

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

Course Number:	N385R	Instructor's name:	Allen Rubin
Unique Number:	96095	Office Number:	3.130E
Semester:	Summer 2008	Office Phone:	(512) 471-9218
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Meeting Time/Place:	T, Th: 5:30-8:00 2.112 SSW	Office Hours:	T, Th: 4:00-5:30

SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH METHODS I

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 evidence-based 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 to evaluate programs and practice, sampling, alternative quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analytic techniques, and preparation and use of research reports. The emphasis in the course is on equipping students with the research knowledge and skills they'll need to engage in the evidence-based practice process at all levels of social work practice. As part of that process, they will learn how to critically appraise sources of scientific evidence and how the criteria for that appraisal will vary depending upon the purpose of the research.

II. Standardized Course Objectives: Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Formulate answerable evidence-based practice research questions;
2. Efficiently conduct advanced searches of electronic bibliographic databases and other sources to find evidence bearing on evidence-based practice research questions;
3. Critically appraise sources of scientific evidence and explain how the criteria for that appraisal will vary depending upon the purpose of the research;
4. Discuss why research evidence needs to be integrated with practice expertise and idiosyncratic client preferences, circumstances and values in the evidence-based practice process;
5. Design evaluations as part of evidence-based practice.
6. Explain how both qualitative and quantitative research processes apply in evidence-based practice;
7. Define basic qualitative and quantitative research concepts and describe the basic principles of causal inference, and their relationship to the various types of research designs;
8. Describe key concepts in measurement bearing on evidence-based practice, such as sources of measurement error, reliability and validity, and measurement equivalence across cultures.
9. Find measurement instruments applicable to evidence-based practice, sources of evidence bearing on the suitability of those instruments for specific practice scenarios, and critically appraise those sources from the standpoint of measurement principles and cultural sensitivity.

10. Describe the logic of probability sampling procedures, issues in the use of non-probability sampling procedures, how sampling issues bear on conducting evidence-based practice research at mezzo and macro levels of practice, and the implications of sampling for appraising and integrating sources of evidence in guiding practice decisions;
11. Describe how particular values and sensitivity to ethical issues influence the conducting of research;
12. Give examples of the issues that diversity (e.g., gender, ethnicity, culture, age, sexual orientation, race, class, and physical or mental ability) raises in the conduct of research and in appraising and utilizing research to guide practice decisions;
13. Critically appraise 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 in class exercises, class discussions from the assigned readings, and in-class team work with instructor consultation on assigned term papers. Students will be expected to have done the assigned readings before class.

IV. Required Texts:

Rubin, A. (2008). *Practitioner's Guide to Using Research for Evidence-Based Practice*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Other readings are found on the course agenda. Hard copies will be made available for your use in the School Of Social Work, Learning Resource Center. Electronic copies can be downloaded on Blackboard.

V. Grading:

20 points	There will be a 5-item true/false quiz at the beginning of most class sessions. Each quiz will assess whether the student read and recalls the main points of the assigned readings for that session. The overall percentage of correct answers across all but two quizzes will account for 10 percent of the course grade. The two quizzes with the lowest percentage of correct answers will be dropped from this calculation. Regardless of the reason for absences or tardiness, any quizzes that are missed due to absence or tardiness will be included among the two dropped quizzes. If more than two quizzes are missed (regardless of the reason) those additional quizzes will be included (with a score of zero) in the overall calculation.
10 points	Preliminary Draft of Paper #1 (described later in Section VIII of this syllabus)
10 points	Preliminary Draft (without results) of Paper #2 (described later in Section VIII of this syllabus)
25 points	Paper #1: Final Version
25 points	Paper #2: Final Version (with graphed results)
10 points	Class attendance and participation

All grades will be determined in the following manner:

Accumulated Points and Grading Scale

100 - 94 = A
93 - 90 = A-
89 - 87 = B+
86 - 84 = B
83 - 80 = B-
79 - 77 = C+
76 - 74 = C
73 - 70 = C-
69 - 67 = D+
66 - 64 = D
63 - 60 = D-
59 and below = F

VI. Course Requirements

Two term papers and quizzes at the start of most class sessions. Class attendance and thoughtful participation reflecting advanced studying of the assigned readings before class.

VII. Class Policies

Drops: May be approved by instructor up to July 8

Incompletes and late submissions: Should be approved in advance by instructor and will be considered only in the case of compelling circumstances.

The university recommends that instructors specify policies on scholastic dishonesty. In this course, scholastic dishonesty may result in a grade of an F in the course and a report to the MSSW Program Committee and the Office of Graduate Studies. While I do not anticipate scholastic dishonesty occurring, for further information, the student may refer to the Web Site of the Student Judicial Services, Office of the Dean of Students (<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/academicintegrity.html>).

Persons 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.

Safety: 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 instructor regarding any safety concerns.

VIII. Team Term Papers:

Each of these two papers will be completed and presented by the same team of about 4-5 students.

Paper #1: Evidence-Based Practice Review and Plan

Approximately 10-15 pages, double-spaced, stapled

10 points	Preliminary draft	Due in class on July 8
25 points	Final version	Due in class on July 29

The focus of the paper should be on selecting and describing an evidence-based intervention and evaluation plan (as well as a backup plan) for a problem (or a real client or a fictional client that you make up) related to social work practice. The level of practice can be micro or macro. A few examples of problems might be: abusive parents (prevention or treatment), traumatized children or adults, Iraqi war veterans with PTSD, welfare reform, community development, family preservation, substance abuse, homelessness, depression among nursing home residents, preventing hospitalization among individuals with chronic brain disorders, coping with death and dying, marital problems, runaways, school dropout, HIV/AIDS prevention, caregiver burden, and many more – these are just some illustrations to help you consider what you may want to choose.

The paper should reflect appropriate implementation of all Steps of the Evidence-Based Practice process (as described in class and in the required text on evidence-based practice. The intervention plans (Plan A and Plan B) that you select should emerge from a review of recently published outcome studies and systematic reviews (if any) on the effectiveness of interventions that have been tested in the past for your selected problem.

The Plan A intervention you select should have the best scientific evidence supporting its effectiveness for the practice problem in question.

The Plan B intervention you select should have good (not the best) evidence supporting its effectiveness for the practice problem in question and should be selected as a backup in case client attributes or feasibility constraints were to make Plan A inadvisable or undoable.

Be sure to address the major methodological strengths and/or weaknesses of the key studies you review. Show that you can distinguish those studies that are sufficiently sound methodologically to guide practice from those whose methodological weaknesses imply the need for more rigorous research before evidence-based practice implications are warranted. Explain/justify your intervention plan based on the evidence you have found in your review.

In addition to describing the evidence for the chosen intervention, the paper should identify other interventions that have been proposed or tested for the selected problem and why they had less or worse evidence than the interventions in Plan A and Plan B.

There is no specific minimum number of studies that you need to review; however, because this is a team project, your literature search should be thorough. **Important** – Do **Not** just select an intervention plan in advance and then restrict your literature review exclusively to that intervention. Instead, review recent outcome studies on whatever interventions have been tested for your selected problem, and then select and describe Plan A and Plan B based on that review. Your paper can be guided by the following outline:

- I. Briefly describe the practice problem and evidence-based practice question.
- II. Describe the way you searched for the best evidence (internet search engines, websites, abstracts, etc.)
- III. Briefly describe each chosen intervention (Plan A and Plan B).
- IV. Critically appraise the main study(s) that led you to choose these plans.
- V. Compare the study(s) above to the studies on other interventions that you did not select, specify those other interventions, and explain why the selected interventions had the best evidence.
- VI. Formulate a single-case design to monitor outcome or evaluate your own effectiveness in implementing Plan A. This section should:
 - A. Describe your research design and why you chose it (e.g., AB, ABAB, B+, etc.)
 - B. Describe and justify what you will measure, source of data (Self-report? Behavioral observation? etc.), any measurement instruments used (i.e., reliability? validity?), who will measure, and when each measurement will be taken.
 - C. Identify and justify how many data points you will have in each phase.

The preliminary drafts of both papers will be graded more leniently than the final version. Students will have the opportunity to incorporate instructor feedback in improving the final versions.

Paper #2: Evidence-Based Practice Self-Change Project

Approximately 10-15 pages, double-spaced, stapled

10 points	Preliminary draft	Due in class on July 8 (Results not included)
25 points	Final version	Due in class on July 29

The focus of the paper should be on selecting, describing, and actually conducting an evidence-based intervention and evaluation for a self-change project for one of the students on your team. The intervention should apply to something that the student would like to improve, such as smoking less, eating better, exercising more, sleeping better, and so on. Also, the target problem and intervention should not be something that was included in Paper #1.

Paper #2 should reflect appropriate implementation of all Steps of the Evidence-Based Practice process (as described in class and in the required text on evidence-based practice). The intervention plan that you select should emerge from a review of recently published outcome studies and systematic reviews (if any) on the effectiveness of interventions that have been tested in the past for your selected problem.

The intervention you select should have the best scientific evidence supporting its effectiveness for the self-change goal and be feasible to carry out in this project. If the intervention with the best evidence is not feasible, then select an alternative intervention that is feasible and has the best evidence among those that are feasible.

Be sure to address the major methodological strengths and/or weaknesses of the key studies you review. Show that you can distinguish those studies that are sufficiently sound methodologically to guide practice from those whose methodological weaknesses imply the need for more rigorous research before evidence-based practice implications are warranted. Explain/justify your intervention plan based on the evidence you have found in your review.

There is no specific minimum number of studies that you need to review; however, because this is a team project, your literature search should be thorough. **Important** – Do **Not** just select an intervention plan in advance and then restrict your literature review exclusively to that intervention. Instead, review recent outcome studies on whatever interventions have been tested for your selected change goal, and then select and describe the selected intervention based on that review.

After you have selected the intervention, you should implement it in the context of a single-case design. Unlike Paper #1, which requires only that you formulate a single-case design, this paper requires that you implement that design, collect data for it, and report and interpret its results.

Although only one team member will be the focus of the intervention, the division of labor can be made equitable by having other team members carry prime responsibility for other tasks in the evidence-based practice process, such as searching for and appraising studies, preparing graphs, and writing the report. Team members might also be involved in the intervention, such as serving as a support group, accompanying the focused team member in exercising, and so on.

Your paper can be guided by the following outline:

- I. Briefly describe the self-change goal.
- II. Briefly describe the chosen intervention
- III. Critically appraise the main study(s) that led you to choose the intervention
- IV. Compare the study(s) above to the studies on other interventions that you did not select, specify those other interventions, and explain why the selected intervention had the best evidence or was just more feasible.
- V. Formulate and carry out a single-case design to monitor outcome or evaluate your own effectiveness in implementing Plan A. This section should:
 - A. Describe your research design and why you chose it (e.g., AB, ABAB, B+, etc.)

- B. Describe and justify what you measured, source of data, any measurement instruments used, who measured, and when each measurement was taken.
- C. Identify and justify how many data points were in each phase.
- D. Report and interpret the visual significance (or lack thereof) of your results, discuss alternative plausible interpretations, and draw conclusions.

The preliminary drafts of both papers will be graded more leniently than the final versions. Students will have the opportunity to incorporate instructor feedback in improving the final versions. For paper #2, data will not yet have been collected in time for inclusion in preliminary draft; however, students will be able to incorporate instructor feedback on results from in-class presentation of results later in the semester.

IX. Course Schedule

Date	Description	Readings
June 5 -10	Introduction to course; Overview of evidence-based practice; Formation of teams for term paper projects	Rubin, Chs. 1-2
June 12	Research hierarchies Team project work with instructor consultation	Rubin, Ch. 3
June 17	Criteria for inferring effectiveness Team project work with instructor consultation	Rubin, Ch. 4, Appendix A
June 19	Critically appraising experiments Team project work with instructor consultation	Rubin, Ch. 5, Appendix B
June 24	Critically appraising non-equivalent comparison groups designs Team project work with instructor consultation	Rubin, Ch. 6, Appendix C
June 26	Critically appraising time-series designs and single-case designs Team project work with instructor consultation	Rubin, Ch. 7, Appendix D
July 1	Critically appraising systematic reviews and meta-analyses Team project work with instructor consultation	Rubin, Ch. 8, Appendix E
July 3	Team Project Day – In lieu of class, teams work on one or both of their projects.	
July 8	Critically appraising and selecting assessment instruments	Rubin, Ch. 11, Appendix H

	Team project work with instructor consultation	
July 10	Monitoring Client Progress Preliminary drafts of Papers 1 & 2 due in class	Rubin, Ch. 12
July 15	Critically Appraising Nonexperimental quantitative studies Team project work with instructor consultation	Rubin, Ch. 9, Appendix F
July 17	Critically appraising qualitative studies Team project work with instructor consultation	Rubin, Ch. 9, Appendix G
July 22-29	Team presentations of Papers 1 and 2	
July 29	Unfinished business and course evaluation FINAL PAPERS DUE IN CLASS	