

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH METHODS

Course Number: SW 313	Instructor: S. L. Rivaux, Ph.D., LMSW
Unique Number: 61090	Office Number: SSW 3.104A
Semester: Fall 2016	E-mail: s_rivaux@austin.utexas.edu
Meeting Time: T Th 2-3:30 PM	Office Hours: Th 12:45-1:45 and by appointment
Meeting Place: SSW 1.214	

Course Description

This course is one of two research courses in the BSW curriculum. The course introduces students to the following topics: social work values, the research process, problem formulation and conceptualization, measurement, research design and inference, single subject design and practice evaluation, sampling, alternative data gathering techniques and analyses, and uses of research in social work. SW313 is a prerequisite for entry into the social work major.

The goal of the course is to help students develop a basic understanding of the research process in order to engage with research for evidence-based practice.

Standardized Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course students should be able to:

- 1) Describe the fundamental steps of scientific inquiry and how they parallel the basic steps of social work practice; **(PB 21 and 22)**
- 2) Demonstrate an understanding of the following basic social work research skills pertinent to the profession: 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; **(PB 21, 22, 41)**
- 3) Critically analyze research findings and be effective consumers of, and contributors to, social work research; **(PB 22 and 41)**
- 4) Illustrate how gender bias or insensitivity to diverse populations can impede effective research and inference; **(PB 41)**
- 5) Identify research methods, sampling designs, and measurement techniques which are sensitive to diverse groups, including women, people of color, persons with disabilities, and members of the LGBT community; **(PB 41)**
- 6) Discuss the usefulness of social science theory and research methods in social work practice; **(PB22)**
- 7) Explain ethical issues in conducting and using research, as well as the role of the social work values in research and evaluation; **(PB 41)**
- 8) Determine feasibility, practicability, and generalizability of research findings. **(PB 41)**

The School of Social Work has been continuously accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) since 1952. In order to maintain our accreditation status, we engage in ongoing curriculum assessment to demonstrate compliance with CSWE's Education Policies and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). Several required courses in our curriculum are part of this ongoing assessment, including this course. Below is a list of the specific Educational Policies (EP) and Practice Behaviors (PB) that are addressed in this course. The complete EPAS can be found in your Student Handbook.

- **EP 2.1.6 Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.**
 - **PB 21** Use practice experiences to inform scientific inquiry. Objectives 1, 2.
 - **PB 22** Use research evidence to inform practice. Objectives 1, 2, 3, 6.
- **EP 2.1.10d Evaluation**
 - **PB41** Critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate interventions. Objectives 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8.

Teaching Methods

The primary means of instruction will be informal lectures (i.e., students are encouraged to ask questions and make comments during lectures), class discussions, and in-class exercises using computers and other materials. Students will be expected to have completed the assigned reading before class, to actively participate in class, and to collaborate with one another. Students are encouraged to meet individually with the instructor to review their progress in the course and to ask questions regarding the course content and the social work profession.

Required and Recommended Texts and Materials

Required Text

Rubin & Babbie (2016). *Essential Research Methods for Social Work, 4th Edition*. Cengage Learning.

Supplemental Readings

The Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) e-Source online resource for Behavioral and Social Sciences Research. Access online at:

<http://www.esourceresearch.org/tabid/226/Default.aspx>

Electronic copies of additional readings will be posted to Canvas during the semester. Students are responsible for checking for these readings regularly.

Canvas

Canvas will be used extensively in this course. On Canvas, you will find most materials needed for this course. Use Canvas to find:

- Additional readings
- Homework assignments and exams to be completed online;
- Course materials such as the syllabus;
- Powerpoint presentations used in lectures;
- All course announcements;
- Access to e-mail addresses to ask questions about assignments.

Access Canvas at: <http://canvas.utexas.edu>

While the University has invested significant resources in support of Canvas, there are still periodic outages and slow-downs. **If you wait until the last minute to complete assignments on Canvas, you may encounter difficulties.**

Grading and Course Requirements

Accumulated points and grading scale

94-100 = A 90-93.999 = A- 87-89.999 = B+ 84-86.999 = B 80-82.999 = B-
77-79.999 = C+ 74-76.999 = C 70-73.999 = C- 67-69.999 = D+ 64-66.999 = D
60-63.999 = D- Below 60 = F

Grades will NOT be rounded up.

Course requirements and grade assignment: The final grade will be computed from grades two examinations (20% each), an evidence-based research paper (25%), in-class exercises or quizzes (10%), a research presentation critique (10%), completing human subjects protections training (5%), and class attendance/preparation/participation (10%). Excessive absences will result in grade reductions per the policy described below. Optional extra credit assignments may be offered during the semester.

All writing assignments must be written in an academic tone in accordance with American Psychological Association (APA) 6th ed. guidelines. You can find information about APA style here: www.apastyle.org and at the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL at Purdue) <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/> . You can get help in persona at the Undergraduate Writing Center on campus: <http://www.uwc.utexas.edu> .

All writing assignments should be submitted to the professor by the due date/times.

Class attendance, preparation, and participation (10% of grade)

It is important that social work practitioners take responsibility for their own continued learning and for acting in a professional manner. Thus, students are expected to maintain good attendance, to complete assigned readings before the class meeting for which they are assigned, to compile questions regarding the material for class discussion, and to actively participate throughout class meetings.

Students are expected to attend all classes and to arrive punctually. Coming late and/or leaving early by more than 10 minutes will be considered a “missed” class. While it is expected students will attend all classes if at all possible, students may have up to two permitted “misses” in the event of unexpected emergencies, medical appointments, university-sanctioned events, or religious holidays. To have a permitted miss, you must email the instructor before that class period. Missing more than three classes will result in a 2% per missed class deduction from the student’s final grade. To encourage class attendance, those students who miss no classes will earn an extra 2% to be applied to their final grade. Please inform the instructor if you will be late or not attend class.

In the event a class must be cancelled, students will be provided an assignment to help them practice the material for that day. Conscientious completion of such assignments will count as attendance for that class. Assignments that are not completed or that are less than 50% correct will be considered an unexcused absence.

Examinations (40% of grade, 20% each)

There will be two exams, each time-limited to 75 minutes. Tests will cover all material

assigned for and discussed in class. Although each test will focus mainly on the content in the classes since the last test, class content is inevitably cumulative. Grades on exams will be released only after all students have completed the exam. Q & A sessions will be provided before each test.

Exams are to be taken at the scheduled time. Only in the case of emergencies and then only with instructor approval will make-up exams be offered. Please notify the instructor of the situation as soon as it is reasonably possible. The date and time for the makeup exam will be scheduled at a time that is mutually convenient to the student and the instructor.

Evidence-based Practice Research Paper (25% of grade)

This paper is designed to help you apply key research concepts to a research topic of your choice. Although you will not be completing an entire research project, you will be asked to complete the following evidence-based practice steps for a real-life social work issue with a specific population (e.g., PTSD in Iraqi veterans, acculturation experiences of African immigrants, depression in the elderly). The final paper should be 11-12 pages long plus references and will consist of four parts:

1. Formulate an answerable EBP question.
2. Search for research evidence in peer-reviewed journals to answer that question.
3. Critically appraise the evidence for its validity, impact, and applicability.
4. Integrate the critical with your practice experience and your population's unique circumstances to make recommendations.

Learning to write about research is a process. Therefore, drafts of portions of this paper will have individual due dates (see course schedule) so that students can get detailed feedback to strengthen their final paper.

Please use the following outline for your paper:

- I. Problem statement: Educate your reader about your practice problem by briefly describing it (client characteristics, presenting problem/practice issue, other contextual issues) and present your EBP question. Describe the prevalence of the problem in the general population, population information, and why your practice problem needs to be addressed. (about 1 page)
- II. Describe your process for searching for reliable research on the problem (search terms, search engines/databases used, your selection process for articles, etc.). A thorough literature search should include both journal articles, books, book chapters, and other trustworthy sources. Emphasis should be given to the most recent research. (1 page or less)
- III. Briefly describe the different approaches that are used to address the problem. Include a description of the interventions and a summary of the available research evidence on its effectiveness. You should review a minimum of two scholarly articles presenting effective interventions, however, the use of more studies will strengthen your paper and is therefore, strongly recommended. You cannot use articles used in class. Emphasis should be on studies that describe the effectiveness of an intervention for the problem (i.e., outcome studies). (1-2 pages)
- IV. Based on the studies you reviewed, select and present one strong intervention that you believe presents a viable solution to the practice problem. This intervention should be both relevant to your target population and rigorous enough to be implemented. (3-5 pages)
 - A. Describe the practice solution/intervention that was supported by this study/systematic review.
 - B. Critically appraise the methodology of the study or the studies of a systematic

review and describe why the methodology was strong enough you would use it to guide your practice. Include both description and analysis of the study design, sample, sampling procedure, validity and reliability of measures, data collection, threats to internal and external validity, and any other relevant aspects of the method. Address both the strengths and limits of the studies.

C. Explain why this intervention has stronger evidence than the other(s) you reviewed.

V. Assess and describe the fit of this practice solution/intervention for your client. Does it seem applicable to your client's preferences, culture, values, goals? Does it seem realistic (time needed, intervention cost, etc.)? Why or why not? Do you have any reservations about using this intervention? What considerations are there in implementing this intervention in the practice setting? (1-2 pages)

VI. Conclusion: Conclude your paper by briefly restating the importance of your topic, your paper's purpose and primary findings. Discuss gaps in the research literature and suggest directions for future research. (~1 page)

Human Subjects Protections Training (5% of grade)

Social research generally includes data obtained through studying human subjects. Therefore, this course requires students to complete training in protecting human subjects. The Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research Course 1 can be accessed at: https://utdirect.utexas.edu/citi/citi_login.WBX

Students may submit a printed or electronic copy of their course completion certificate.

In-Class Exercises and Quizzes (10% of grade)

There will be 12 in-class exercises, assignments, or quizzes. These will not be announced prior to class and quizzes will be given in the first 10 minutes of class. Therefore, it is important to attend all classes and arrive on time so you do not miss any of these. Grading for each will be credit or no credit. Credit will be given if the student would have earned a B or higher on the assignment had grading been done that way. Each assignment that receives credit will count as 1% of the final grade. Students may drop the two lowest scores, or, if they have received credit for all of them, earn 2% extra credit. There is no make-up for in-class assignments nor will assignments be taken by email. The student must be present in the class to receive credit.

Research Presentation Report (10% of grade)

Students should attend an on-campus research lecture, symposium, colloquium, or "brown bag" on a topic of relevance to social work. You might consider talks presented by researchers at the School of Social Work, Women's Studies, African American Studies, the Population Research Center, LBJ School of Public Affairs, psychology, sociology, or other academic department or research unit on campus.

The lecture can be on any subject of interest to you as long as the speaker presents original, empirical research they conducted and an academic department or research unit sponsors the presentation. The instructor will help you identify presentations to attend.

Write a 4-5 page, double-spaced, and typewritten description and analysis of the presentation. Include the overall subject, the specific research questions or hypotheses, research methods used, the speaker's conclusions, and any issues raised by the audience. Critique the work based on research concepts we've studied in class, citing the text, and referring to lectures. For example, when discussing the researcher's data collection, you should consider whether their processes created any methodological strengths or

weaknesses. It may be helpful to email the presenter to request the lecture's PowerPoint if no handouts were provided.

You likely will not be able to critique every aspect of the researcher's work in 5 pages. So focus on the most critical points. The papers will be graded on writing quality (organization, clarity, grammar, APA), integration of class content, and the quality of the ideas presented (clear expression of thought, depth of thought, analytic perspective). When you submit your paper, include a copy of any handouts provided during the lecture.

University and School Notices and Policies

The University of Texas Honor Code. The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Professional conduct and civility in the classroom. The professor expects students to act as professionals in class. This means students should arrive on time for class, be prepared to participate in the class discussion, and show respect for one another's opinions. A course brings together a group of diverse individuals with various backgrounds. Students are influenced and shaped by such factors as ethnicity, gender, sex, physical abilities, religious and political beliefs, national origins, and sexual orientations, among others. We expect to learn from each other in an atmosphere of positive engagement and mutual respect. Social Work also deals with complex and controversial issues. These issues may be challenging and uncomfortable, and it would be impossible to offer a substantive classroom experience that did not include potentially difficult conversations relating to challenging issues. In this environment we will be exposed to diverse ideas and opinions, and sometimes we will not agree with the ideas expressed by others. Nevertheless, the professor requires that students engage one another with civility, respect, and professionalism.

Unanticipated distress. Students may experience unexpected and/or distressing reactions to course readings, videos, conversations, and assignments. If so, students are encouraged to inform the professor. The professor can be responsive and supportive regarding students' participation in course assignments and activities, but students are responsible for communicating clearly what kind of support is desired. If counseling is needed, students may contact a service provider of their choosing, including the UT Counseling Center at 512-471-3515 or online at <https://cmhc.utexas.edu/>.

Policy on Social Media and Professional Communication. Public social networks are not private. Even when open only to approved or invited members, users cannot be certain that privacy will exist among the general membership of sites. If social work students choose to participate in such forums, please assume that anything posted can be seen, read, and critiqued. What is said, posted, linked to, commented on, uploaded, subscribed to, etc., can be accessed and archived, posing potential harm to professional reputations and prospective careers.

Social work students who use social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and other forms of electronic communication (i.e. blogs, etc.) must be mindful of how their communication may

be perceived by clients, colleagues, faculty, and others. Social work students are expected to make every effort to minimize material which could be considered inappropriate for a professional social worker in training. Because of this, social work students are advised to manage security settings at their most private levels and avoid posting information/photos or using any language that could jeopardize their professional image. Students are asked to consider the amount of personal information posted on these sites and are obliged to block any client access to involvement in the students' social networks. Client material should not be referred to in any form of electronic media, including **any** information that might lead to the identification of a client or compromise client confidentiality in **any** way. Additionally, students must critically evaluate any material that is posted regarding community agencies and professional relationships, as certain material could violate the standards set by the School of Social Work, the Texas Code of Conduct for Social Workers, and/or the NASW Code of Ethics.

Social work students should consider that they will be representing professional social work practice as well as the University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work program while in the classroom, the university community, and the broader area communities.

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. 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/>).

Use of Course Materials. The materials used in this course, including, but not limited to exams, quizzes, and homework assignments, are copyright protected works. Any unauthorized duplication of the course materials is a violation of federal law and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the student. Additionally, the sharing of course materials without the specific, express approval of the professor may be a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty, which could result in further disciplinary action. This sharing includes, among other things, uploading class materials to websites for the purpose of distributing those materials to other current or future students. Do not upload course materials or share them electronically without the express permission of the course instructor.

Documented Disability Statement. Any student who requires special accommodations must obtain a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471- 6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). A student should present the letter to the professor at the beginning of the semester so that needed accommodations can be discussed and followed. The student should remind the professor of any testing accommodations no later than five business days before an exam. For more information, visit <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>.

Religious Holidays. By UT Austin policy, students must notify the professor of a pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If the student must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, the professor will give the student an opportunity to complete

the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Title IX Reporting. In accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the University of Texas at Austin is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from discriminatory conduct based on gender. Students who report incidents of sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, or sexual misconduct to faculty, instructors, and/or staff who supervise students, will be provided a list of University resources. If the incident is impacting the academic environment, a report will be provided to the University's Title IX Coordinator. Further information, including student resources related to Title IX, may be found at <http://socialwork.utexas.edu/dl/files/academic-programs/other/qrg-sexualharassment.pdf>.

Campus Carry Policy. The University's policy on concealed fire arms may be found here: <https://campuscarry.utexas.edu>. You also may find this information by accessing the Quick Links menu on the School's website.

Classroom Confidentiality. Information shared in class about agencies, clients, and personal matters is considered confidential per the NASW Code of Ethics on educational supervision and is protected by regulations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as well. As such, sharing this information with individuals outside of the educational context is not permitted. Violations of confidentiality could result in actions taken according to the policies and procedure for review of academic performance located in sections 3.0, 3.1, and 3.2 of the Standards for Social Work Education.

Use of E-mail for Official Correspondence. Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, students are responsible for reading their email for university and course-related information and announcements. Students are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to their e-mail address. Students should check their e-mail regularly and frequently—daily, but at minimum twice a week—to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-sensitive. Students can find UT Austin's policies and instructions for updating their e-mail address at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php>.

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 notify the professor regarding any safety concerns.

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL). If students are worried about someone who is acting differently, they may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone their concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

Emergency Evacuation Policy. Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation

- Familiarize yourself with all building and classroom exit doors. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the professor's instructions.
- Do not re-enter a building unless you are given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.
- Link to information regarding emergency evaluation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: www.utexas.edu/emergency
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform the professor in writing during the first week of class.

Course Policies and Notices

Canvas Course Website: The instructor uses Canvas (a web-based, course-management system with password-protected access) as the primary means of communicating with students. All course materials will be posted on the course's Canvas site. Canvas may also be used to communicate and collaborate online, to post grades, to give online quizzes or surveys. Students are responsible for checking this site regularly for class announcements and for new postings. Support in using Canvas can be obtained from the ITS Help Desk by calling 475-9400 between 8AM-6PM on Monday through Friday. Please plan accordingly.

Late Assignment Policies: Except in the case of extreme emergencies, and then only with prior permission from the professor, late assignments will not be accepted without penalty. Students will lose 3 points for each day that an assignment is late. If the due date is a problem, then the student must contact the professor and negotiate another due date at least **48 hours PRIOR** to the date specified in the course syllabus.

Incompletes: Students are expected to complete all course work by the last day of class and to complete all assignments by the dates due. Only in emergency situations will an incomplete grade be given for a course and only when, prior to the emergency, the student has been in attendance and has done satisfactory work. 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.

Computer and Other Electronic Device Use Policy: Students are expected to use laptops and handheld tech in class for class-related purposes only. To engage in other types of tech use (e.g., accepting or making phone calls, texting, online surfing, etc.) is unprofessional and disruptive to the course. Thus, students who violate this policy may be asked to leave the classroom and will be marked absent for the day.

Feedback on Learning: During this course the professor will ask students to provide feedback on their learning in informal as well as formal ways. It is very important for the professor to know the students' reactions to what is taking place in class, so students are encouraged to inform the professor on how her teaching strategies are helping or hindering student learning, ensuring that together the professor and students can create an environment effective for teaching and learning.

Course and Instructor Evaluations: At the end of the semester, I will use the standard Course Instructor Survey (CIS) provided by the University of Texas at Austin. The CIS offers provides a systematic, campus-wide method of evaluating courses and instructors. I hope that every student will complete the CIS. Although important, these evaluations are after-the-fact. Therefore, I strongly encourage you to provide input and feedback regarding the course during the semester so that together we can make this course of maximum benefit to you!

Course Schedule

The anticipated schedule of activities for this course is as follows. Reading due dates are the class for which the reading is listed. Homework assignments are given on the day listed. The instructor reserves the option to modify the schedule if deemed necessary. References to chapters are from the course textbook, from online e-sources, or from readings posted on Canvas.

Date	Description	Text/Readings/Assignments
Th, 8/25	Introduction	Syllabus Review
T, 8/30	Why study research? Evidence-based practice Research topics	Rubin and Babbie, Chapters 1 & 2
Th 9/1		Visit the Cochrane Collaboration and the Campbell Collaboration (www.cochrane.org) (www.campbellcollaboration.org) and read some reviews of interest to you – be prepared to discuss.
T, 9/6	Human Subjects Protections Training Certificate due Research Ethics	Rubin and Babbie, Chapter 16
Th, 9/8		
T, 9/13	The Research Process	Rubin and Babbie, Chapters 3 & 4
Th, 9/15		
T, 9/20	Literature review	Rubin and Babbie, Chapters 5 & 6
Th, 9/22	Conceptualization	
T, 9/27	Measurement	Rubin and Babbie, Chapters 7 & 8
Th, 9/29	Measurement Instruments	
T, 10/4	Parts 1-3 of EBP paper due Surveys	Rubin and Babbie, Chapters 9 & 10
Th, 10/6	Sampling	
T, 10/11	Experimental designs	Rubin and Babbie, Chapter 11
Th, 10/13	Experimental designs continued Single case designs Pre-exam Q & A	Rubin and Babbie, Chapter 12
Th, 10/20	Exam 1	
T, 10/25	Program evaluation	Rubin and Babbie, Chapter 13
Th, 10/27	Qualitative methods	Rubin and Babbie, Chapter 14
T, 11/1	Qualitative methods	
Th, 11/3	Qualitative data analysis	
T, 11/8	Secondary analysis	Rubin and Babbie, Chapter 15
Th, 11/10	Culturally competent research	Rubin and Babbie, Chapter 17 “Cultural Competency: A practical guide for mental health service providers” http://www.hogg.utexas.edu/uploads/documents/cultural_competency_guide.pdf
T, 11/15	Data analysis - Quantitative	Rubin and Babbie, Chapter 18
Th, 11/17	Library day to work on paper	
T, 11/22	Optional: Drafts of EBP paper	

Th, 11/24	Research Presentation Report due Writing Research Proposals / Reports	Rubin and Babbie, Appendices a & B
T, 11/29	Final draft of EBP paper due Pre-exam Q & A	
Th, 12/1	Second exam	