



THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

National Catholic SCHOOL of Social Service

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SSS 340

Research Methods in Social Work

Fall 2009

(3 credits)

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I. COURSE PURPOSE

This course is designed to give undergraduate students a basic understanding of the research process used by social workers and other social scientists. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies are examined. Critical thinking is fostered as the various steps of a research design are presented. Ethical issues in research as well as concerns regarding ethnic and cultural diversity and at-risk populations are addressed. Use of data analysis learned in the statistics course are incorporated. Examples of various methodologies are presented through discussion of published research. Attention is given to the theoretical perspectives guiding the research. The course is primarily lecture format.

II. EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Students should understand the various steps in the research process and be aware of ethical issues and issues of ethnic and cultural diversity which may arise when conducting research with human subjects. Specifically, they should be able to

1. Distinguish between quantitative and qualitative approaches;
2. Formulate a research problem;
3. Identify a theoretical perspective;
4. Formulate a research question and a testable hypothesis;
5. Identify independent and dependent variables and levels of measurement;
6. Distinguish between reliability and validity of measures;
7. Develop a probability and nonprobability sampling plan;
8. Describe and critique both group and single subject designs;

9. Critique experimental designs in terms of the threats to validity;
10. Develop a design to evaluate practice effectiveness;
11. Develop a design to evaluate a program;
12. Identify issues related to ethnic and cultural diversity in research;
13. Identify ways to protect populations at risk;
14. Identify statistical techniques to use for specific research questions;
15. Identify ethical issues in social work research.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Required Texts

Engel, R. J. & Schutt, R. K. (2009). *The Practice of Research in Social Work*. 2nd. Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

B. Course Assignments

There will be four assignments, and four tests. In addition, there may be a number of ungraded exercises throughout the semester.

Assignment One Faculty Interview

Each student is expected to arrange an interview with a member of the Social Work faculty regarding the faculty's own involvement in research. A two-page summary of the interview based on a series of questions is to be submitted.

Due: Class 10, Thursday, October 1, 2009 (See attached guidelines.)

Assignment Two Critique of a Research Article

The instructor assigns a research articles one-week to the due date. Students write a short report in response to a series of questions about the selected article.

Due: Class 18, Thursday, October 29 (See attached guidelines)

Assignment Three Data Analysis

Students are asked to interpret the results of statistical tables. Details will be described later in the semester.

Due: Class 24, Thursday November 19 – Will be reviewed in class that day!

Assignment Four Developing a Research Investigation: Question, Hypothesis, and Variables Paper

Each student is expected to identify a social work concern or issue of interest to him/her by conducting a brief literature review on the topic of interest. Based on this literature review, the student develops a research question and hypothesis related to the issue, identifies the variables as independent and dependent, and presents how each variable would be measured.

Due: Last Class – 28, Thursday, 12/10/2009 (Short Paper: 5-7pages; see attached guidelines.)

****Ten percent (10%) will be deducted from any assignment which is submitted late without permission from the instructor that must be obtained prior to the due date! Assignments will not be accepted after they have been reviewed in class.**

Tests All tests are in-class written closed book/notes tests. They are based on the contents assigned by the instructor. The contents will be in a written form presented as short questions for “fill-in answers”, some might be “matching” or “multiple-choice” answers.

They take-up almost the entire class time. If a student is unable to take a given test on the scheduled date – he/she must notify the instructor as soon as possible. Not taking a test on the scheduled date without a prior written explanation to the instructor is assigned a grade of “Failure” (F).

If a student has a documented disability through DSS Office at CUA, then with the instructor’s approval and arrangements, the student may pursue individualized testing arrangements at the DSS Office. If a student wishes to pursue such arrangements, he/she must present written documentation from the DSS Office at CUA.

Testing Schedule

- Test One** Class 7, Tuesday, September 22
- Test Two** Class 15, Tuesday, October 20
- Test Three** Class 25, Tuesday, November 25
- Test Four** Final Exam Week: To Be Assigned

C. Grading Policy

Attendance and participation	10%
Assignments:	50%
Assignment 1 - Faculty Interview	10%
Assignment 2 – Article Critique	15%
Assignment 3 – Data Analysis	10%
Assignment 4 – Paper: Developing a Study	15%
Tests (four) – 10% each	40%

D. Course and Instructor Evaluation

NCSSS requires electronic evaluation of this course and the instructor. At the end of the semester, the evaluation form may be accessed at

<http://evaluations.cua.edu/evaluations>

using your CUA username and password. Additional informal written or verbal feedback to the instructor during the semester is encouraged and attempts will be made to respond to requests.

E. Class Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to attend and participate meaningfully in class discussions. Two percent (2%) will be deducted from the grade for attendance

and participation for each unexcused absence unless the student notifies the instructor and requests an excused absence prior to the class meeting class. One percent (1%) will be deducted from the grade for attendance and participation for each time a student is late, unless the professor is notified in advance.

Use of Listening Electronic Devices: Students are also advised that all electronic devices (such as cell phones, ear-cell phones, I-Pods, or music and other such sound-making devices, etc. must be removed and silenced prior to class). E-mailing, game playing, surfing, or other non-academic uses are unacceptable during class sessions. In emergency situations, the message recipient should leave the room, returning when the immediate situation has been addressed.

Assistive learning devices authorized by the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office are welcome in the classroom and should be used in a manner consistent with the formal learning assessment recommendations provided by that office. It is expected that a student will provide the instructor with written documentation from DSS authorizing the use of the device during classes.

Personal computers/laptops/other recording devices: Students who choose to bring personal computers or other note taking/audio/video recording devices to classes are expected to seek the prior approval of the instructor.

IV. CLASS EXPECTATIONS

A. Scholastic Expectations

Please refer to NCSSS Announcements, or appropriate Program Handbook for Academic Requirements, including scholastic and behavioral requirements. All written work should reflect the original thinking of the writer, cite references where material is quoted or adapted from existing sources, adhere to APA format, and should be carefully proof read by the student before submission to the instructor for grading.

B. Academic Honesty

Joining the community of scholars at CUA entails accepting the standards, living by those standards, and upholding them. Please refer to University Policy and appropriate Program Handbooks.

C. Accommodations

Students with physical, learning, psychological or other disabilities wishing to request accommodations must identify with the Disability Support Services (DSS) and submit documentation of a disability. If you have documented such a disability to DSS that requires accommodations or an academic adjustment, please arrange a meeting with the instructor as soon as possible to discuss these accommodations.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1

Class 1
9/1/09 - Tu

Overview of Course

Why do social work research?
What kinds of questions do social workers ask?
What is your special interest in social work?

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 1: Science, Society, and Social Work Research

****For the Next Class: *Class Participation Exercise*:** Consider a social concern that might be of interest to you, and find **one scholarly journal article** on some aspect of your topic of interest, and come prepared to class to present and discuss the following (5-10mins):

- a. What is the social concern, and what made you interested in it?
- b. Why should this concern be examined?
- c. Who are the individuals –people that are affected y the social concern, and in what way?
- d. Why would this concern be of interest to social workers, or social work practice?
- e. Briefly summarize what the article you read was about.

Class 2
9/3 - Th

Reasoning About the Social World

Sources of error
Science
Types of research
Class Participation Exercise

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 1: Science, Society, and Social Work Research

****Preparation Ungraded Assignment for Assignment Four - Graded:**

For Thursday – Class 3 (9/10), be ready to discuss and present in class the following questions in **one page** that will be then emailed to the instructor (farber@cua.edu) by 8pm (Upon review, the instructor will provide brief email feedback and permission to pursue this topic for the paper):

1. What social work – social problem is of interest to you?
2. For what group(s) of people is this a problem?
3. In what way(s) are these people affected by the problem?
4. What might be two kinds of research questions that you could pose that could be used for developing an investigation of this social problem?
5. If answers were found for this social problem, how might the people (social work clients) or the profession benefit?

6. Give an example of two scholarly sources (journal articles or books) that you have examined (Use APA style to reference these two sources).

Please note that this ungraded assignment is used to obtain permission from the instructor to pursue the selected topic for investigation for the paper in Assignment Four. This assignment counts for course participation.

WEEK 2

Class 3
9/8 - Tu

Getting Started with the Research Process
Research questions, hypotheses, and variables
Literature reviews
Role of theory
Quantitative vs. qualitative approaches

**** Class Exercise: Comparing 2 articles: Qualitative vs. Quantitative study**

Prior to class, please read the following 2 articles:

- a. Abrams, L. S., and Gordon, A. I. (2003). Self-harm narratives of young urban and sub-urban women. *Affilia, 18*, 429-444.
- b. Pomeroy, E. C., Kiam, R. and Abel, E. M. (1999). The effectiveness of a psychoeducational group for HIV-infected incarcerated women. *Research on Social Work Practice 9* (2), 171 – 187.

And, come prepared to discuss the following:

- a. In what way do they differ in presenting the contents of the study?
- b. Which one is following a quantitative style vs. qualitative style of research?
- c. Based on the qualitative research article, give an example of a possible quantitative research question.

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 2: The process and problems of social work research

Class 4
9/10 - Th

Guidelines for Doing Research
Philosophical approaches
Guidelines for social work research
NASW Code of Ethics
Protection of human subjects, especially vulnerable populations

****DUE – Class Presentation – Discussion and Email to the Instructor:
Preparation Assignment for Assignment Four**

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 2: The process and problems of social work research

WEEK 3

Class 5
9/15 - Tu **Measurement in Research**
Defining - Conceptualizing variables
Operationalizing - Measuring variables: Instrumentation
Scales and Indexes
Types of variables - Levels of measurement
Measurement errors

**** Class Exercise – Handout by the Instructor**

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 3: Measurement

Class 6
9/17 - Th **Measurement in Research, continued**
Reliability of Measuring Instruments
Validity of Measures
Measurement issues with diverse populations

**** Class Exercise – Handout by the Instructor**

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 3: Measurement

Read Article: McMurty, S. L., and Hudson, W. W. (2000). The Client Satisfaction Inventory: Results of an Initial Validation Study, *Research on Social Work Practice, 10*, 644-664.

WEEK 4

Class 7
9/22 - Tu **TEST 1: Engel and Schutt, Chapters 1 through 3**

Class 8
9/24 - Th **Sampling Approaches in Research Studies**
Sample Planning
Sampling terminology
Probability sampling methods

**** Class Exercise – Handout by the Instructor**

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 4: Sampling

WEEK 5

Class 9
9/29 - Tu

Sampling, continued
Non-probability sampling
Generalizability of results

Issues of diversity in sampling

**** Class Exercise – Handout by the Instructor**

Class 10
10/1 - Th

Causation in Experimental Investigation

1st Hour: DUE - Assignment 1 – Class Presentations (10 minutes) and
Hand-in a hard copy of the Summary of the Interview with Faculty
Researcher (See instructions)

2nd Hour: Criteria for causality
Association
Time Order
Nonspuriousness

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 5, “Causation and Research Design”

WEEK 6

Class 11
10/6 - Tu

Causation and Experimental Design Designs

Criteria for causality
Association
Time Order
Nonspuriousness
Individual and Group Units of Analysis
Errors in Causal Reasoning

**** Class Exercise – Handout by the Instructor**

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 5, “Causation and Research Design”

Class 12
10/8 - Th

Group Experimental Designs

Internal validity
External validity
True experiments

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 6: Group Experimental Designs

WEEK 7

Class 13

Group Experimental Designs, continued

10/13 - Tu

Quasi-experimental designs

Designs for program evaluation
Ethical issues in experimental research

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 6: Group Experimental Designs

**** Class Exercise: Evaluating an Intervention:**

Prior to class, please read the following article:

Pomeroy, E. C., Kiam, R. and Abel, E. M. (1999). The effectiveness of a psychoeducational group for HIV-infected incarcerated women. *Research on Social Work Practice* 9 (2), 171 – 187.

And prepare to discuss the following:

- a. What was the social concern that guided the purpose of the study?
- b. What information did the literature review found about the social concern?
- c. What were the research questions and/or hypothesis(es)?
- d. What were the variables?
- e. How were they measured?
- f. What design was used?
- g. To whom are the results generalizable?

Class 14

Single Subject Research

10/15 - Th

The basic single-subject design
Analyzing single-subject designs
Types of single-subject designs

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 7: Single-Subject Design

WEEK 8

Class 15

TEST 2: Engel and Schutt, Chapters 4 through 7

10/20 - Tu

**** Instructor assigns a quantitatively oriented research article for review
(Assignment 2 that is due 10/29)**

Class 16

Survey Research

10/22 - Th

Using questionnaires

Guidelines for constructing questionnaires
Errors in using questionnaires
Sensitivity to diverse populations

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 8: Survey Research

**** Class Exercise: Conducting a Survey**

Prior to this class, please read the following article:

McIntyre, L., Officer, S., and Robinson, L. (2003). Feeling poor: The felt experiences of low-income lone mothers. *Affilia* 18(3) 3-6 – 331.

WEEK 9

Class 17
10/27 - Tu

Approach to article evaluation

Prior to this Class – review assigned readings and read the following article, which will be used for **Class Practice**:

Allen, S. F. (2007). Parents' perceptions of home-visiting practices in home visiting programs. *Infants and Young Children*, 20, 3, 266-281.

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Appendix A – Summaries of frequently cited research articles; Appendix B – Questions to ask about a research article, and Appendix C – How to read a research article.

Class 18
10/29 - Th

Qualitative Methods

Participant observation
Intensive interviewing
Focus groups
Ethical issues in qualitative research

**** DUE Assignment 2 – Article Evaluation: Email (farber@cua.edu) the WORD document to the instructor by 5pm!**

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 9: Observing, Participating, Listening

WEEK 10

Class 19 **Using Statistics in Research**

11/3 - Tu Introducing Statistics
 Preparing Data for Analysis
 Displaying Univariate Distributions
 Measures of Central Tendency
 Measures of Variation

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 12: Quantitative Data Analysis

**** Handout** for a statistical exercise on Percentages
**** Handout** - Homework

Class 20 **Using Statistics in Research, continued**
11/5 - Th Measures of central tendency continued
 Measures of variation continued
 Graphs
 Normal curve

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 12: Quantitative Data Analysis

**** Handout** for a statistical exercise for Mean, Median, Range, and Standard Deviation
**** Handout** - Homework

WEEK 11

Class 21 **Using Statistics in Research, continued**
11/10 - Tu Testing hypotheses
 Comparing two or more means: t-tests, Analysis of variance
 Statistical significance

**** Handout** for t Test for Independent Groups and Dependent Groups, and One-Way ANOVA
**** Handout** - Homework

Class 22 **Using Statistics in Research, continued**
11/12 - Th Linear relationships

Reading Assignment: Dozier, M. and Lindhiem, O. (2006). This is my child: Differences among foster parents in commitment to their young children. *Child Maltreatment 11* (4) 338 – 345.

**** Handout** for using Correlation Coefficient and Coefficient of Determination
**** Handout Assignment 3 (Examination of Statistical Data) by the Instructor**

WEEK 12

Class 23 **Using Statistics in Research, cont.**
11/17 - Tu Chi-square test

**** Handout** for statistical exercise using Chi-Square test

Class 24 **Evaluation Research**
11/19 - Th Evaluation Basics
 Questions for Evaluation Research

Reading Assignment: Engel and Schutt, Chapter 11

****DUE: Assignment 3 – Hand-in a hard copy to the instructor and bring an additional copy for yourself to review in class!**

WEEK 13

Class 25 **TEST 3– Engel and Schutt, Chapters 8, 9 and 12**
11/24 - Tu

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

11/26 - Th **NO CLASS**

WEEK 14

Class 26 **Reading Evaluation Research**
12/1 - Tu Class Participation Exercise: Read the following articles before
class

Reading Assignment:

- (a) Cheung, K. M. (1999). Effectiveness of social work treatment and massage therapy for nursing home clients. *Research on Social Work Practice, 9*, 229-247.

- (b) Horodynski, M.A., and Stommel, M. (2005). Nutrition education aimed at toddlers: An intervention study. *Pediatric Nursing, 31*, 367-372.

Participate in Class Discussion: Class will separate into two groups and each group will address the following issues presented in the selected article:

1. Present the social concern/issue the article addressed;
2. Identify the population being examined;
3. Discuss the purpose of the study;
4. Discuss – summarize the information presented for literature review;
5. Discuss – address how the study addressed any research questions/hypotheses;

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ASSIGNMENT 1
Faculty Interview Questions

Instructions:

- a. Please make an appointment with a social work faculty well in advance of your due date of the assignment;
- b. Plan at least a half-hour for the interview with the faculty member;
- c. Confirm the appointment by phone or email the day before;
- d. Be on time for your interview;
- e. Once you complete the interview, please don't forget to thank the faculty member for his/her time;
- f. Then, write-up a two page report addressing the questions below;
- g. Add a title page to your report that should include the following: Assignment 1, course number (SSS340), student name, and date;
- g. Bring a hard-copy for your presentation on the DUE DATE.

Structure of your inquiry for the faculty member around the following questions:

- 1. What is the focus of your research interests? What type of research have you been involved in?**
- 2. Why are you interested in this area?**
- 3. Why should social workers do research?**
- 4. Why is social work research different from other areas of research?**
- 5. What is the most exciting part of this research?**
- 6. What is the least exciting part of this research?**
- 7. What might the impact of the results of your research have for social work?**

DUE: Class 10, Thursday, October 1, 2009

SSS 340

Research Methods in Social Work
Assignment IV

Social workers should take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed... NASW Code of Ethics (1996), Section 4.08(3)

Students are expected to complete this assignment on their own, without assistance from or consultation with classmates, other students, or anyone else.

Proposing a Research Study for Investigation

This assignment is meant to serve as a “mini-proposal” for developing a research study. The assignment is a short scholarly paper (6-7 pages of text plus a title page, and reference page) in which you will present a social problem for the investigation, present a brief literature review on your selected topic using scholarly references, develop a testable research question and a related hypothesis, identify variables as independent and dependent, discuss measures/instruments that would be used to operationalize the variables, identify unit of analysis, and briefly justify the importance of this study to social work practice.

Please review at least 6-8 scholarly references from social sciences (social work, psychology, education, nursing, etc. on your topic) as part of your literature review.

Use APA latest manual style for scholarly writing style and referencing in text, and for creating a separate reference page at the end of the paper.

The title page should include a specific title for your proposed research study; followed by the Assignment IV caption, student name, course number, and date.

Number your pages in the top header, right, starting with the title page, and finish numbering with reference page(s). Include your last name in the top header on the right as well.

Structure your paper with the following headings:

Introduction (Center of the page)

Literature Review (Left flush margin)

Research Question and Hypothesis (Left flush)

Variables (Left flush)

Unit of Analysis (Left flush)

Importance of the Study (Center)

More details will be provided by the instructor throughout the course.

DUE: Thursday, 9 October 2008; Class 13