

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

**SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH METHODS I**

<b>Course Number:</b>	N385R	<b>Instructor's name:</b>	Allen Rubin
<b>Unique Number:</b>	94880	<b>Office Number:</b>	3.130E
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<b>Meeting Time/Place:</b>	T, TH 5:30-8:00 Room 2.112	<b>Office Hours:</b>	T, TH: 4:30-5:30 and by appointment

**I. Standardized Course Description:**

This Foundation course is designed to help students gain an understanding of and appreciation for the use of research as a tool for professional evidence-based practice. Students are introduced to the concepts and skills underlying a systematic approach to social work research, including basic research terminology, the scientific method in social work, the value of research in social work, research ethics and the social work value base, problem formulation and conceptualization, measurement, research designs to evaluate programs and practice, sampling, alternative quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analytic techniques, and preparation and use of research reports. The emphasis in the course is on equipping students with the research knowledge and skills they'll need to engage in the evidence-based practice process at all levels of social work practice. As part of that process, they will learn how to critically appraise sources of scientific evidence and how the criteria for that appraisal will vary depending upon the purpose of the research.

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

1. Formulate answerable evidence-based practice research questions; **(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: Papers #1 and #2

**PB22** Use research evidence to inform practice

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

Assignment: Paper #1

**EP2.1.10d: Evaluation.**

**PB41** Critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate interventions

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

Assignment: Papers #1 and #2

**III. Teaching Methods:**

The primary means of instruction will be in class exercises, class discussions from the assigned readings, and in-class team work with instructor consultation on assigned term papers. Students will be expected to have done the assigned readings before class.

**IV. Required Texts:**

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

Rubin, A. (2010). *Statistics for Evidence-Based Practice and Evaluation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*, Brooks/Cole.

Other readings are found on the course agenda. Electronic copies can be downloaded on Blackboard.

## V. Grading:

30 points	Paper #1 (described later in Section VIII of this syllabus)
20 points	Paper #2 plus oral presentation to class (described later in Section VIII of this syllabus)
20 points	Exam #1
20 points	Exam #2
10 points	Class attendance and participation (especially during article critique sessions)

All grades will be determined in the following manner:

### Accumulated Points and Grading Scale

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

## VI. Course Requirements

Two term papers, two exams; class attendance and thoughtful participation reflecting advanced studying of the assigned readings before class.

### VII. Class Policies

Drops: May be approved by instructor up to October 29.

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

### 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 like 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 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/>).

### **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 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—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're given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

## **VIII. Team Term Papers:**

Each of these two papers will be completed by the same team of about 2 students.

**Paper #1: Evidence-Based Practice Review** (Approximately 10-15 pages, double-spaced, stapled; Due in class on July 26.)

The paper should begin with an overview of the target problem (or a real client or a fictional client that you make up or a real or made up macro situation) related to social work practice to which the rest of your EBP paper will apply.

Next, it should focus on selecting and describing an evidence-based intervention for the described clinical or macro level target problem. In other words, it should address the first EBP question mentioned on p. 43 of the Rubin (2008) text: *What Intervention, Program, or Policy Has the Best Effects?* The level of practice for this section can be micro or macro. A few examples of problems might be: abusive parents (prevention or treatment), traumatized children or adults, war veterans with PTSD, welfare reform, community development, family preservation, substance abuse, homelessness, depression among nursing home residents, preventing hospitalization among individuals with chronic brain disorders, coping with death and dying, marital problems, runaways, school dropout, HIV/AIDS prevention, caregiver burden, and many more – these are just some illustrations to help you consider what you may want to choose. **Important** – these are NOT just clinical examples. For instance, regarding abusive parents, an agency administrator may need to decide what programs to implement in her agency. Likewise, a community organizer might need to choose a community development strategy that has the best chance to succeed.

The paper should reflect appropriate implementation of all Steps of the Evidence-Based Practice process (as described in class and in the required text on evidence-based practice). The answer you formulate should be based the best scientific evidence for answering the EBP question. (Information discussed in the text and in class will show what is meant by the “best” evidence that fits a particular client, problem, or situation.) The intervention plan that you select should emerge from a review of recently published outcome studies and systematic reviews (if any) on the effectiveness of interventions that have been tested in the past for your selected problem. The intervention you select should have the best scientific evidence supporting its effectiveness for the practice problem in question. Be sure to address the major methodological strengths and/or weaknesses of the key studies you review. Show that you can distinguish those studies that are sufficiently sound methodologically to guide practice from those whose methodological weaknesses imply the need for more rigorous research before evidence-based practice implications are warranted. Explain/justify your intervention plan based on the evidence you have found in your review. In addition to describing the evidence for the chosen intervention, the paper should identify other interventions that have been proposed or tested for the selected problem and why they had less or worse evidence than the selected intervention.

**Important** – Do **Not** just select an intervention plan in advance and then restrict your literature review exclusively to that intervention. Instead, review recent outcome studies on whatever interventions have been tested for your selected problem, and then select and describe the chosen intervention based on that review.

The paper should include the following components:

- Overview of target problem
- Identify the EBP question
- Describe the way you searched for the best evidence (internet search engines, websites, abstracts, etc.)
- Describe the intervention you have chosen.
- Explain why the chosen intervention had the best evidence, and why that evidence was superior to other possible answers that you found in your search (including why the chosen intervention would be feasible to implement and a good fit in light of the characteristics of the client or situation you have described).

There is no specific minimum number of studies that you need to review; however, because this is a team project, your literature search should be thorough.

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

Approximately 7-10 pages, double-spaced, stapled; Due in class on July 26.

The focus of the paper should be on conducting a single-case design evaluation for a self-change project for one of the students on your team. The intervention should apply to something that the student would like to improve, such as smoking less, eating better, exercising more, sleeping better, and so on. At least one component of the intervention should be a social work intervention. For example, if the aim is to stop smoking, it is okay to include a nicotine patch as one component, but since that is not a social work intervention, another component would be needed, such as a behavioral modification contingency, social support/reinforcement, some sort of motivational technique, etc. Likewise, if the goal is to lose weight, it is okay to include a dietary component, but since that is not

a social work intervention, another component would be needed – perhaps some sort of social or behavioral intervention to motivate the student to keep to her diet, etc.

Formulate and implement a single-case design to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention you develop, collect data for it, and report and interpret its results. Although only one team member will be the focus of the intervention, other team members can help in formulating the design and measurement plan, implementing the intervention (for example, by serving as a support group, accompanying the focused team member in exercising, and so on), preparing graphs, and writing the report. The chief criteria in evaluating your in-class presentation of this project will be whether you are well prepared and present it in an interesting manner, whether you have at least one neat graph to present to the class via the overhead projector system, and whether you interpret the implications of your graph appropriately.

Your paper can be guided by the following outline:

- I. Briefly describe the self-change goal.
- II. Briefly describe the chosen intervention. (The intervention need not be evidence-based. Just choose something that makes sense to you and is feasible for you.)
- III. Describe your research design and why you chose it (e.g., AB, ABAB, etc.)
- IV. Describe and justify what you measured, source of data, any measurement instruments used, who measured, and when each measurement was taken.
- V. Identify and justify how many data points were in each phase.
- VI. Report and interpret the visual significance (or lack thereof) of your results, discuss alternative plausible interpretations, and draw conclusions.

## IX. Course Schedule

Date	Description	Readings
June 2-7	Introduction to course; Why study research? Key research methodology concepts and terms.  Formation of teams for term paper projects.	Rubin, A. (2010). <i>Statistics</i> : Ch. 1, 3; Appendixes A & B
June 9	Overview of evidence-based practice; Steps in the EBP Process; Research hierarchies; The Dodo Bird Verdict and other arguments for and against EBP.	Rubin, A. (2008). <i>Practitioner's Guide</i> : Chs. 1-3 Rubin, A. (2010). <i>Statistics</i> : Ch. 2
June 14	Monitoring client progress; Critically appraising and selecting assessment instruments.	Rubin, A. (2008). <i>Practitioner's Guide</i> : Chs. 11-12 ; Appendix H

June 16	Review of basic descriptive statistics	Rubin, A. (2010). <i>Statistics</i> : Chs. 4-8
June 21	Statistical chance; review of inferential statistics; clinical significance and substantive significance.	Rubin, A. (2010). <i>Statistics</i> : Chs. 9-13, 17 (disregard calculations)
June 23	Criteria for inferring effectiveness;	Rubin, A. (2008). <i>Practitioner's Guide</i> : Ch. 4, Appendix A
June 28	Exam #1	
June 30	Critically appraising experiments  Team project work with instructor consultation if time permits	Rubin, A. (2008). <i>Practitioner's Guide</i> , Ch. 5, Appendix B  Read and be prepared to discuss in class your critical appraisal of the following articles:  Shapiro, "Efficacy of the Eye Movement Desensitization Procedure in the Treatment of Traumatic Memories"  Fraser, et al. "Conduct Problems and Peer rejection in Childhood"  Schilling et al. "Motivational Interviewing to Encourage Self-Help Participation"
July 5	Critically appraising non-equivalent comparison groups designs  Team project work with instructor consultation if time permits.	Rubin, A. (2008). <i>Practitioner's Guide</i> , Ch. 6, Appendix C  Read and be prepared to discuss in class your critical appraisal of the following article:  Black et al. "Evaluating a Psychoeducational Sexual Assault Prevention Program Incorporating Theatrical Presentation, Peer Education, and Social Work"

July 7	Critically appraising time-series designs and single-case designs	<p>Rubin, A. (2008). <i>Practitioner's Guide</i>, Ch. 7, Appendix D</p> <p>Read and be prepared to discuss in class your critical appraisal of the following articles:</p> <p>Taber, "Cognitive behavior modification treatment of an aggressive 11-year old boy"</p> <p>Wolfe, et al., "Intensive Behavioral Parent Training for a Child Abusive Mother"</p>
July 12	Critically appraising systematic reviews and meta-analyses	<p>Rubin, A. (2008). <i>Practitioner's Guide</i>, Ch. 8, Appendix E</p> <p>Read and be prepared to discuss in class your critical appraisal of the following articles:</p> <p>Seidler &amp; Wagner, "Comparing the Efficacy of EMDR and TF-CBT in the treatment of PTSD: A Meta-analytic Study," <i>Psychological Medicine</i>, 36, 11, November 2006</p> <p>Maxfield &amp; Hyer, (2002) "The Relationship Between Efficacy and Methodology in Studies Investigating EMDR Treatment of PTSD," <i>Journal of Clinical Psychology</i>, 58, 23-41.</p> <p>Thomas, R., &amp; Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2007). Behavioral outcomes of parent-child interaction therapy and Triple P—Positive Parenting Program: A review and meta-analysis. <i>Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology</i>, 35, 475-495.</p>
July 14	Critically Appraising Non-experimental quantitative studies,	<p>Rubin, A. (2008). <i>Practitioner's Guide</i>, Ch. 9, Appendix F</p>
July 19	Critically appraising qualitative studies	<p>Rubin, A. (2008). <i>Practitioner's Guide</i>, Ch. 10, Appendix G</p> <p>Bell article</p>

July 21	Exam #2	
July 26	Team presentations of Paper #2. Papers #1 and #2 due in class at time of presentation. Course evaluation.	