

The University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work

Doctoral Comprehensive Exam Course

<b>Course Number:</b>	SW 395K	<b>Instructor:</b>	Barbara Jones, Ph.D., MSW
<b>Unique Number:</b>	63021	<b>Office Number:</b>	SSW 3.122F
<b>Semester:</b>	Spring 2012	<b>Office Phone:</b> <b>Email:</b>	(512) 475-9367 <a href="mailto:BarbaraJones@mail.utexas.edu">BarbaraJones@mail.utexas.edu</a>
<b>Meeting Time:</b> <b>Place:</b>	Tuesdays 11:30-2:30 SSW 2.140	<b>Office Hours:</b>	or by appointment

**I. Course Description**

The purpose of the comprehensive exam is to demonstrate knowledge of the substantive issues, key research questions, theory, empirical evidence, and implications related to a specific area of interest to the student. As such, the exam is an extension of the work that students have conducted during the previous year and a half in the doctoral program. The knowledge gained and summarized for papers from coursework may be useful in defining the scope and content of this exam.

The comprehensive exam is a collaborative process between the student and the comprehensive exam committee chair, with participation by other members (2) of the comprehensive exam committee. The paper is meant to assist in building a solid foundation for an extended body of academic work. The topic must be broad enough to give the student a firm foundation in an area of study that can sustain a long-term research agenda, i.e., the comprehensive exam is not intended to be background merely for a single research project such as the dissertation. It aims to include the background and knowledge base of a larger area of focus that will provide the context for the student's dissertation. On the other hand, the topic cannot be so broad that it loses meaning as an identifiable body of work.

The course is a seminar and designed to provide on-going support and feedback concerning the process of developing the area of focus and the various components of the comprehensive exam paper. It has been designed to maximize progress on the paper. Unlike other courses in the doctoral sequence, this course focuses more on the process of developing this document than on the mastery of content from lectures and readings. As such, the writing assignments that are to be completed should support the objectives of the comprehensive paper. It is the responsibility of the student to complete the various sections leading to the final document and the various writing assignments are meant to facilitate this process.

## II. Course Objectives

At the beginning of this course, students should have a chair of the comprehensive exam who agrees to provide guidance and have identified two additional members for the exam committee.

By the end of the class, students should have developed a first-draft of the comprehensive exam paper, complete with all areas identified in the course outline.

## III. Methods of Instruction

The methods of instruction will be in a seminar format, with class discussions and student presentations. This course will focus on experiential learning through discussions concerning the process of developing the comprehensive exam paper and associated issues. Reading of new material will be related to the student's topic area and focus of the paper. Readings should be directed by not only the student's own continuous learning, but by the chair of the comprehensive exam committee and others that the student views as necessary for additional consultation.

## IV. Class Policies

All written assignments are to be typed in double space. E-mail submissions are required.

1. Students are expected to attend class sessions and participate in seminar-type, interactive discussions between students and professor. Regular attendance to class meetings and contribution to thoughtful discussions will be considered in assigning the final grade, which is CREDIT/NO CREDIT. Students are to notify the professor if they are going to be absent.
2. Except in the case of extreme emergencies, and then only with the permission of the professor, late assignments will not be accepted. No assignments will be accepted late and there will be no "make-up" of assignments. Students are expected to email all required assignments on the due date set by the professor. Note that the professor will send a reply email when the paper is received; if you do not receive a reply before the end of the day the paper is due, contact the professor immediately. Email is great, but not ALWAYS reliable!
3. Student feedback is welcome. Students are also encouraged to provide feedback during office hours, by phone, by e-mail, and by appointment if they desire. Because this is the first time students and faculty have been through this process, constructive feedback will be needed and encouraged.

### *Special Accommodations for Students with a Disability*

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259; 471-4641 TTY. Please notify the professor of any special accommodations that you may need prior to the end of the second week of class.

### *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://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs>).

**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 practice related to agency and/or community safety. Students should also notify instructors regarding any safety concerns.

**VI. Course Requirements and Grading**

CREDIT = meets the requirements of written assignments, attendance and participation, and demonstrates evidence of in-depth critical thinking and analysis

**Course Requirements**

1. Writing assignments for various sections of comprehensive exam paper  
Writing assignments will be required to facilitate development of the comprehensive exam paper. Each of the sections of the comprehensive exam paper will be submitted, by email, to the instructor. Each section will be read by instructor with feedback; however, it should be understood that this feedback is only meant as a guide as the student will rely on committee chair and members to guide the substantive content. Feedback will focus on readability, focus, logic of argument, understandability, etc.
  
2. Student presentations of two sections of their paper Each student will present two sections of their paper as outlined below. Presentations will include 3-5 slides with a focus on gaining feedback from class members. Focus of feedback will include suggestions concerning content, clarity of logic, inclusiveness/exclusiveness of topics, etc.
  
3. Participation in class discussion The student will be evaluated on overall engagement, participation, and involvement they demonstrate during class discussions.

**VII. Class Schedule**

Date	Description	Course assignments
Jan. 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Course</li> <li>• Discuss objectives of the Comprehensive Paper and Oral Exam</li> <li>• Handout of suggested outline</li> </ul>	

Date	Description	Course assignments
<b>Jan. 24</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of examples of Comprehensive papers – differences/structure/outline elements</li> <li>• Timelines</li> <li>• Discuss issues in developing outline for comprehensive paper – hand out of examples and structure</li> <li>• Guest Speaker : Dr. Susan Schorn</li> </ul>	Provide instructor list of chair and committee members, if identified
<b>Jan. 31</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No class: individual meetings with instructor to discuss outline</li> </ul>	Outline of Comp. paper due at least 1 day before meeting with instructor
<b>Feb. 7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss feedback on outlines – issues, process, challenges, solutions</li> <li>• Discuss meetings with chair and possible committee members</li> <li>• Discuss statement and significance of the area of interest and its significance to SW and the focus of Comprehensive Paper</li> <li>• Guest Speakers: Jeremy Goldblach and Kat Montgomery, who successfully defended comprehensive papers</li> </ul>	
<b>Feb.14</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each student to present overview of their area that will be included in comprehensive paper – may use about 5 powerpoint slides and must provide handout of slides for each person in class. 20 minutes for presentation of area, class feedback and discussion.</li> </ul>	Student Presentation of Scope of Topic area for comprehensive paper
<b>Feb. 21</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of key concepts and issues.</li> <li>• Discussion of what concepts need special attention</li> <li>• Guest speaker- PhD student, Jerry Cochran, who successfully defended comprehensive paper</li> </ul>	
<b>Feb. 28</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the dominant theories or conceptual frameworks used in area of research focus</li> <li>• Students discuss general theories that have been applied as well as more specific theories or frameworks used in focus area.</li> <li>• Guest speaker, Dr. Susan Cadell, Wilfred Laurier University</li> </ul>	Description of key concepts and issues section – due by 12:00 today.

Date	Description	Course assignments
<b>Mar. 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No class: individual meetings with instructor to discuss key concepts section</li> </ul>	
<b>Mar. 13</b>	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	
<b>Mar. 20</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of the empirical evidence</li> <li>Includes synthesis of current state of knowledge</li> <li>Discuss how to write this section – Organization strategies, specific topics to address, synthesis</li> <li>Handouts of examples for organizing tables</li> <li>Guest Speaker, Joy Learman, PhD student who successfully defended her comprehensive exam</li> </ul>	Dominant theories and frameworks section - due by 12:00 today
<b>Mar. 27</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No class: individual meetings with instructor to discuss theory section</li> </ul>	
<b>Apr. 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discussion of topics based on priority needs of students</li> </ul>	OUTLINE of Literature review section - due by 12:00 today
<b>Apr. 10</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No class: individual meetings with instructor to discuss literature review outlines</li> </ul>	
<b>Apr. 17</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Methodological challenges and issues</li> <li>Critique research designs, sampling and data collection methods used in area of interest.</li> <li><u>Each student should be prepared to present categories of topics what will be included in this section of paper to class. Include an example of how tables will be used for this section</u></li> </ul>	Student Presentation of methodological challenges and issues for comprehensive paper
<b>Apr. 24</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss policy/practice implications section</li> <li>Discuss oral defense strategies and issues</li> <li>Course evaluations and wrap-up</li> </ul>	Methodological challenges and issues section - due by 12:00 today
<b>May 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>meet with instructor to discuss methodology section</li> </ul>	

## Comprehensive Paper Outline Suggestions

I. Introduction -- statement of the area of interest and its significance/relevance to social work –  
(*approximately 8-15 pages*)

A. Scope of the problem

- ☐ Problem statement – why study this issue, the “so what” of this issue
- ☐ Epidemiology – briefly describe prevalence of issue
- ☐ Brief description of population – who is impacted by the problem
- ☐ Theoretical relevance or implications – what theories provide basis for addressing problem
- ☐ Clinical and/or Policy significance

B. Organization of the comprehensive paper

- ☐ Summarize various components that will be included in the full paper

2. Description/definitions of key concepts and issues – (*approximately 10-15 pages*)

A. Key concepts defined

- ☐ Provide historical context/setting for the issue (this may go here or in another place, depending on focus)
- ☐ Population described specifically
- ☐ Define key characteristics
- ☐ Define key terms related to issue – operational definitions

B. Summarize section - table?

3. Theories and theoretical frameworks - (*approximately 20-25 pages*)

A. Provide overview of theories associated with issue

- ☐ Describe theory broadly, then more specifically as it relates to topic
- ☐ Be careful not to include so many that become difficult to describe how theory related to the topic
- ☐ Only include those theories that are truly related to your topic – (remember the scope of your issue and the importance of providing good background, but not everything ever written that ‘could’ be related)
- ☐ May include diagrams of theory models to clarify for readers the components of the theory as it relates to topic

B. Summarize section with identification/critique of the theory or set of theories that make the most sense to focus on in your topic area.

4. Review of the empirical evidence, including a summary, consensus, & synthesis of current knowledge – (*approximately 40-45 pages*)

A. Provide organized structure for review of literature, including subheading for various areas that will be discussed.

- ☐ Headings might include:
  - population characteristics
  - risk factors
  - measures of various concepts included in area
  - various intervention strategies used with population
  - types of studies that been conducted

- types of groups/characteristics that are included in topic area
  - barriers and resources
  - assessment strategies
- B. Summarize/synthesize the findings – tables very helpful
5. Methodological challenges and issues, including critique of the methods and data analysis used in the studies reviewed – (*approximately 10-15 pages*)
- A. Provide subheadings of several methodological issues, such as
- Samples and sampling strategies and recruitment issues
  - Research designs
  - Measurement – standardized, non-standardized instruments
    - Table of various measures for focus concept = Dep. Variable of interest
  - Analytic procedures – types of analyses conducted
  - Create table(s) of all empirical articles organized by design, sample, dependent variable, independent variables, etc.
- B. Summarize limitations of methods
- C. Suggest methods and next steps for research to address limitations (great content for committee during oral defense to ask you questions)
6. Implications for policy and/or practice – (*approximately 8-15 pages*)
- A. Include subheadings for relevant sections:
- Social work practice
  - Policy
  - Research
- B. Conclusion to this section
- C. Conclusion to the entire paper