

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

**Course #:** SW 313

**Unique #:** 59425

**Semester:** Fall 2020

**Meeting Time/Place:** Online via Canvas;  
Tues/Thurs, 2-3:30pm

**Instructor:** Ahmed Whitt, PhD, MSW

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**Office:** 3.106C

**Office Phone:** XXX

**Office Hours:** By Appt.

**Social Work Research Methods**

**I. Standardized Course Description**

This course is one of two research courses in the BSW curriculum. The course introduces students to the following topics: social work values, the research process, problem formulation and conceptualization, measurement, research design and inference, single subject design and practice evaluation, sampling, alternative data gathering techniques and analyses, and uses of research in social work. SW313 is a prerequisite for entry into the social work major. The goal of the course is to help students develop a basic understanding of the research process in order to engage with research for evidence-based practice.

Course credit or concurrent registration for SW318 or any approved SW318 substitution is a prerequisite for this course.

**II. Standardized Course Objectives**

The goal of the course is to help students develop a basic understanding of the research process.

Upon completion of this course students should be able to:

1. Describe the fundamental steps of scientific inquiry and how they parallel the basic steps of social work practice.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the following basic social work research skills pertinent to the profession: a) formulation of research problems; b) formulation of research questions and hypotheses; c) use of various research methods (e.g., survey research, single subject design, experimental and quasi-experimental designs, field research, and use of secondary data); d) collection and analysis of research data; and e) interpretation of research results.
3. Critically analyze research findings and be effective consumers of, and contributors to, social work research.
4. Illustrate how gender bias or insensitivity to diverse populations can impede effective research and inference.
5. Identify research methods, sampling designs, and measurement techniques which are sensitive to diverse groups, including women, people of color, persons with disabilities, and members of the LGBT community.
6. Discuss the usefulness of social science theory and research methods in social work practice.
7. Explain ethical issues in conducting and using research, as well as the role of the social work values in research and evaluation.
8. Determine feasibility, practicability, and generalizability of research findings.

**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, 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

### III. Teaching Methods

The primary methods of instruction are lectures, virtual 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 virtually 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.

### IV. Required Texts

**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>

### V. 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%):** 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 (30%):** Submit a 12-15 page paper (excluding title page, references, and appendices) of your Research Proposal. The research Proposal is designed to help you deepen your understanding of the key research concepts covered in the course through practice and application.

- Formulate an answerable research question that will contribute to an evidence based social work practice;
- Literature review (in peer-reviewed journals) of the chosen problem and critical appraisal of the efficacy and effectiveness of the evidence-based practice/service/intervention;

- Research design (quasi-experimental or experimental design; description of the procedures of implementing evidence-based practice/service/intervention; sample inclusion/exclusion criteria, planned methods of subject identification, screening, recruitment, and retention; fidelity monitoring method;
- Design and methods of data collection;
- Anticipated findings and their implication for social work practice, programs, and/or policies;
- Anticipated limitations of the study with respect to its research; and
- Identify gaps in the literature and suggest areas for additional research.

Research Proposal Presentation (10%): Give a five-minute presentation (5-10 slides) of the highlights and key findings (as listed above) of the Research Proposal.

Weekly lecture assignments and participation (10%): Students are expected to complete one short assignment per course topic.

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 (10%): Students will participate in a field data collection exercise as part of an ongoing research project at a specified date.

## VI. Grades

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

A = 100 – 90 points Superior work: The assignment significantly exceeds expectations listed in the syllabus. Student exceeds what is required in the assignment and demonstrates a high level of in-depth critical thinking and analysis (i.e., writing is coherent, ideas synthesized and logical, discussion well developed).

B = 89 – 80 points Good Work: The assignment meets all the requirements and demonstrates evidence of in-depth critical thinking and analysis.

C = 79 – 70 points Average Work: The assignment meets the requirements or has minor gaps, but lacks evidence of in-depth critical thinking and analysis.

D-failing = 69 and below Poor/failing Work: The assignment has important gaps, both in terms of not meeting the requirements and lacking in-depth critical thinking and analysis.

Grading of all written assignments will take into account the quality of the writing, as well as the content. The American Psychological Association (APA) 6th edition format must be used to format citations and references. Written material should be carefully proof read and errors (punctuation, typographical, spelling) corrected. Good writing requires an iterative process for quality to improve. It is strongly encouraged that you to read your paper several times and, if possible, have someone else proofread it. Graduate writing assistance is available.

## VII. 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.

## VIII. University 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.

**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/>.

**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 race, 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. This atmosphere includes working intentionally to recognize and dismantle racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism in the classroom. 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 (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and other forms of electronic communication (e.g. blogs) 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/>.

**SHARING OF COURSE MATERIALS IS PROHIBITED** No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty. I am well aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure in the course.

**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.

**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>.

**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 Austin is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from discriminatory conduct on the basis of sex <https://titleix.utexas.edu/>. Faculty, field instructors, staff, and/or teaching assistants in their supervisory roles are mandated reporters of incidents of sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, stalking, dating violence, or any other forms of sexual misconduct. Students who report such incidents will be informed of University resources. Incidents will be reported to the University’s Title IX Coordinator. Further information, including student resources related to Title IX, may also be found at <https://titleix.utexas.edu/>.

**CAMPUS CARRY POLICY.** The University’s policy on concealed firearms may be found here: <https://campuscarry.utexas.edu>. You also may find this information by accessing the Quick Links menu on the School’s website.

**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 have concerns about their behavioral health, or if they are concerned about the behavioral health of someone else, students may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone their concerns. 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.

**COVID CAVEATS.** To help keep everyone at UT and in our community safe, it is critical that students report COVID-19 symptoms and testing, regardless of test results, to University Health Services, and faculty and staff report to the HealthPoint Occupational Health Program (OHP) as soon as possible. Please see this link to understand what needs to be reported. In addition, to help understand what to do if a fellow student in the class (or the instructor or TA) tests positive for COVID, see this University Health Services link.

### IX. 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.

### X. Course Schedule (Subject to Change)

Date	Day	Content	Assignment Due	Readings
27-Aug	Th			
3-Sept	Th	Social Workers as Researchers		ES: Chapter 1
8-Sep	Tu			
10-Sep	Th	Evidence-Based Practice		ES: Chapter 2
15-Sep	Tu			
17-Sep	Th	Measurement		ES: Chapters 4 & 5
22-Sep	Tu			
24-Sep	Th	Defining Problems		OBSSR: "Objective Measurement of Subjective Phenomena"
29-Sept	Tu			
1-Oct	Th	Community Participatory Research Methods		ES: Chapter 9 OBSSR: "Ethical Challenges"
6-Oct	Tu			
8-Oct	Th	The Role of Theory		OBSSR "Social and Behavioral Theories"
13-Oct	Tu	Midterm Review		
15-Oct	Th	Midterm		

20-Oct	Tu	Research Design	ES: Chapter 6 & 7
22-Oct	Th		
27-Oct	Tu	Collecting & Assessing Previous Research	ES: Appendices A, B, C, & D
29-Oct	Th		
3-Nov	Tu	<i>Problem Statement Presentations</i>	<i>Statement Due (11/2)</i>
5-Nov	Th		
10-Nov	Tu	Program Evaluation	ES: Chapter 13
12-Nov	Th		Kellogg Logic Model Guide
17-Nov	Tu	Quantitative Data Analysis	ES: Chapter 14
19-Nov	Th	Qualitative Data Analysis	<i>Data Analysis Exercise</i> ES: Chapters 10 & 11
1-Dec	Tu	Final Presentations	
3-Dec	Th	Final Presentations	
10-Dec	Tu	Final Reports Due (11:59pm)	

## XI. Bibliography

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