SW 8102 Advanced Research (3 credits)
Fall, 2009
3:00-5:50 p.m. Tuesdays, Bohannon Hall 112

Instructor: Denny Falk
Office Hours: Tu 1:30-2:30 pm;
220 Bohannon Hall
Th 10:00-11:00 am;
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& by appointment
724-7407 (home)
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Research page URL: http://www.d.umn.edu/~dfalk/research

Course Overview

This second course in the research sequence builds on the beginning understanding of social work research that was acquired in SW 8101 Introduction to Research or in an undergraduate social work research course. Successful completion of SW 8101 and 8102 will provide a student the abilities to understand and apply the principles of social research, to evaluate research articles, to evaluate one's own practice, and to conduct research projects as an advanced generalist social work practitioner. The relationship of this course to the advanced generalist curriculum will be discussed in class.

The broad goals of this course are for students to review and apply the knowledge they have gained in SW 8101 or a previous research course; to further develop key research skills; to further consider ethical issues inherent in the practice of social work research; to learn more about data collection methods, program evaluation, and analysis of data; and to use appropriate statistical software to analyze data. At the completion of the course, the student should be able to:

1. Apply key concepts of the research process to a specific research project.
2. Describe the importance of research in advanced generalist social work practice.
3. Describe and be able to apply selected data collection methods, including research interviewing, survey research, secondary analysis, and single case design.
4. Critique previous research studies, identifying strengths and weaknesses of the studies.
5. Describe how research data collection techniques and research concepts and results can be integrated with practice.
6. Describe key concepts related to descriptive and inferential statistics.
7. Select appropriate statistical procedures for data analysis and present results clearly.
8. Demonstrate a beginning level of understanding of computer operations and applications to social work research, including the use of data analysis software.
9. Describe of the impact of one's own values and biases on research projects, and to be able to conduct more culturally competent research being sensitive to issues of gender, class, and race/ethnicity.
10. Develop a social work research proposal.
Course Format

The first portion of this course will involve reviewing basic social research content and concepts and applying this information to students' research topics and areas of practice. Later class session will introduce new topics and also focus on implications for social work research.

We will incorporate a variety of learning activities in attempting to accomplish the goals described above. A reading list appears below and an extensive bibliography of additional readings is available online. Class meetings will include lectures by the instructor, group discussions, guest presentations, discussion of students’ research projects, and skill development activities. Students will also be encouraged to participate in additional learning activities outside of class.

Students are encouraged to participate actively in the class. If you have ideas on how a certain topic might be presented or addressed, please express them; if you aware of learning resources that are not being used, please suggest them. If we work together, I think this can be a very interesting and rewarding class.

Readings

The primary texts used for this course will be:


Both of these texts are available in the UMD bookstore. The Masters Research Project Handbook is available online at: http://www.d.umn.edu/sw/MANUALS/MSWDepartmentHandbooks.htm. Additional readings will come from materials provided in class or available on reserve in the library, including the following books:


A course reading handbook (abbreviated H below) of selected readings is referenced in the syllabus and will be available online.
Student Evaluation

The requirements for this course include class participation, two tests, three assignments, and activities that lead to a research proposal. The tests will be given near the middle and at the end of the term. The mid-term test will be administered in class, and you will have the opportunity to make corrections. The final test will be of the "take-home" variety. These tests will be based on required readings, class discussions and activities, and handouts. The topics to be covered on the mid-term test will be described prior to the test. Separate handouts on the Internet resource identification and evaluation assignment, the research critique assignment, the statistics assignment, and the research proposal will be provided in class.

The relative weights of the various tests and assignments are as follows:

- Class participation: 10% (successful completion yields about 90 of 100 points)
- Mid-term test: 20%
- Take-home final test: 25%
- Research critique assignment: 5% (successful completion yields about 90 of 100 points)
- Resource ID & eval assignment: 5% (successful completion yields about 90 of 100 points)
- Statistics assignment: 10% (successful completion yields about 90 of 100 points)
- Research proposal: 25%

Students receiving 90 or more points will be assured of receiving an "A," 80-89 points will guarantee a "B," 70-79 points receives a "C," and 60-69 points receives a "D."

Students may demonstrate competency related to the broad goals of this course through alternative means by working with a learning contract. Please see Denny if you would like more information about this option.

Policy on Incompletes

I encourage you to complete this course by the end of the fall term. If you do find it necessary to take an incomplete, you must develop a written contract by the last day of class to clearly indicate which tasks you still need to complete and the date by which you will complete these tasks. This form is found at: http://www.d.umn.edu/sw/FORMS/index.htm. Please be aware that it is often difficult for the instructor to read materials on short notice once an incomplete has been taken.

Disabilities

My highest priority is for our classroom and course work to facilitate participation and exchange. I am eager to make accommodations to guarantee to students with disabilities access to class sessions, course materials, and the activities of the class. You are encouraged to contact the Access Center-Disability Services to discuss and arrange reasonable accommodations (102 Kirby Center, tel. 726-8217). In addition, please let me know as soon as possible if you have a disability for which accommodations will be requested. Note that you are under no obligation to disclose the nature of your disability to me or other faculty.
Evaluation of Course and Instruction

During the term I will solicit feedback from you in several ways. First, I will encourage you to speak up with feedback at any time as the course progresses. Feel free to tell me what is valuable and useful and what is not. At mid-term and at the end of the semester, I will ask you to fill out forms asking for your reactions and feedback. I appreciate any feedback you may offer and will try to incorporate what I can in order to make the course more interesting and valuable.

Ground Rules for Discussion (We will discuss these guidelines further in class.)

Since this course includes a variety of topics that could raise controversy or conflict, the following ground rules for how we discuss sensitive topics are proposed. These ground rules are adapted from Lynn Weber Cannon's "Fostering Positive Class, Race, and Gender Dynamics in the Classroom," which appeared in Women's Studies Quarterly, 1990, 1&2, 130-132.

- We can assume that discrimination exists in many forms (e.g. sexism, racism, classism, ageism, homophobia, anti-semitism, ableism, etc.). Any critical understanding of these various -isms means that we need to recognize that we have been taught misinformation about our own groups and well as about members of other groups. This is true for both dominant (e.g. white, male, upper class, heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.) and subordinate (e.g. people of color, women, poor and working class, gay/Lesbian, disabled, etc.) group members.

- Based on these assumptions then, let's agree that we cannot be blamed for the misinformation we have learned, but we should take personal responsibility for repeating misinformation after we have learned otherwise. This is not to suggest that any one person has a corner on truth or that disagreement with any one idea carries with it any kind of punitive response. People and groups are not to be blamed for their subordinate positions.

- Let's assume that people are always doing the best they can. Let's actively pursue information about our own groups and those of others. Let us share information about our own groups with other members of the class but never demean, devalue, or in any way put down people for their experiences.

- Essentially what this means is that we can talk about ideas the class agrees to discuss, but that we will do so with respect for each other as human beings. We will not engage in depersonalized name-calling. We each have an obligation to actively combat the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups so that we can break down the walls which prohibit group cooperation and group gain. Let's create a safe atmosphere for open discussion. Thus, at times, members of the class may wish to share writing or make comments that they do not want repeated outside the classroom. If so, the student will preface his/her remarks with a request and the class will agree not to repeat the remarks.
Guidelines for Selected Course Requirements

1. Because of the nature of the course, attendance is required at all class sessions. The instructor also recognizes that other life events (e.g., illness) may prevent you from attending every session. Please schedule an individual meeting with Denny to make up for any session that you miss. Students’ presentations of aspects of their research proposal contribute to the participation grade, along with the forms students turn in related to these presentations.

2. You will be asked to critique one previous Research Proposal and one previous Masters Research (Plan B) Paper that you read. Criteria for critiquing the proposal and paper, and a form to submit, will be provided.

3. The timetable for the research project includes a list of the various tasks that remain for you in completing your research project and the anticipated dates of completion for each of these steps. For the purpose of example, please assume you will collect and analyze data and complete a final research report. Leave a column to fill in the actual date that the step was finished. Because of the nature of the research process, the timetable is usually a dynamic guide that changes as the time required to complete the research tasks become clearer. A sample will be provided in class.

4. You will be asked to present your research topic in class and turn in a copy of a completed form used to organize your thinking about the topic. You will be asked to describe the general topic of your research and to identify and define key concepts associated with this research topic.

5. The research question/hypothesis will be presented to a group in class and handed in to the instructor. Criteria for a quality research question/hypothesis will be discussed in class.

6. The presentation of the research methods involves describing the tentative 1) population and sample, 2) general research design, 3) data collection procedure, and 4) data analysis plan that you could use in your research project. A form to turn in to the instructor will be provided, and this requirement will be discussed further in class.

7. The presentations of a final progress report describe the progress the student has made in completing the research project according to the timetable developed. The report includes a discussion of limitations or difficulties encountered and how these were addressed. The focus is not so much on whether or not one is rigidly adhering to the timetable, but rather on providing an opportunity to be affirmed for the progress made and to receive support for moving on to the next steps if you choose to do so.

8. The research proposal will be completed when the criteria for a research proposal in the “Current Guidelines for Proposals for Masters Research Projects and SW 8102” have been achieved. The research proposal in particular will be discussed more extensively in class.

Each of the items described briefly above will be discussed in class and can be clarified further in discussions with Denny. Forms and samples will be provided for most requirements. Note: Information about the “Resource Identification and Critique” assignment will be distributed and discussed in class.
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<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/8</td>
<td>Introduction to the course; get acquainted; distribute material (abbreviated class due to orientation)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>9/15</td>
<td>Syllabus review; overview of research process; using the computer in research</td>
<td>R&amp;B 545-570, R&amp;B 1-21, R&amp;B 22-38, R&amp;B 39-66, Masters Research Project Handbook</td>
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<td>Review and apply “Why Study Research?”</td>
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<td>Review and apply evidence-based practice</td>
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<td>Review and apply philosophy and theory in science</td>
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<td><em>Introduction to the research proposal</em></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>9/22</td>
<td>Review and apply ethics and politics of SW research</td>
<td>R&amp;B 67-96</td>
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<td>Review and apply culturally competent research</td>
<td>R&amp;B 97-122</td>
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<td>Review and apply problem formulation</td>
<td>R&amp;B 123-149</td>
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<td><em>Writing the research proposal</em>(overview)</td>
<td>G88 429-444</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>9/29</td>
<td>Review and apply conceptualization and operationalization</td>
<td>R&amp;B 150-172</td>
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<td>Review and apply measurement &amp; constructing instruments</td>
<td>R&amp;B 173-226</td>
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<td><em>Formulating research problems</em>; working with the community*</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>10/6</td>
<td>No class; alternative assignment for Human Services Conference</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>10/13</td>
<td>Review and apply causal inference and correlational design</td>
<td>R&amp;B 227-249</td>
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<td>Review and apply experimental design</td>
<td>R&amp;B 250-279</td>
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<td>Review and apply single case design</td>
<td>R&amp;B 280-304</td>
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<td><em>Completing the literature review</em></td>
<td>R&amp;B 545-576</td>
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<td><em>Resource identification and evaluation assignment due</em></td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>10/20</td>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>R&amp;B 305-334, handouts</td>
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<td>Review and apply sampling &amp; survey research</td>
<td>R&amp;B 335-389</td>
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<td>Preview mid-term test</td>
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<td><em>Present research proposal topic</em> <em>(form due)</em></td>
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<td><em>Timetable for research project due</em></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>10/27</td>
<td>Analyzing existing data</td>
<td>R&amp;B 390-414</td>
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<td>Qualitative research: principles and methods</td>
<td>R&amp;B 415-454</td>
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<td><em>Institutional Review Board Form (review on the Internet prior to class)</em></td>
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<td><em>Research critique form due</em></td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>11/3</td>
<td><strong>Mid-term test</strong>: mid-term evaluation</td>
<td>R&amp;B 455-476</td>
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<td>Qualitative data analysis</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>Begin quantitative data analysis</td>
<td>W &amp; G xiii-39</td>
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<td>Descriptive statistics</td>
<td>R&amp;B 477-503</td>
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<td>Begin inferential statistics</td>
<td>W&amp;G 40-78</td>
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<td>Present research proposal question* (form due)</td>
<td>W&amp;G 79-118</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>11/17</td>
<td>Inferential statistics (continued)</td>
<td>W&amp;G 119-189</td>
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<td>Feminist and cross-cultural perspectives on research</td>
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<td>(including focus on issues related to American Indians)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>11/24</td>
<td>Inferential statistics (finish)</td>
<td>W&amp;G 190-248</td>
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<td>Integrating data gathering techniques</td>
<td>H (G88 chap 20)</td>
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<td>Present research proposal methods* (form due)</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>12/1</td>
<td>Using SPSS to do statistics (handouts to be provided); practice data</td>
<td>R&amp;B 504-544 (skim)</td>
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<td>analysis assignment</td>
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<td>Integrating research concepts into practice</td>
<td>H (G88 chap 21)</td>
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<td>Draft research proposal due (only if your want to have chance to revise)</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>12/8</td>
<td>Using SPSS to do statistics (handouts to be provided); regular data</td>
<td>H (G88 chap 22)</td>
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<td>Constructing personal practice models</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>12/15</td>
<td>Presenting results</td>
<td>W&amp;G 249-267</td>
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<td>Finish statistics</td>
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<td>Summary and conclusions; evaluation</td>
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<td>Final report on research proposal* (form due)</td>
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<td>Statistics assignment due</td>
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**Research proposal** due by 4:00 pm Tuesday, December 15, 2009 in 220 BohH (or by email)

**Final take home exam** due by 4:00 pm Friday, December 18, 2009 in 220 BohH (or by email)

*Items in italics in the schedule relate to completing a research proposal. Collectively, these activities go into the participation (attendance) portion of the grade for the course; they also prepare the student to write the final research proposal.*