

# The University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work

## Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Course

<b>Course number:</b>	SW 395K	<b>Instructor:</b>	Diana DiNitto
<b>Unique number:</b>	62125	<b>Office Number:</b>	SSW 3.130B
<b>Semester:</b>	Spring 2015	<b>Office Phone:</b>	512-471-9227
<b>Meeting time</b>	T 11:30-2:30	<b>E mail:</b>	ddinitto@mail.utexas.edu
<b>Meeting place</b>	SSW 2.122	<b>Office hours:</b>	T 2:30-3:30 & by appt.

### 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 her/his comprehensive exam committee chair and participation by two other social work faculty members. 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 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

By the beginning of this course, each student should have identified the chair of her/his comprehensive examination and identify two additional social work faculty members to serve on the exam committee. The chair should agree to provide guidance during this course and throughout the process. By the end of the class, students are expected to develop a first-draft of the comprehensive exam paper that is complete with all areas in the paper outline.

### III. Methods of Instruction

This course focuses on the development of an individual comprehensive exam paper. The course will be conducted in seminar format and will include independent thinking and writing, student presentations of their work, class discussion, and guest speakers (as may be helpful). The bulk of the reading will be on the student's topic area and focused on her/his paper. These substantive readings will be directed by the student, the chair of the comprehensive exam committee, and others that the student views as necessary for additional consultation. The course instructor has suggested additional reading on topics of general interest to the class focused on conducting literature reviews and on the writing process. Class time will be an opportunity to synthesize readings, ask questions, seek guidance and receive feedback.

The course instructor (and your comprehensive exam committee chair) will provide critiques of your work. We will also try using a buddy or partner system in which each class member will be paired with another class member. Your partner will be asked to read your materials and provide peer support and helpful comments.

### IV. Textbooks and Reference Material

Reading will focus largely on the comprehensive exam paper topic you have selected. The following texts are suggested as ones that may help in the literature review and synthesis, writing, and critical thinking processes. Since students' needs may differ, each student may select readings useful for her/him.

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: Author This is the referencing style generally used by social workers and the one adopted for most work in the UT Austin School of Social Work. Other style manuals are available should students wish to consult them.

Cooper, H., Hedges, L. V., & Valentine, J. C. (Eds.). (2009). *Handbook of research synthesis and meta-analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Available electronically at UT Libraries website. This edited volume contains considerable information specific to meta-analysis such as on analyzing effect sizes. There are chapters particularly relevant to the comprehensive exam paper (e.g., use of databases, research synthesis, assessing quality of literature).

Galvan, J.L. (2013). *Writing literature reviews: A guide for students in the social and behavioral sciences* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pyczak Publishing. This is a basic, practical guide. Section IV of this syllabus (Class Schedule) refers to chapters in this book should students wish to consult them.

Rudestan, K. E., & Newton, R. R. (2015). *Surviving your dissertation* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE. There are many books on writing the dissertation. Though our course focuses on the comprehensive exam paper, this book contains information helpful in writing the comprehensive exam such as conducting literature reviews, understanding research studies, etc. It may also help you start thinking ahead to the dissertation.

Strunk, W., Jr., & White, E. B. (2013). *The elements of style* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson. Also available is Strunk, W., Jr., printed October 10, 2014, a brief volume that focuses on language usage, rules of grammar, and punctuation.

Williams, J. M., & Bizup, J. (2014). *Style: Lessons in clarity and grace* (11<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson. This book is designed you help you improve your writing.

## V. Policies Specific to this Course

**Professional conduct:** Your attendance, attention, and participation are expected for all class sessions. Participation includes reading all assigned materials prior to the class session and engaging in class discussions and exercises. Lively class discussion is encouraged. Respectful communication is necessary to the learning environment. Please turn off cell phone ringers and refrain from text messaging and other non-class activities. Students are also expected to observe professional codes of conduct with regard to confidentiality, dress, language, and other matters and exercise good judgment while working with agencies, organizations, and other entities on assignments for this course.

**Attendance:** Arriving late and/or leaving early are considered class absences. **Ten points** will be deducted from the final course grade for the first class absence not due to illness, an (unforeseen) emergency, or observance of a religious holy day (attending weddings and family reunions or work conflicts are generally not cause for an excused absence). Generally, missing two or more classes will result in an F for the course or the need to withdraw from the course regardless of circumstances.

### **Submitting assignments:**

- All work should be word-processed (typewritten) and usually double-spaced in 12-point font and with reasonable margins.
- Assignment due dates are noted in the course calendar. Each assignment is due in hard and electronic copy by the date specified. Except in the case of serious illness or an emergency, assignments are expected to be submitted on time.
- The current edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA) is the style manual to be used.
- Appropriate referencing of citations (authors, titles, page numbers, etc.) is required. This includes giving due credit to others when indirect quotes (paraphrasing) and direct (verbatim) quotes are used. Short direct quotes (of 5 to 39 words) must be placed in quotation marks. Long direct quotes (40 or more words) must be indented. Paraphrasing requires more than changing a word or two in a sentence. Failure to give due credit to others will result in an “F” for the course. **Plagiarism is a form of scholastic dishonesty and will be addressed as such (see next item).**

**Scholastic Dishonesty:** Scholastic dishonesty may result in a report to the Doctoral Program Director, the Dean of the School of Social Work, the Dean of the Graduate School, and/or Student Judicial Services. Students may receive an “F” for the course and other sanctions in accordance with University policies, including dismissal from the

University. Also see information on UT's policy on scholastic dishonesty at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/>.

**Course modifications:** Should any modifications or changes need to be made to the course (e.g., calendar, assignments), students will be notified in class and/or by e-mail. Students should check their e-mail frequently, and students who are absent from class should check on announcements made in class during their absence. We will periodically take time to review the course format and make modifications that the instructor and students deem necessary to facilitate progress on preparing the comprehensive exam paper.

**Canvas:** The Canvas website will be used for some class functions, and some course communication will also be done via e-mail. Also see UT's policy on e-mail below in section B.

## **VI. Official University and School of Social Work 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.

**CLASSROOM CIVILITY.** 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 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.

**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 instructor. The instructor 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 can contact a service provider of their choosing, including the UT Counseling Center at 512-471-3515 or online at [www.utexas.edu/student/cmhc/](http://www.utexas.edu/student/cmhc/).

**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 (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and other forms of electronic communication (e.g., 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 CLASS MATERIALS.** The materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, exams, quizzes, and homework assignments are copyright protected works. Any unauthorized copying of the class materials is a violation of federal law and may result in disciplinary actions being taken against the student. Additionally, the sharing of class materials without the specific, express approval of the instructor 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 includes, among other things, uploading class materials to websites for the purpose of sharing those materials with other current or future students.

**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, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

**USE OF E-MAIL FOR OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE TO STUDENTS.** 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 exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.  
If you require assistance to evacuate, inform the professor in writing during the first week of class. 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. A link to information on emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures is [www.utexas.edu/emergency](http://www.utexas.edu/emergency).

## **VI. Course Requirements and Grading**

The reading, writing, class exercises, and discussions are designed to facilitate continuous development of the comprehensive exam paper. The course instructor will provide feedback on content, substance, writing style, and other elements of the paper (e.g., conformity of the drafts to the purpose and outline of the work). This feedback is meant to be helpful in preparing the comprehensive exam paper. The course instructor assigns a grade for this course, but the student’s comprehensive exam committee chair and committee members determine whether the work meets the comprehensive examination paper requirements.

The course assignments and due dates are provided immediately below and are also noted on the course schedule. The outline or structure of each student's comprehensive exam paper may differ somewhat, but these assignments are intended to reflect the material generally included in the paper.

- Jan. 20: One paragraph description of your comprehensive exam (comp) paper topic and purpose and tentative title
- Jan. 27: Ten page draft of first section(s) of comp paper
- Feb. 3: Outline of your comp paper. Review, contrast, and be prepared to discuss two successfully defended comp papers.
- Feb. 10: One table summarizing conceptual literature and one summarizing empirical literature relevant to your comp paper
- Feb. 17: A 15-20 minute discussion of concepts, theories, models, and conceptual frameworks underlying comp paper
- Feb. 24: Draft of section on concepts, theories, models, and conceptual frameworks underlying comp paper
- Mar. 3: A 15-20 minute discussion of empirical studies/findings relevant to your comp paper
- Mar. 10: Draft of section on empirical studies/findings relevant to your comp paper
- Mar. 24: 15-minute summary of critique of conceptual and empirical literature relevant to your comp paper
- Mar. 31: Draft of critique of conceptual and empirical literature relevant to your comp paper
- Apr. 7: Draft of section on implications for research, policy, and social work education and practice
- Apr. 14: Draft of entire comp paper
- Apr. 28: Revised draft of comp paper
- May 5: Summary of comp paper and comments on comp paper process

This course is offered on a CREDIT/NO CREDIT basis. Receiving CREDIT means that the student has met **all** the requirements of written assignments, presentations, attendance, and participation in class exercises at the level of depth the comprehensive exam requirement demands. NO CREDIT means failure to meet one or more of these requirements.

## VII. Class Schedule

Date	Topics	Assignments
<p>Week 1 Jan. 20</p>	<p>Course overview Students' presentations of their comprehensive exam paper topic and purpose Follow up to December meeting on conducting literature reviews Discussion of progress to date and future plans Preparation for compiling material, developing annotations and tables of relevant literature (conceptual and empirical articles, books, reports), and other resources Questions and concerns</p>	<p>Review materials provided in December on comprehensive exam requirements and suggested outline</p> <p>Bring to class <b>six</b> copies (one for each class member and one for the instructor) of a one-paragraph description of your comprehensive exam paper topic and purpose, including a tentative title for the paper.</p> <p>Readings specific to your comprehensive exam paper and, for example, Galvan, Introduction to the Fifth Edition; Chapter 1, Writing Reviews of Academic Literature: An Overview; 2, Considerations in Writing Reviews for Specific Purposes; Chapter 3, Selecting a Topic and Identifying Literature for Review</p>
<p>Week 2 Jan. 27</p>	<p>Individual meetings with course instructor and comprehensive exam committee chair should she/he be available and wish to participate (hereafter referred to as "individual meetings")</p>	<p><b>Prior to this meeting</b>, submit to the course instructor, committee chair, and your partner a draft of approximately 10 pages or more of the first section(s) of your comprehensive exam paper.</p> <p>Readings specific to your comprehensive exam paper and, for example, Galvan, Chapter 4, General Guidelines for Analyzing Literature; Chapter 5, Analyzing Quantitative Research Literature; Chapter 6, Analyzing Qualitative Research Literature</p>



<p>Week 3 Feb. 3</p>	<p>Discussion of the outline for your comprehensive exam paper and progress with literature review, compiling material, developing annotations and tables of relevant literature (conceptual and empirical articles, books, reports), and other resources</p> <p>Discussion of successfully defended comprehensive exam papers</p> <p>Preparation for organizing and writing materials on concepts, theories, models, and conceptual frameworks relevant to your comprehensive exam paper</p>	<p>Bring to class six copies of the outline for your comprehensive exam paper.</p> <p>Review two successfully defended comprehensive exam papers and be prepared to compare and contrast them in class (e.g., their structure, strengths, etc.).</p> <p>Readings specific to your comprehensive exam paper and, for example, Galvan, Chapter 7, Building Tables to Summarize Literature; Chapter 8, Synthesizing Literature Prior to Writing a Review</p>
<p>Week 4 Feb. 10</p>	<p>Individual meetings</p>	<p><b>Prior to this meeting</b>, submit to the course instructor, committee chair, and your partner one table that summarizes conceptual literature you have been reviewing for your comprehensive exam paper and one table reviewing empirical findings.</p>
<p>Week 5 Feb. 17</p>	<p>Discussion of concepts, theories, models, and conceptual frameworks relevant to your comprehensive exam paper</p> <p>Preparation for writing materials on empirical studies/findings relevant to your comprehensive exam paper</p>	<p>Be prepared to spend 15 to 20 minutes discussing the concepts, theories, models, and conceptual frameworks underlying your comprehensive exam paper.</p> <p>Readings specific to your comprehensive exam paper and, for example, Galvan, Chapter 9, Guidelines for Writing a First Draft; Chapter 10, Guidelines for Developing a Coherent Essay</p>

<p>Week 6 Feb. 24</p>	<p>Individual meetings</p>	<p><b>Prior to this meeting</b>, submit to the course instructor, committee chair, and your partner a draft of materials that review the concepts, theories, models, and conceptual frameworks relevant to your comprehensive exam paper.</p> <p>Readings specific to your comprehensive exam paper and, for example, Galvan, Chapter 11, Guidelines on Style, Mechanics, and Language Usage</p>
<p>Week 7 Mar. 3</p>	<p>Discussion of empirical studies/findings relevant to your comprehensive exam paper Preparation for writing critique of conceptual literature and research studies relevant to your comprehensive exam paper</p>	<p>Be prepared to spend 15 to 20 minutes discussing empirical studies/findings relevant to your comprehensive exam paper.</p> <p>Readings specific to your comprehensive exam paper and, for example, Galvan, Chapter 12, Incorporating Feedback and Refining the First Draft</p>
<p>Week 8 Mar. 10</p>	<p>Individual meetings</p>	<p><b>Prior to this meeting</b>, submit to the course instructor, committee chair, and your partner a draft of materials that discuss empirical findings relevant to your comprehensive exam paper.</p> <p>Readings specific to your comprehensive exam paper and, for example, Galvan, Chapter 13, Preparing a Reference List</p>
<p>Mar. 17</p>	<p>Spring break</p>	<p>Get some well deserved R&amp;R</p>
<p>Week 9 Mar. 24</p>	<p>Discussion of critique of conceptual literature and research studies relevant to your comprehensive exam paper Prepare for writing section on implications for social work practice, social work education, and social welfare policy and administration</p>	<p>Come to class prepared to critique the conceptual and empirical literature relevant to your comprehensive exam paper.</p> <p>Readings specific to your comprehensive exam paper</p>

Week 10 Mar. 31	Individual meetings	<p><b>Prior to this meeting</b>, submit to the course instructor, committee chair, and your partner a draft of materials that critique the conceptual literature and research studies relevant to your comprehensive exam paper.</p> <p>Readings specific to your comprehensive exam paper and, for example, Galvan, Chapter 14, Comprehensive Self-editing Checklist for Refining the Final Draft</p>
Week 11 Apr. 7	<p>Implications for social work practice, social work education, and social welfare policy and administration</p> <p>Assess overall progress on comp paper</p>	<p><b>Prior to this class</b>, submit to the course instructor, committee chair, and your partner a draft of the implications section of your comprehensive exam paper</p>
Week 12 Apr. 14	Individual meetings	<p><b>Prior to this meeting</b>, submit a complete draft of your comprehensive exam paper to the course instructor and your committee chair</p>
Week 13 Apr. 21	Discussion of comprehensive exam defense procedures/format	Work on revisions to your comprehensive exam paper
Week 14 Apr. 28	Individual meetings	<p><b>Prior to this meeting</b>, submit a revised draft of your comprehensive exam paper to the course instructor and your committee chair.</p>
Week 15 May 5	<p>Final presentations of comprehensive exam papers</p> <p>Course instructor survey</p> <p>Celebration of students' accomplishments</p>	Be prepared to summarize the content of your comprehensive exam paper and comment on the process.