

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

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| Course Number: | SW 385R | Instructor's name: | S. Rivaux, PhD, LMSW |
| Unique Number: | 64290 | Office Number: | SSW 3.104A |
| Semester: | Spring 2014 | Office Phone: | (512) 698.3831 |
| Meeting Time: | Th 5:30-8:30PM | Office Hours: | Th 2:15-3:15 & by appointment |
| Meeting Place: | SSW 2.118 | Instructor's e-mail: | s_rivaux@austin.utexas.edu |

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.

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

1. Formulate answerable evidence-based practice research questions; **(PB22)**
2. Efficiently conduct advanced searches of electronic bibliographic databases and other sources to find evidence bearing on evidence-based practice research questions; **(PB22)**
3. Critically appraise sources of scientific evidence and explain how the criteria for that appraisal will vary depending upon the purpose of the research; **(PB22 & PB41)**
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; **(PB22)**
5. Design evaluations as part of evidence-based practice. **(PB21 & PB41)**
6. Explain how both qualitative and quantitative research processes apply in evidence-based practice; **(PB22 & PB41)**
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; **(PB22 & PB41)**
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. **(PB22 & PB41)**
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. **(PB22 & PB41)**
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; **(PB22 & PB41)**

11. Describe how particular values and sensitivity to ethical issues influence the conducting of research; **(PB21, PB22 & PB41)**
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; **(PB21, PB22 & PB41)**
13. Critically appraise how social work commitment to equity and social justice influences and differentiates the social work research process. **(PB21)**

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 assessed in this course. The complete EPAS can be optioned from your Student Handbook.

EP2.1.6: Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.

PB21 Use practice experiences to inform scientific inquiry

Objectives 5, 11, 12, 13

Assignment: Paper, Exams #1 and #2, Class discussions and presentations

PB22 Use research evidence to inform practice

Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Assignment: Paper, Class discussions and presentations

EP2.1.10d: Evaluation.

PB41 Critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate interventions

Objectives 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Assignment: Paper, Exams #1 and #2, Class discussions and presentations

Teaching Methods

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

Required Text and Readings

(Students are responsible for the material in the assigned readings whether or not the material is discussed in class.)

Required text:

Rubin, A. & Bellamy, J. (2012). *Practitioners guide to using research for evidence-based practice* (2nd edition). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

This book is also available as an e-book through the publisher:

<http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-111823880X.html>

Required statistics readings: This is not a statistics course and in-depth knowledge of statistics is not required to succeed in this course. However, basic conceptual understanding of statistics is critical to any research endeavor. Therefore, statistical tests and concepts may be included as part of course content. Students may use a statistics textbook to review these topics if they have one available or may refer to resource such as this online, public-domain resource:

Online Statistics Education: A Multimedia Course of Study (<http://onlinestatbook.com/>). Project Leader: David M. Lane, Rice University. Available: <http://onlinestatbook.com/2/index.html>

Additional readings: Electronic copies of other readings will be posted to Blackboard during the semester. Students are responsible for checking the Blackboard course site regularly for these.

Websites relevant to this course

<http://www.campbellcollaboration.org> (meta analysis of the effects of interventions in the social, behavioral, crime and justice, and educational arenas)

<http://www.cochrane.org> (meta analysis of the effects of health and mental health interventions)

http://www.psych.org/psych_pract/treatg/pg/prac_guide.cfm (practice guidelines for psychiatrists for each psychiatric/mental/cognitive disorders)

<http://evidencebasedprograms.org>: Social programs that work

Grading and Course Requirements

Accumulated points and grading scale

94-100 = A 90-93.99 = A- 87-89.99 = B+ 84-86.99 = B 80-82.99 = B- 77-79.99 = C+
74-76.99 = C 70-73.99 = C- 67-69.99 = D+ 64-66.99 = D 60-63.99 = D- <=59.999 = F

Grades will NOT be rounded up.

Course requirements and grade assignment: The final course grade will be computed from grades on two exams (50%), one group proposal project (40%), and class participation/attendance (10%). One optional extra credit assignment will be offered (3%).

1. Two exams, a midterm and a final, will cover all materials assigned and/or discussed in this course. Each exam is worth 25% of the course grade.
2. Group written research proposal (no more than 18 double-spaced pages, page limits exclude title page, references and appendices) and class presentation: The proposal will be worth 30% and the presentation will be worth 10%. Students will work in teams to write a proposal for a research project on a program/service/intervention addressing a chosen problem. Note that page limits will be strictly adhered to and any pages beyond the allowable limit will not be considered in grading the project. Each group will also present their research proposal to the class in an approximately 15-minute presentation.

The project will be completed in stages: (1) a concept paper, (2) a background and literature review, (3) the presentation to the class, and (4) the final proposal. Because learning to write about research is a learning process, only the presentation and final proposal paper will be graded. Written feedback will be provided after each step of the process so students can improve their work before the final project is submitted for grading.

Since group members will rely on each other to get a good grade on this project, it is very important that group members contribute actively and equally. Thus, with submission of the final paper, each student must also send the instructor a paragraph describing the contributions of each group member (themselves included) and assessing each member's performance in producing the paper and presentation. Should any individual not share sufficiently in the workload, the instructor may assign a lower grade commensurate with the individual's contributions. Students are responsible for talking to the instructor if group members are not participating equally in the project.

3. Class attendance and participation (10%): It is important for social work practitioners to be punctual both in meeting deadlines and in attendance. Thus, students are expected to attend all classes, if at all possible. Students are permitted **one** excused absence. A student will also be considered absent if they arrive

more than 15 minutes late to class or leave more than 15 minutes early unless that student provides a reasonable reason for doing so in advance and receives instructor permission. Medical documentation will be required to avoid losing grade points for more than one absence. Please inform the professor if you will be late or not attend class.

Students are expected to do assigned readings before the class meeting for which they are assigned, to compile questions regarding the material for class discussion, and to actively participate in both class discussions and group exercises.

4. **Optional extra credit - Human subjects protections training (3%):** Most social science research uses information about human subjects. Due to the potential for abuses in the research context, federal and university rules govern how research on human subjects can be conducted. All research about human subjects conducted at the University must be approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) before starting. The major goals of IRB review are to minimize risk to human subjects (beneficence), ensure all subjects consent to participate with full information about the project and its risks (autonomy), and promote equitable conduct of research (justice). Therefore, students who wish to better understand the processes – or who just want to earn an extra 3% - may take the human subjects protection course (CITI) at: www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/humansubjects/training/index.html. When you complete the course, a completion certificate will be presented. Turn this in to the instructor to receive credit. Keep a copy for yourself in case you need it later.

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 in class. 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. We will not, nor should we, always agree with one another. In this environment we should be exposed to diverse ideas and opinions, and sometime we will not agree with the ideas expressed by others. However, the professor does require that students engage one another with respect and professionalism.

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/>).

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). Present the letter to the professor at the beginning of the semester so that needed accommodations can be discussed. The student should remind the professor of any testing accommodations no later than five business days before an exam. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

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.

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

- Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.
- 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

Blackboard: The instructor uses Blackboard (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 Blackboard site. Blackboard 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 Blackboard 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 computers in class for class-related purposes only. To engage in other types of computer use and/or electronics use (e.g., accepting or making phone calls, texting, surfing the net, etc.) is unprofessional and disruptive to the course. Thus, students who violate this policy may be asked to leave the classroom.

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 below. Reading due dates are the class for which the reading is listed. The instructor reserves the option to modify the schedule if deemed necessary. References to chapters are from the course textbook. Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard.

| Date | Description | Text/Readings |
|----------------|---|--|
| Week 1 1/16 | Introduction to course Introduction to evidence-based practice and policy Form teams for paper assignment Discuss human subjects assignment | Rubin & Bellamy, Ch 1 Read description of www.campbellcollaboration.org and www.cochrane.org |
| Week 2 1/23 | Evidence-based social work practice and policy; Philosophy and theory; the Dodo Bird verdict Review basic statistical concepts: variables, levels of measurement, sampling, descriptive v. Inferential statistics, clinical v. statistical significance | Rubin & Bellamy, Ch 2-3, Appendix B Review statistical topics in text or online |
| Week 3 1/30 | Ethics and politics Culturally competent research Criteria for inferring effectiveness HUMAN SUBJECTS ASSIGNMENT DUE | Rubin & Bellamy, Ch 4 Fischman (2010) Frieden and Collins (2010) |
| Week 4 2/6 | Critically appraising experimental designs | Rubin & Bellamy, Ch 5 Read and be prepared to discuss Week 4 articles from Blackboard |
| Week 5 2/13 | Critically appraising experiments and quasi experiments CONCEPT PAPER FOR RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE | Rubin & Bellamy, Ch 5-6 Read and be prepared to discuss Week 5 articles from Blackboard |
| Week 6 2/20 | Critically appraising time-series designs and single-case designs Review for mid-term exam | Rubin & Bellamy, Ch 7 Read and be prepared to discuss Week 6 articles from Blackboard |
| Week 7 2/27 | MID-TERM EXAM (1.5 hour) (The rest of the class time will be used to discuss / work on research proposals) | |

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| | Mid-course evaluation | |
| Week 8 3/6 | Review exam Critically appraising systematic reviews and meta-analyses | Rubin & Bellamy, Ch 8 Read and be prepared to discuss Week 8 articles from Blackboard |
| 3/10- 3/15 | **SPRING BREAK** | |
| Week 10 3/20 | Critically appraising non-experimental quantitative studies. PART ONE OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE (TITLE PAGE, INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND, LITERATURE REVIEW) | Rubin & Bellamy, Ch 9 Read and be prepared to discuss Week 10 articles from Blackboard |
| Week 11 3/27 | Critically appraising qualitative studies | Rubin & Bellamy, Ch 10 |
| Week 12 4/3 | Qualitative methods continued | Week 12 readings from Blackboard |
| Week 13 4/10 | Critically appraising and selecting assessment instruments Monitoring client progress | Rubin & Bellamy, Ch 11-12 Week 13 readings from Blackboard |
| Week 14 4/17 | FINAL EXAM (1.5 hour) (The rest of the class time will be used to discuss & work on research proposals) | |
| Week 15 4/24 | Review exam Presentation of research proposals | |
| Week 16 5/1 | Presentation of research proposals Course evaluation | |
| ****FINAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL PAPERS AND ASSESSMENTS OF GROUP MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS ARE DUE BY 5/2/2013 AT NOON. **** | | |