

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

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| <b>Course #:</b> SW n385R                     | <b>Unique #:</b> 88735                           |
| <b>Semester:</b> Summer 2019                  | <b>Instructor:</b> Ahmed Whitt, PhD, MSW         |
| <b>Meeting Day/Time:</b> Tues/Thurs. 5:30-8pm | <b>Contact:</b> ahmedwhitt@utexas.edu            |
| <b>Class Location:</b> SW 2.112               | <b>Office Hours:</b> Thurs. 4:30-5:30pm or Appt. |

**Social Work Research Methods  
(Required Course – MSSW Program)**

**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.

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

1. Formulate answerable evidence-based practice research questions;
2. Efficiently conduct advanced searches of electronic bibliographic databases and other sources to find evidence bearing on evidence-based practice research questions;
3. Critically appraise sources of scientific evidence and explain how the criteria for that appraisal will vary depending upon the purpose of the research;
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;
5. Design evaluations as part of evidence-based practice.
6. Explain how both qualitative and quantitative research processes apply in evidence-based practice;
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;
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.
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.
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;
11. Describe how particular values and sensitivity to ethical issues influence the conducting of research;
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;
13. Critically appraise how social work commitment to equity and social justice influences and differentiates the social work research process.

## EPAS Competencies

The Steve Hicks 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, the UT SHSSW engages in ongoing curriculum assessment to demonstrate compliance with CSWE's Education Policies and Accreditation Standards (EPAS).

**Using a common evaluation instrument (assessed as part of the midterm), this course measures the implementation of knowledge, skills, values, and/or cognitive and affective processes to assess the following competencies:**

### **Competency 4: Engage In Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice**

Outcome 4.1: Use practice experience and theory to inform scientific inquiry and research

Outcome 4.2: Apply critical thinking to engage in analysis of quantitative and qualitative research methods and research findings

Outcome 4.3: Use and translate research evidence to inform and improve practice, policy, and service delivery

## **II. Teaching Methods**

The primary methods of instruction are interactive lectures (students are encouraged to ask questions and make comments), class discussions, group/class exercises, and reading assignments. 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. The instructor is available to meet by appointment and is responsive to emails. Please note that the instructor will communicate frequently about the course via Canvas announcements and/or Canvas mail.

## **III. Texts**

Required: Engel, R. J., & Schutt, R. K. (2016). *The practice of research in social work*. Fourth edition. Sage. ISBN-10: 1506304265 | ISBN-13: 978-1506304267 [ES]

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>

Rubin, A., & Babbie, E. R. (2012). *Essential Research Methods for Social Work, Third Edition*. Cengage Learning. | ISBN-10: 0840029136 | ISBN-13: 978-0840029133

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

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

## **IV. Class Policies**

1. Students are expected to attend class sessions and participate in an interactive framework between students and professor. Students are expected to complete the readings prior to class, and should be well prepared to participate in discussions. Failure to regularly attend classes and demonstrate through discussions that one has comprehended the readings will be considered in assigning the final grade. Students are to notify the professor if they are going to be absent. Students are responsible for any material missed due to absences.

2. Except in the case of extreme emergencies, and then only with the permission of the professor, late assignments will not be accepted without penalty. Students are expected to email all required assignments on the agreed upon due date to the professor. Assignments turned in after the 5:30p.m. deadline will be considered late. If accepted, late assignments will be assessed point penalties each day the assignment is late. If the due date is a problem, the student should see the professor and negotiate another due date WELL in advance. Note that the professor will send a reply email when the paper is received; if you do not get a reply within 24 hours, 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.

4. If students are concerned about their class performance, the professor is more than willing to work with students to help them find ways to improve their course grades prior to the end of the semester. Final grades assigned in the course are not negotiable.

## **V. Grading Scale**

94.0 and Above A

90.0 to 93.999 A-

87.0 to 89.999 B+

84.0 to 86.999 B

80.0 to 83.999 B-

77.0 to 79.999 C+

74.0 to 76.999 C

70.0 to 73.999 C-

67.0 to 69.999 D+

64.0 to 66.999 D

60.0 to 63.999 D-

Below 60.0 F

## **VI. Course Requirements**

**Mid-Term Exam (20%):** The exam will include objective and short answer questions covering content from the text and class discussions. Exam will include multiple-choice, short answer, true/false and essay questions that cover all materials assigned and/or discussed in class up to the exam date. Make up exams will be given for emergencies only and at the discretion of the instructor.

**Preparation for Final Research Proposal (20%):** The following exercises are designed to provide students multiple opportunities for feedback during the process of completing the final Research Proposal assignment.

**Problem Statement (10%):** Submit 3-5 page summary of plan for Research Proposal. Briefly state the purpose of the paper and then provide an overview of the target problem/issue related to social work practice. Include some statistics regarding the prevalence of the problem. A brief review of relevant literature related to the problem focusing on its etiology and effects is also necessary. State the specific research question(s) that you will be examining. Then, describe the significance of the chosen question(s) to evidence-based social work practice.

**Problem Statement Presentation (5%):** 5-Minute (3 Slides) Presentation of problem statement, previous literature, and expected evaluation procedure for Research Proposal.

**Peer Review (5%):** Students will be organized into small groups to provide feedback on the Problem Statement Presentation of each group member.

**Research Proposal (40%):** The research proposal (no more than 18 double-spaced pages, Excluding title page, references and appendices) and class presentation: The proposal will be worth 30% and the presentation will be worth 10%.

The purpose of this paper is to provide students with the opportunity to conduct a comprehensive review of the literature to identify the intervention, program, or policy that has the best effects for a chosen problem/issue; and then to provide students with the opportunity to apply what they are learning about research methods by planning an

evaluation of a program/service/intervention for a chosen problem/issue.

The students will apply the following research process in the proposal writing:

- (1) Formulation of answerable research questions that will contribute to promoting evidence-based social work practice;
- (2) literature review of the chosen problem and critical appraisal of the efficacy and effectiveness of the evidence-based program/service/intervention; hypotheses generation;
- (3) research design (quasi-experimental or experimental design; description of the procedures of implementing evidence-based program/service/intervention; sample inclusion/exclusion criteria, planned methods of subject identification, screening, recruitment, and retention; fidelity monitoring methods;
- (4) selection of measures of outcomes and other variables; and data collection methods);
- (5) anticipated findings and their implications for social work practice, programs, and/or policies; and
- (6) anticipated limitations of the study with respect to its research design and methods of data collection.

**Class attendance and participation (15%):** Students are expected to attend all classes.

Students are permitted one excused absence. A student will also be considered absent if they arrive more than 15 minutes late to class or leaves 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.

Students are expected to do assigned readings before the class meeting for which they are assigned, to compile questions regarding the material.

**Data Collection/Evaluation Exercise (5%):** Students will participate in a field data collection exercise as part of an ongoing research project at a specified date.

## **VII. 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 Steve Hicks 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 Steve Hicks 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.

**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/>.

**CAMPUS CARRY.** Information on The University's policy on concealed firearms (Campus Carry) may be found here: <https://campuscarry.utexas.edu/>

**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, examination, work assignment, or 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  
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Austin is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from discriminatory conduct based on gender. Faculty, instructors, agency-based field instructors, staff, and/or teaching assistants in their supervisory roles are mandated reporters of incidents of sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, or sexual misconduct. Students who report such incidents will be informed of University resources. Incidents will be reported to the University's Title IX Coordinator and/or the Title IX Liaison for the SHSSW, Professor Tanya Voss. Students, faculty and staff may contact Professor Voss to report incidents or to obtain information. Further information, including student resources related to Title IX, may also be found at <http://socialwork.utexas.edu/dl/files/academic-programs/other/qrg-sexualharassment.pdf>.

**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 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 for keeping the university informed about a change of 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 between 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 in the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering 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.

## **VIII. Additional Class Policies Affecting Course Grade**

**Late Assignment Policies:** Except in the case of extreme emergencies, and then only with the permission of the professor, late assignments will not be accepted without penalty. Students are expected to submit hardcopies of all required assignments on the specified due date at the beginning of class. Electronic versions of assignments will be allowed only under special circumstances if a student cannot be present in class. Students will lose 5 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.

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.

## VII. Course Schedule (Subject to Change)

| Date   | Content                                  | Readings/Assignments   |
|--------|--|--|
| 6-Jun  | Social Workers as Researchers            | ES: Chapter 1  |
| 11-Jun | Evidence-Based Practice                  | ES: Chapter 2  |
| 13-Jun | Measurement                              | ES: Chapters 4 & 5; OBSSR: "Objective Measurement of Subjective Phenomena" |
| 18-Jun | Community Participatory Research Methods | ES: Chapter 9<br>OBSSR: "Ethical Challenges"                               |
| 20-Jun | The Role of Theory                       | OBSSR "Social and Behavioral Theories"                                     |
| 25-Jun | Midterm                                  |  |
| 27-Jun | Research Design                          | ES: Chapters 6 & 7   |
| 3-Jul  | NO CLASS                                 |  |
| 4-Jul  | NO CLASS                                 |  |
| 9-Jul  | <i>Problem Statement Presentations</i>   | <i>Problem Statement Due</i>   |
| 11-Jul | Collecting & Assessing Previous Research | ES: Appendices A, B, C, & D  |
| 16-Jul | Quantitative Data Analysis               | ES: Chapter 14   |
| 18-Jul | Qualitative Data Analysis                | ES: Chapters 10 & 11<br><i>Data Analysis Exercise (In-Class)</i>           |
| 23-Jul | Final Presentations                      |  |
| 25-Jul | Final Presentations                      |  |
| 30-Jul | Final Reports Due                        |  |

## X. Bibliography

Engel, R. J., & Schutt, R. K. (2016). *The practice of research in social work*. Fourth edition. Sage.

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