on Social Work Practice, 12(5), 642-652.

DiNitto, D. M., Webb, D. K., & Rubin, A. (2002). The effectiveness of an integrated treatment approach for clients with dual diagnoses. Research on Social Work Practice, 12(5), 621-641.

Fuscaldo, D., Kaye, J. W., & Philliber, S. (1998). Evaluation of a program for parenting. Families in Society, 79, 53-61.

Miller, D. B., Webster, S. E., & MacIntosh, R. (2002). What’s there and what’s not: Measuring daily hassles in urban African American adolescents. Research on Social Work Practice, 12(3), 375-388.

Schoenberg, N. E., Coward, R. T., & Albrecht, S. L. (2001). Attitudes of older adults about community-based services: Emergent themes from in-depth interviews. Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 35(4), 3-19.

Somlai, A. M., Kelly, J. A., Wagstaff, D. A., & Whitson, D. P. (1998). Patterns, predictors, and situational contexts of HIV risk behaviors among homeless men and women. Social Work, 43(1), 7-20.

Sowers, K. M., Ellis, R. A., Washington, T. A., & Currant, M. (2002). Optimizing treatment effects for substance-abusing women with children: An evaluation of the Susan B. Anthony Center. Research on Social Work Practice, 12(1), 143-158.

Weaver, H. N. (1997). The challenges of research in Native American communities: Incorporating principles of cultural competence. Journal of Social Services Research, 23 (2), 1-15.

## **V. Grading and Course Requirements**

### **Accumulated points and grading scale**

90 or more = A

80-89 = B

70-79 = C

60-69 = D

59 or less = F

### **Course requirements and grade assignment:**

1. Outline for a single-case evaluation study (for the instructor's feedback: ungraded; Due: February 20th): Submit a 1-page outline for your planned single-case evaluation study. The outline must briefly describe your dependent variable(s) and interventions, research design, method of data collection, and time line for the interventions.
2. Two--mid-term and wrap-up--tests (15 point each, 30 points total, closed book; February 27th and April 24th): Two multiple-choice tests will cover all materials assigned and/or discussed in class this semester. One third of the test questions will be selected from the example test questions of the Rubin and Babbie's Study Guide.
3. Critical review paper (6 pages, double-spaced: 10 points; Due: April 3rd): For this assignment, students are required to critically examine 3 empirical articles (based on analyses of quantitative or qualitative data) from the required reading list. Refer to the attached guidelines for this paper.
4. Report on a single-case evaluation study (8 pages in total, double-spaced: 30 points; Due: April 17<sup>th</sup>): For this project, students should select something that they would like to change in themselves (the dependent variable: e.g., level of perceived stress; tendency to procrastinate; smoking, and binge eating), design and implement intervention(s) that are social work in nature (independent variable(s): e.g., cognitive-behavioral interventions and support groups) to change the targeted behavior, and measure and compare the status of the dependent variable before and during the intervention phase to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention(s). Students are strongly recommended to select at least one scale/index from the Corcoran & Fischer book (refer to the Bibliography section at the end of this syllabus) as a measurement tool. Refer to the attached guidelines for the paper.
5. Group research proposal (10 pages maximum, double-spaced, for the body text of the proposal; Due: May 8th) and class presentation during the last two weeks of the semester (30 points for the written proposal and the presentation): For this assignment, 5-6 students are required to form a group and choose a research topic of common interest and write a proposal for conducting the research, following the essential steps of a study: problem formulation; literature review; hypotheses generation; choice of research design (e.g., analysis of existing data, data collected from a survey/interview of research subjects, and/or experimental design); planned methods of sampling, data collection and data analyses;

anticipated findings and their implications for social work practice, programs, and/or policies; and anticipated limitations of the study with respect to its research design and methods of data collection. Given that this is a proposal, you do not need to engage in actual data collection, but must propose how you will carry out the data collection and analysis and what you anticipate to find from the data analysis. In addition to the group research proposal, each group will have a 15-minute presentation of its work to the class. Since all the group members will receive the same points based on the grade of the group project, it is very important for all the group members to work together. Refer to the attached guidelines for the proposal and the presentation.

## **VI. Class Policies**

1. It is important for social work practitioners to be punctual in both attendance and in meeting deadlines. Thus, students are expected to attend all classes and hand in assignments on time. Students who miss more than two classes during the semester will lose 5 points, and those who miss more than four classes during the semester will lose 10 points. Also, students will lose 3 points for each day that an assignment is late. Any adjustment in assignment due dates and/or examination times **MUST** be discussed with the instructor at least 48 hours prior to the regularly scheduled date. Incompletes will not be allowed in this course.
2. Students are expected to do assigned readings before the class time and actively participate in class discussions and group exercises.
3. While scholastic dishonesty is not anticipated, students shall be subject to The University of Texas at Austin's policy on this subject, in case violations occur.
4. Students with Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability (physical or cognitive) who requires academic accommodations should contact the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259 (voice) or 471-4641 (TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing) as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations.
5. Safety: As part of professional social work education, students may have assignments that involve working in agency settings and/or community. As such, these assignments may present some risks. Sound choices and caution may lower risks inherent to the profession. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of and adhere to policies and practices related to agency and/or community safety. Students should also notify instructors regarding any safety concerns.

## VII. Course Schedule

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Text/Readings</b>
Week 1 1/16/03	<p>Introduction to course</p> <p>Role of scientific method in Social Work: Why is research important to social workers?</p> <p>Philosophical and political issues in Social Work research</p> <p>Selection into groups for group research projects</p>	Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 1-2 Study Guide, Ch. 1-2
Week 2 1/23/03	<p>Ethics and Social Work research: At whose expense? Protection of human subjects</p> <p>Issues of diversity, sensitivity, beneficence, and social justice in research</p> <p>Viewing of video: The Deadly Deception</p> <p>Purposes/types of research; The role of theory in Social Work research problem formulation</p>	<p>Rubin &amp; Babbie, Ch. 4 Study Guide, Ch. 4 <a href="http://www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/humanresearch">www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/humanresearch</a></p> <p>Weaver, H. N. (1997).</p> <p>Rubin &amp; Babbie, Ch. 3 &amp; 5 Study Guide, Ch. 3 &amp; 5</p>
Week 3 1/30/03	<p>Conceptualization, development of research hypotheses, operationalization, and levels of measurement</p>	Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 6-7 Study Guide, Ch. 6-7
Week 4 2/6/03	<p>Relationships between/among variables Reliability and validity in measurements</p> <p>Research designs: Causal inferences in group designs</p>	<p>Rubin &amp; Babbie, Ch. 10 Study Guide, Ch. 10 Miller, D. B., Webster, S. E., &amp; MacIntosh, R. (2002).</p>
Week 5 2/13/03	<p>Single-case evaluation designs Measurement in single-subject evaluation designs</p> <p>Viewing of video: Evaluating Social Work practice: A user-friendly approach</p>	<p>Rubin &amp; Babbie, Ch. 11 Study Guide, Ch. 11 Brophy, G. (2000).</p>

Week 6 2/20/03	Constructing and assessing measurement instruments  Article critiques  <b>*Outline for a single-case evaluation study due 2/20/03</b>	Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 8 Study Guide, Ch. 8  Fuscaldo, D., Kaye, J. W., & Philliber, S. (1998).
Week 7 2/27/03	<b>MID-TERM TEST</b>  <b>Consultation time for single-case evaluation study</b>	
Week 8 3/06/03	Sampling	Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 9 Study Guide, Ch. 9
Week 9 3/20/03	Surveys and interviews  Article critiques	Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 12 Study Guide, Ch. 12  Delva, J., Allgood, J. Morrell, R., & McNeece, C. A. (2002). Somlai, A. M., Kelly, J. A., Wagstaff, D. A., & Whitson, D. P. (1998).
Week 10 3/27/03	Qualitative research methods  Unobtrusive research: Field, historical, and content analyses  Viewing of video: Research methods for the social sciences	Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 13 Study Guide, Ch. 13 Schoenberg, N. E., Coward, R. T., & Albrecht, S. L. (2001).  Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 14 Study Guide, Ch. 14
Week 11 4/03/03	Program evaluation  <b>*Critical review paper due 4/03/03</b>	Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 19 Study Guide, Ch. 19 Sowers, K. M., Ellis, R. A., Washington, T. A., & Currant, M. (2002).
Week 12 4/10/03	Coding, data entry, and data cleaning	Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 15 Study Guide, Ch. 15

	<b>In-class time for group proposal: Questions and clarifications</b>	
Week 13 4/17/03	Data analysis and interpretation  <b>In-class time for group research proposals</b>  <b>*Single-case evaluation study paper due 4/17/03</b>	Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 16 Study Guide, Ch. 16
Week 14 4/24/03	<b>WRAP-UP TEST, 4/24/03</b>	
Week 15 5/01/03	Presentation of group research proposals	
<b>5/08/03</b>	<b>*Group Research Proposal due 2:00 pm, 5/08/03: Bring the proposal to the instructor's office (no class)</b>	

## **VIII. Description of Assignments and Suggested Formats:**

### ***In-class, closed-book, mid-term and wrap-up tests:***

For each test, there will be 30 (0.5 point each) multiple-choice and true-false type questions. The instructor provides opportunities for many in-class practice tests. The test questions will resemble the questions in the in-class practice tests.

### ***Guidelines for a single-case evaluation Study Paper (8 pages)***

- **Title page:** Descriptive title of the study and your name
- **Introduction:** A description of the case; a description of the client system and a conceptualization of the client's problem. Include a statement of the client's goals and the social worker's (your) goals. (It is very important to adhere to the guidelines of confidentiality to protect the identity and privacy of your client/research subject. Make sure that you use an alias and edit/change any information that may lead to his/her identification.)
- **Research problem and hypotheses:** A statement about the research problem, i.e., the hypothesis or hypotheses, including identification of dependent and independent variable(s). The dependent variable is the targeted behavior that you try to change; and the independent variable(s) is (are) the interventions that you are practicing to change the targeted behavior. (Be brief here since a more detailed description of these variables can be provided in the method section.)
- **Conceptual/theoretical framework and literature review:** (1) The theoretical background of the hypothesis, and a rationale for it (including both why it is a reasonable hypothesis, and why it is significant or worth investigating), and any underlying assumptions; and (2) a review of relevant literature: What is already known and what needs to be known.
- **Method:** (1) Description of the research design and rationale for it (This should include attention to the baseline and its importance.); (2) Description of the interventions and a rationale for it (them), operationalization of dependent variable(s), rationale for the selected measures, and their reliability and validity; (3) methods of data collection and rationale for them; and (4) description of methods you employed to try to maximize the degree of internal validity, fidelity of intervention(s), and the measurement rigor; and (5) discussion of strengths and weaknesses in methods.
- **Findings (or Results):** Report of findings, including a visual presentation of the findings. Include at least two charts, and describe the visual significance or nonsignificance of the findings.
- **Discussion and conclusion:** Discussion of clinical significance of results of study. Strengths and limitations of the study in terms of methods, interventions, and ethical issues. Implications for future research
- **Reference list:** Follow the APA format.

Note: The student will NOT be graded on the basis of conducting a successful intervention, but on the basis of demonstrating an understanding of research in single-case evaluation studies.

### **Guidelines for a Critical Review Paper**

- Briefly summarize the nature and type of the study being conducted. Assess the merits of the justification for the study. Assess the quality and relevance of the theoretical framework and the literature review.
- Identification of the major research question(s) and/or hypotheses, and, if applicable, the dependent, independent, and other variables and their operational definitions.
- Assess the strengths and limitations of the study with respect to its research design; sampling procedures, measures, reliability and validity of the measurement; data collection methods, method of analysis, and implications.
- Your recommendations as to how the article can be improved. Or how would you have written it differently, if you were the author?

### **Guidelines for a Group Research Proposal**

The purpose of the research proposal is to (1) familiarize the students with the research literature on a topic chosen by the student; (2) allow the students the opportunity to select and describe the data collection methods they think best for researching the chosen topic; and (3) allow the students the opportunity to select and describe the data analysis methods they think best for researching the chosen topic. The following is a guideline for the proposal assignment. It may not be all inclusive, and you are free to include other information which is applicable to your study. Always include complete reference and appropriate citations. You must adhere to the APA writing/reference styles for all your assignments.

**Title Page:** Descriptive title, group members' names, date, and a very brief (one paragraph) synopsis.

**Introduction (1 page):** In the first sentence, describe the purpose of the study. Then, describe the specific research question(s) you will be studying. Also, describe the significance of the chosen topic/problem to social work with reference to one or a few of the following criteria:

- a) Current issues
- b) Fills a knowledge gap
- c) Sharpens definition of an important concept
- d) Has implications for the solution of a range of practical problems
- e) Relates to a critical population (e.g. consumers of social work services)
- f) Provides an evaluation of techniques, practices, and so forth.
- g) Has implications for social policy

**Theoretical Framework and Literature Review (2-3 pages):** Provide a conceptual/theoretical framework guiding your research study. Examples may include learning theory, systems theory, role theory, life course perspective, and so on. The conceptualization of the problem need not be extensive, but is necessary.

For literature review, what is the essence of the previously published works relevant to this contemplated study? What is the current state of our knowledge? At what points is essential knowledge lacking? Cite research references currently available in the literature and state how these works are specifically related to your study. You are not expected to make an exhaustive review of the literature -- perhaps 8-12 articles will be adequate. One to three non-research articles are acceptable out of the 8-12 chosen.

Research Design and Data Collection Methods (2-3 pages):

**Hypotheses (quantitative study):** If you have one or more specific hypotheses to be tested, state them in the beginning of this section and provide a rationale (from theory or your own "theorizing") for believing that your independent variable(s) will be related to your dependent variable(s). State which variable is which. If appropriate, identify an antecedent and an intervening variable relevant to your hypotheses. If not appropriate, cite two variables you wish to control for, giving rationales. Make up a brief list of additional variables related to your study questions for which you would want to collect information.

**Design:** (a) Describe and diagram, if necessary, the best research design that can be used -- (e.g., use of existing data; survey; qualitative; quasi- or true-experimental). (b) Specify strengths and limitations. (c) Provide rough estimate of time, cost, and other resources needed to conduct the study.

**Sampling Procedures:** Describe your type of sampling plan (e.g. purposive; simple random; stratified; clustered; and multi-stage clustered) and defend your choice against any other sampling plan. Your plan must be feasible. Specify population from which sample is to be drawn, if any. How will you access them? Sample size? Representativeness? Sources of sampling bias? Other factors affecting external validity (=generalizability). Make sure your sampling plan is consistent with your chosen design.

**Data Collection:** Describe techniques to be used: coding of agency records; interviews; mailed questionnaires; participant observation; etc. Who will collect data? What instruments or recording methods will you use? Provide a brief rationale for your choice of data collection method and instruments especially as compared to alternative choices and reliability and validity considerations. Pretesting (or pilot testing) procedure, if necessary, to be utilized. Also discuss how you will adhere to the ethical guidelines when collecting data.

Data Management and Analysis; Findings, and Implications (2 pages):

**Data analysis:** Discuss applicable coding. How will you analyze your data? If applicable, which statistical tests will you perform?

**Implications of the study:** Assuming your hypotheses are supported or refuted, what are the implications of such findings for 1) theory, 2) practice, 3) policy, and 4) future research? Same points also need to be discussed for qualitative research. Briefly summarize (and discuss) the assets and limitations of your study that you have already identified in the previous sections. How will you disseminate your study findings?

References: For the articles, books, and documents that are cited in the body of the proposal.

Appendices: Any document you consider important, copies of survey questionnaire, interview schedule, and/or measurement instruments. Label each of them as a separate appendix.

#### **IV. Bibliography (Recommended readings):**

Campbell, D. T. & Stanley, J. C. (1963). Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Cook, T. D. & Stanley, J. C. (1979). Quasi-Experimentation: Design and analysis issues for field settings. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Corcoran, K & Fischer, J. (2000). Measures for clinical practice (Vols I and II). New York: The Free Press.

Gibbs, L. & Gambrill, E. (1999). Critical thinking for social workers (revised edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Herek, G. Kimmel, D. C., Amaro, H., & Melton, G. B. (1991). Avoiding heterosexist bias in psychological research. American Psychologist, 46 (9): 957-963.

Kish, L. (1965). Survey Sampling. New York: John Wiley.

Padgett, D. K. (1998). Qualitative methods in social work research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Thompson, L. (1992). Feminist methodology for family studies. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 54, 3-18.

Unrau, Y. A., Gabor, P. A., & Grinnell, R. M. (2001). Evaluation for human services. F. E. Peacock