

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH METHODS

Course Description

This is one of two research courses in the BSW curriculum. Usually taken in the student's sophomore year, the course introduces students to the use of the scientific method in social work, research ethics and the social work values base, the research process, problem formulation and conceptualization, measurement, research designs and inference, single subject designs and practice evaluation, sampling, alternative data gathering techniques and analyses, and uses of research in social work. SW 313 is a prerequisite to entry into the social work major.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of the course, the student should be able to:

1. Describe the basic steps of scientific inquiry and how they parallel the basic steps of social work practice;
2. Demonstrate an understanding of basic social work research skills pertinent to the profession of social work: a) formulation of research problems, b) formulation of research questions and hypotheses, c) use of various research methods (e.g., survey research, single subject design, experimental and quasi-experimental designs, field research, and use of secondary data), d) collection and analysis of research data, and e) interpretation of research results;
3. Critically analyze research findings and be effective consumers of, and contributors to, social work research;
4. Illustrate how gender bias or insensitivity to diverse populations can impede effective research and inference;
5. Identify research methods, sampling designs, and measurement techniques which are sensitive to diverse groups, including women, people of color, persons with disabilities, and gays and lesbians;
6. Discuss the usefulness of social science theory and research methods in social work practice;
7. Explain ethical issues in conducting and using research and the role of the social work values base in research and evaluation.

Teaching Methods

The primary means of instruction are interactive lectures (i.e., students are encouraged to ask questions and make comments), in-class exercises, class discussions, guest speakers who will discuss their research, tests, and experiential assignments.

Required Text and Additional Required Readings

The text for this course is Rubin, A., & Babbie, E. R. (2005). *Research methods for social work (5th ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Additional readings are listed on the course schedule below and can be accessed on the UT Library website unless otherwise indicated.

Student Evaluation

Your grade for the course will be based on four tests and two additional assignments.

Tests

Tests 1, 2, and 3 will each count as 15% of the final grade, and test 4 will count as 20%. The tests will contain a combination of some or all of the following types of questions: matching; true/false; and multiple choice. Test 1 is scheduled for Tuesday, February 13; Test 2 for Thursday, March 8; Test 3 for Tuesday, April 10; and Test 4 will be given at the scheduled final exam time on Wednesday, May 9, from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Assignment 1

This assignment will expose you to the process of attending academic presentations and allows you to expand your knowledge beyond what you learn in class. Social workers engage in life-long learning. Attending presentations as a student sets the stage for attending during your professional career so that you can stay abreast of the latest developments in your field.

To complete this assignment, attend an on-campus **research** lecture, symposium, colloquium, or “brown bag” talk offered by the School of Social Work, Women’s Studies, African American Studies, Population Research Center, LBJ School of Public Affairs, psychology department, sociology department, or other departments on campus. The lecture can be about any subject as long as the speaker presents original, empirical research he or she conducted and an academic department sponsors the presentation. The instructor and teaching assistant will help you identify presentations to attend. Write a 750-word, double-spaced, and typewritten description and analysis of the presentation. Include the subject matter, research questions or hypotheses, research methods, and conclusions the speakers presented, your critique of the work, and other information, such as issues the audience raised. **Be sure to relate your discussion to the material that has been covered in class by directly referring to research concepts and citing the text and referring to lectures.** For example, if you are discussing the presenter’s hypothesis, you should consider discussing whether it meets the criteria for a good hypothesis. Or, if you are discussing sampling, identify the type of sampling used, the sample’s representativeness, and other important qualities of the sample. You will not be able to cover everything about the presentation in 750 words, so after summarizing the basic idea of the presenter’s research, focus on a few points. Your paper will be graded on the quality of writing (organization, clarity, grammar) and the quality of the ideas (expression of thought, depth of thought, analytic perspective) presented. When you submit your paper, include a copy of any handouts provided during the lecture. This paper is worth 10% of the final course grade. It is **due**

on Thursday, March 22. You may turn in a draft of the paper at least two weeks in advance (no later than March 8) if you want feedback before you submit the final copy. You have plenty of time to do this assignment, but getting started early is generally a good idea. **To receive a grade for this assignment, you must also complete all 3 sections of the TILT tutorial.** TILT is sponsored by the UT Digital Library and is designed “to prepare you explore and research in the online world.” It will help you become familiar with the UT library system and how to use it, understand the seriousness of plagiarism and how to avoid it, learn how to choose reliable and appropriate sources for scholarly work, and learn how to use appropriate APA or other citation styles. The TILT website is: <http://tilt.lib.utsystem.edu/>. Once you have completed TILT and received a score of 100% on all 3 online quizzes, e-mail our TA your quiz results by typing his e-mail address (stripodi@mail.utexas.edu) when prompted after getting the quiz results.

Assignment 2

The profession of social work needs more members equipped to conduct research and utilize research in their practice. The purpose of assignment 2 is to your increase your involvement in social work research by giving you an opportunity to participate in a research project, design a research study, or apply research to a practice issue. There are three options for completing assignment 2. In addition, everyone must take the human subjects protection course at <http://www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/training/index.php>. **If you are doing Option 1, you must submit a copy of your training completion certificate to the course instructor and principal investigator or project director before beginning work on the project. If you select option 2 or 3, submit the certificate with your paper.** You are **strongly** encouraged to submit a draft of your paper before submitting the final copy.

Option One: Research Participation

Work on a UT-sponsored research project for at least 20 hours. Faculty and staff at the School of Social Work are conducting many research projects. The Center for Social Work Research is one place that offers opportunities for you to become involved in research. The instructor and teaching assistant will also help you identify suitable opportunities. This assignment should be confined to tasks that can be done on campus and that **would not jeopardize your safety**. Examples of appropriate tasks are working with a team to code qualitative data, assisting with analysis of quantitative or qualitative data, helping to design a survey instrument, or conducting telephone surveys at a supervised phone bank. Simple data entry alone is not sufficient for this assignment. **If you choose this option, turn in a sign-up sheet by Tuesday, February 6, and get the instructor’s approval before proceeding.** Familiarize yourself with the project by reading available grant proposals, human subjects review material, and discussing the study with the principal investigator or project director and other staff before you engage in project tasks. At the completion of the assignment, write a 1500 word paper describing the project and your work; devote at least 500 words to providing insights (e.g., what you learned, what you felt was most relevant about your research experience). **Be sure to relate the description of your work to the research concepts and principles such as hypothesis testing, sampling, ethical issues, etc., discussed during the semester by citing the text or referring to lectures.** The paper will be graded on the quality of writing (organization, clarity, grammar) and the quality of the ideas (expression of thought, depth of thought, analytic perspective) presented. **The paper is due on Thursday, April 26. When you turn in your paper, you must include a form provided by the course instructor.** Have the research project’s principal investigator, project director, or

other responsible staff member sign the form, indicating that you have satisfactorily completed the required hours. A passing grade cannot be assigned without this verification.

Option 2: Research Design (Undergraduate Research Fellowship)

Selecting this option will allow you to design a research study, and if your proposal is selected by a university committee, you will be able obtain up to \$1,000 to carry it out. Briefly:

The Undergraduate Research Fellowship program provides support for specific scholarly research projects conducted by full-time UT undergraduate students enrolled in any department. These fellowships are intended to cover costs associated with academic research projects proposed and written by student applicants and undertaken with the supervision of a university tenured or tenure-track faculty member, lecturer, senior lecturer or full-time research scientist/engineer. Some restrictions apply. See current application for more information.

To determine if you wish to choose this option and qualify to submit, go to the following webpage: <http://www.utexas.edu/research/vp/awards/>, scroll down, and click on “Undergraduate Research Fellowships.” The required text is no more than 2 pages. If you select this option, you must submit the proposal, and, if selected, carry it out. **It is due to the University on Tuesday, February 13**, giving you only a short time to develop it this semester. If you submit by this due date and receive funding, you will not have to take the fourth class test. You can also choose this assignment and complete it by **Thursday, April 26**, if you agree to submit it in the fall competition (assuming there will be a fall competition) and complete it if selected. You may submit a draft two weeks earlier (no later than April 12) if you wish to obtain feedback before submitting the final copy to the course instructor. If you are awarded the funding in the fall term, I will take you to lunch at the UT Club to celebrate. The instructor will make every effort to help you identify a faculty member willing to sponsor your research project.

Option Three: Evidence-based Practice Paper

To complete this assignment, read at least four articles from scholarly journals and/or scholarly research reports that report on **original** research studies on a micro, mezzo, or macro practice approach, technique, intervention, or method social workers may use in their work. The works you select can be evaluations or clinical trials using any of the research methods (quantitative and/or qualitative) addressed in this course. See the instructor or TA if you need assistance with conducting a literature review that will help you identify appropriate articles or reports. Based on your study of these works, write a 1,500-word, double-spaced, and typewritten paper. The first 500 to 750 words can be devoted to describing the studies. The remaining 750 to 1,000 words should compare and contrast the results of the studies. Your paper should end with a conclusion about the evidence or lack of evidence to support the use of the approach, technique, etc. As in Assignment 1, make sure you refer to research concepts studied in class. Pay close attention to aspects of research design such as internal and external validity. **The paper is due on Thursday, April 26.** It will be graded using the same criteria as for Assignment 1. You may submit a draft two weeks earlier (no later than April 12) if you wish to obtain feedback before submitting the final copy.

Grading

Each test, the two additional assignments, and the final grade will be based on the following scale:

The final grade will be calculated as follows:

90–100% = A	Test 1=	15%
80–89% = B	Test 2=	15%
70–79% = C	Test 3=	15%
60–69% = D	Test 4=	20%
59% AND BELOW = F	Assignment 1	10%
	<u>Assignment 2</u>	<u>25%</u>
	TOTAL=	100%

In-Class Exercises

Five in-class exercises will be used to give students an opportunity to learn experientially how to design social work research. Students will work in small groups and simulate participation on a research team. The exercises are arranged according to the stages of research design. Each student is expected to contribute to these group exercises. Groups will report on their exercises to the class. A different group member will report each time. **Students who do not participate in these exercises and report for their group will lose one letter grade at the end of the course.** The five exercises are as follows:

Exercise 1: Groups brainstorm possible research questions. The objective of this exercise is to settle on a particular research question and a hypothesis (if applicable). Groups should discuss whether their questions and hypotheses express the relationship between at least two variables, have nature and direction, and address an important social science issue.

Exercise 2: Groups identify concepts included in their questions and hypotheses and develop both conceptual and operational definitions of those concepts.

Exercise 3: Groups will select the type of research design to be used in their hypothetical studies (e.g., experimental, quasi-experimental, survey, qualitative, etc.) and explicate their design. They will also discuss the threats to internal validity posed by their design and attempt to minimize them.

Exercise 4: Groups will determine the type of sampling method and a sampling strategy to be used in their studies and their rationale for this selection. They will also consider generalizability (external validity) of study results.

Exercise 5: Groups will review and discuss the ethical issues or dilemmas raised as they went through the process of designing their study and any additional ethical issues that come to mind.

Class Policies

1. Students are expected to attend all classes, be prepared for each session by reading the materials assigned for that date **before** coming to class, and participate in class discussions, exercises, etc. Learning is also facilitated by respectful communications among all parties.
2. While scholastic dishonesty is not anticipated, students should be familiar with The University of Texas at Austin's policy on this subject found in *General Information 2006-07*. There will be two versions of each test. All non-test materials must be placed under desks during exams. Direct quotes of 5 to 40 words must be enclosed in quotation marks and the work cited. Longer direct quotes must be indented and the work cited. Paraphrased work should be cited

appropriately. If you do not know how to cite work correctly, now is the time to learn. Scholastic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism) in this class will result in a grade of F for the course with reporting to the Undergraduate Program Director, Dean of the School of Social Work, and the Dean of Students.

3. Only in the case of illness or other **unforeseen** emergencies will make-up tests be given. Please notify the instructor of the situation as soon as it is reasonably possible. The format of makeup tests is at the discretion of the instructor and may be limited to essay questions.
4. Barring emergencies, assignments are to be submitted on time. Five points per day (including weekends) will be deducted from the grade for each day the assignment is late, starting with assignments not turned in by the start of class at 11:00 a.m.
5. Only in emergency situations will a grade of X (incomplete) be assigned for the course. If an incomplete grade should be assigned, there will be a written agreement with the instructor about when and how the work will be completed.
6. The referencing style of the American Psychological Association (APA) is to be used for all written assignments. If you are not familiar with this style, a handout is available at the Student Services desk.
7. The Blackboard site available for this class will be used for e-mail, announcements, and other functions. Class e-mail rosters are a component of these sites. Students who do not want their names included in these electronic rosters must restrict their directory information in the Office of the Registrar, Main Building, Room 1. For information on restricting directory information see: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi00-01/app/appc09.html>.
8. 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.
6. As part of professional social work education, students may have assignments that involve working in agency settings and/or the 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.


Course and Instructor Evaluation

Students will have opportunities to evaluate the instructor at mid-term and at the end of the semester. You do not have to complete these evaluations, but they are helpful to the instructor. I am also available during office hours and at other mutually agreeable times to discuss the course with you.

I look forward to a productive term.

Course Schedule

Date	Description	Text/Readings
T, Jan. 16	INTRODUCTIONS WHAT IS SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH AND HOW SCIENTIFIC IS IT? EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE: MYTH OR NECESSITY?	Syllabus
TH, Jan. 18	REVIEW SYLLABUS	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 1, Scientific inquiry and social work, pp. 1-33
T, Jan. 23	RESEARCH IN THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK (GUEST SPEAKERS)	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 22, Writing research proposals and reports, pp. 627-631
TH, Jan. 25	IS THERE ANYTHING MORE PRACTICAL THAN A GOOD THEORY? IT ALWAYS STARTS WITH A PROBLEM: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 2, Philosophy and theory in science and research, pp. 34-68; Chap. 4, Problem formulation, pp. 108-139 Abbey, A., & McAuslan, P. (2004). A longitudinal examination of male college students' perpetration of sexual assault. <i>Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 72(5)</i> , 747-756.
T, Jan. 30	IN CLASS EXERCISE ON RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 5, Problem formulation (con't), Appendix A, Using the library, pp. 673-680
TH, Feb. 1	IN CLASS EXERCISE ON RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES (con't) GETTING SPECIFIC: CONCEPTS, CONSTRUCTS, AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 5, Conceptualization and operationalization, pp. 140-166 Ashford, J. B. (2006). Comparing the effects of judicial versus child protective service relationship on parental attitudes in the juvenile dependency process. <i>Research on Social Work Practice, 16</i> , 582-590.
T, Feb. 6	IN CLASS EXERCISE ON DEFINING CONCEPTS ASSIGNMENT 2, OPTION 1, RESEARCH PROJECT SIGN- UP SHEET DUE	Rubin and Babbie, Chap. 5, Conceptualization and operationalization (con't)
TH, Feb. 8	REVIEW FOR TEST 1	
T, Feb. 13	TEST 1!	
TH, Feb. 15	REVIEW TEST 1 SELECTING A GOOD YARDSTICK: THE VALIDITY OF MEASURES	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 6, Measurement, pp. 167-205 Tebb, S. (1995). An aid to empowerment: A caregiver well-being scale. <i>Health & Social Work, 20(2)</i> , 87-92.
T, Feb. 20	SELECTING A GOOD YARDSTICK: THE RELIABILITY OF MEASURES	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 6, Measurement (con't)
TH, Feb. 22	MEASUREMENT (con't): TYPES OF SCALES; WRITING GOOD ITEMS; EXAMPLES OF INSTRUMENTS MIDTERM EVALUATION OF COURSE	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 7, Constructing measurement instruments, pp. 206-238

T, Feb. 27	LOOKING FOR MINES: THREATS TO INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL VALIDITY	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 10, Experimental designs for evaluating programs and practice, pp. 313-321
TH, Mar. 1	SO MANY CHOICES: EXPERIMENTAL DESIGNS	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 10, Experimental designs for evaluating programs and practice, pp. 321-341 DiNitto, D. M., Webb, D. K., & Rubin, A. (2002). The effectiveness of an integrated treatment approach for clients with dual diagnosis. <i>Research on Social Work Practice, 12</i> , 621-641. Visit the Cochrane Collaboration (www.cochrane.org) and the Campbell Collaboration (www.campbellcollaboration.org) and read some reviews of interest to you
T, Mar. 6	SO MANY CHOICES: QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL DESIGNS REVIEW FOR TEST 2	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 10, Quasi-experimental designs for evaluating programs and practice, pp. 342-363
TH, Mar. 8	TEST 2! DRAFT OF ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE IF YOU WANT FEEDBACK	
T, Mar. 13 & TH, Mar. 15	SPRING BREAK	HAVE FUN! 
T, Mar. 20	REVIEW TEST 2 SO MANY CHOICES: SINGLE SUBJECT DESIGN	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 12, Single-case evaluation designs, pp. 364-393 Brophy, G. (2000). Social work treatment of sleep disturbance In a 5-year-old boy: A single-case evaluation. <i>Research on Social Work Practice, 10</i> , 748-758.
TH, Mar. 22	SO MANY CHOICES: SURVEY RESEARCH AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 9, Survey research, pp. 281-312; Chap. 14, Qualitative research methods, pp. 427-468 Rubin, A., & Parrish, D. (2007). Views of evidence-based practice among faculty in master of social work programs: A national study. <i>Research on Social Work Practice, 17</i> , 110-122. Wilson, K., Fyson, R., & Newstone, S. (2007). Foster fathers: Their experiences and contributions to fostering. <i>Child and Family Social Work, 12</i> , 22-31.
T, Mar. 27	UNOBTRUSIVE RESEARCH IN CLASS EXERCISE ON RESEARCH DESIGNS	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 14, Qualitative research methods (con't); Chap. 14, Analyzing available records: quantitative and qualitative methods, pp. 437-463

TH, Mar. 29	IN CLASS EXERCISE ON RESEARCH DESIGNS (con't) CHOOSE ME: PROBABILITY SAMPLING IN THE CONDUCT OF SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 8, Sampling and surveys, pp. 240-280
T, Apr. 3	PROBABILITY SAMPLING (con't) NONPROBABILITY SAMPLING IN CLASS EXERCISE ON SAMPLING	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 8, Sampling and surveys (con't) Franklin, C., Streeter, C. L., Kim, J. S., & Tripodi, S. J. (<i>under review</i>). The effectiveness of a solution-focused, public alternative school for dropout prevention/retrieval. <i>Children and Schools</i> . Will be posted on course Bb site.
TH, Apr. 5	IN CLASS EXERCISE ON SAMPLING (con't) REVIEW FOR TEST 3	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 8, The logic of sampling, (con't)
T, Apr. 10	TEST 3!	
TH, Apr. 12	REVIEW TEST 3 MEASURING OUR SUCCESS: PROGRAM EVALUATION DRAFT OF ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE IF YOU WANT FEEDBACK	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 13, Issues in program evaluation, pp. 394-426 Brooks, F., Russell, D., & Fisher, R. (2006). ACORN's accelerated income redistribution project: A program evaluation. <i>Research on Social Work Practice, 16</i> , 369-381.
T, Apr. 17	ETHICS AND POLITICS IN SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH: CAN RESEARCH ACHIEVE SOCIAL JUSTICE? IN CLASS EXERCISE ON ETHICAL ISSUES IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 3, The ethics and politics of social work research, pp. 69-106
TH, Apr. 19	ISSUES OF DIVERSITY: ETHNICITY AND CULTURE IN SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH	Rubin & Babbie, Chap. 16, Culturally competent research, pp. 496-524
T, Apr. 24	ISSUES OF DIVERSITY: GENDER & SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH	Cummerton, J. M. (1986). A feminist perspective on research: What does it help us see? In N. Van Den Bergh & L. B. Cooper (Eds.). <i>Feminist visions for social work</i> (pp. 80-100). Silver Spring, MD: National Association of Social Workers. Will be made available to you.
TH, Apr. 26	RESEARCH REPORT DAY (Use this time to work on your Option 2 paper or your third Option 1 paper.) ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE	The instructor and TA are available for consultation.
T, May 1	CRITIQUING RESEARCH STUDIES	Review DiNitto et al. article from Mar. 1, & Rubin & Parish article from Mar. 22.
H, May 3	PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER TOWARD THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH REVIEW FOR TEST 4 FINAL COURSE EVALUATION	Rubin & Babbie, Appendix B, Social Work Research and Cyberspace, pp. 609-619 Atherton, C. A. (1993). Empiricists versus social constructionists. <i>Families in Society, 74</i> (10), 617-624.

Bibliography (Recommended Readings)

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Tutty, L. M., Rothery, M. A., & Grinnell, R. M., Jr. (1996). *Qualitative research for social workers: Phases, steps, and tasks*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Tyson, K. (1995). *New foundations for scientific social and behavioral research: The heuristic paradigm*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

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