I. COURSE PURPOSE

Building upon the foundation social work research course, this advanced curriculum course focuses on the research process within the context of clinical social work practice. Emphasis is on developing the knowledge and skills required to critically assess empirically-based evidence for practice and design ethical and feasible approaches to practice evaluation. Based on key concepts and methodological issues inherent to applied research, the course addresses the steps of problem formulation, including delineation of research questions and hypotheses; group and single-system designs, including issues of internal and external validity; probability and non-probability sampling approaches and related implications for generalizability; approaches to measurement, including measurement reliability, validity, and other criteria for use in practice evaluation; identification of appropriate data collection procedures with special attention to diversity issues; and quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures designed to assess progress and change in client outcomes and practice effectiveness. Critical examination of published research allows students to assess their understanding of core concepts. Development of a research proposal enables students to demonstrate their capacities in designing practice evaluations. Throughout the course, ongoing attention is given to ethical issues that may arise in the evaluation of practice, issues related to research with diverse and at-risk populations, and the role of research in the promotion of social and economic justice.

II. EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course students will be able to:

1. Understand the purposes of practice evaluation research within social work practice.
2. Engage in the process of problem identification and formulation, including the use of the professional literature in shaping and refining research questions and hypotheses important to social work practice.
3. Differentially apply various group and single-system designs for use in practice evaluation and critically assess their strengths and limitations in terms of both internal and external validity.

4. Select appropriate sampling strategies for evaluating practice and identify the implications of such strategies for the generalization of findings.

5. Understand the role of measurement in practice evaluation and the applicability of measurement reliability, validity, and other criteria in selecting measurement tools.

6. Utilize appropriate data collection approaches based on the objectives of the practice evaluation project and the needs of research participants.

7. Specify appropriate statistical methods for describing sample characteristics.

8. Apply appropriate visual and statistical methods for analyzing data from single-system designs and appropriate statistical methods for analyzing data from group designs.

9. Understand the role of clinical or practical significance as auxiliary assessment criteria to statistical significance in practice evaluation.

10. Identify ethical issues and utilize ethical guidelines in designing and conducting practice evaluation research.

11. Identify and address issues related to diversity as they apply to all phases of evaluation research, with respect to age, cognitive ability, literacy, language, culture, race, sex, sexual orientation, disability, and socio-economic status.

12. Understand the linkages between practice evaluation research with at-risk and vulnerable client populations and the promotion of social and economic justice.

13. Demonstrate skills in critiquing published evaluation practice research.

14. Demonstrate skills in developing a feasible research proposal for conducting a social work practice evaluation.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Required Texts (available at the CUA Bookstore)


Note: Supplemental Readings may be assigned for some class sessions.
B. Other Recommended Resources and Media


Various workbooks and short texts on social science research methods and interpreting statistics are also available from http://www.pyrczak.com

C. Course Graded & Ungraded Assignments. **Detailed instructions and criteria for evaluation will be distributed by the instructor for all assignments.**

The mastery of the course contents are built through assignments which are separated into different components: Ethical conduct in research, development of a full research proposal for evaluating the effects of a practice based intervention, and final examination. The ethical conduct assignment is divided into two parts and focuses on integration of ethics in planning research and evaluation of studies. The development of a research proposal is divided into three papers that build a complete proposal and result in a scholarly paper. The final take-home exam develops an evaluation strategy based on a practice case and is used to prepare for the research question in the advanced-year comprehensive examination.

**Ungraded Assignment:** The ungraded assignment is due in Class 3. It serves as a preparation for the development of the graded research proposal paper (further discussed below) and provides an opportunity for individualized support from the instructor. In this assignment, the student is expected to have engaged in a preliminary literature review of the topical area of interest. In a one page outline that is to be emailed to the instructor, the student briefly identifies and discusses: The social problem that is relevant and important for social work practice, the treatment intervention that may be used for evaluation, and one or two possible research questions that may guide the investigation.

**Assignment # 1** (graded): This assignment is composed of two parts. Detailed instructions for this assignment are provided in the first class. **Part A** involves reading and reviewing information about ethical conduct in research using on-line information provided by the National Institute of Health (NIH) and answering a set of questions. Part A is due in Class 2 and is to be emailed to the instructor. **Part B** involves reading an
intervention study and evaluating the study using a specific set of questions. Part B is due in Class 8. A hard copy is to be provided to the instructor.

**Problem Formulation Paper 1** (graded): This paper is the first part of a three-part research proposal. The focus of this part of the proposal is on identifying and developing a problem area or issue important to social work that is amenable to conducting a practice evaluation. This paper will involve the use of the literature to develop a problem statement and identify the practice intervention used for evaluation, present a literature review in respect to the problem area being evaluated, and specify the research question(s) and research hypothesis(es) that will be used to test the effectiveness of the intervention practice. A hard copy of this paper is due in Class 6.

**Research Methodology Paper 2** (graded): This second part of the research proposal presents the various aspects of research methodology required to investigate the stated research question and research hypothesis(es). This paper will provide detailed conceptualization of both the independent variable (i.e., the social work intervention) and dependent variable(s) (i.e., the expected outcomes). It will also delineate the measurement tools, data collection approach, sampling strategy, and design. A hard copy of this paper is due in Class 11.

**Data Analysis Paper 3** (graded): This third and final part of the research proposal presents the data analysis plan for the proposed practice evaluation. The data analysis plan typically includes discussion on the statistical procedures used for describing the sampled participants; statistical tests that will be used to test the hypotheses either under group design or under single system design; and indicators of clinical or practice significance. A hard copy of this paper is due in Class 13.

**Final Examination** (graded). The final take-home exam requires students to integrate and apply course content to a practice evaluation case context specified in a handout by the instructor in the last class. The exam is due by noon on the same day of the following week, and may be emailed to the instructor.

**D. Grading Policy and Weights of Assignments**
Grades will be based on the CUA Grading Policy as described in the *Graduate Announcements*. Full credit will not be given for assignments that are submitted late. **No credit will be given for assignments submitted after they have been reviewed in class.** The following provides weights for the various course assignments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment # 1- A</th>
<th>5%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment # 1- B</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Formulation Paper 1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methodology Paper 2</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Paper 3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**E. 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](http://evaluations.cua.edu) 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 this feedback.

IV. CLASS EXPECTATIONS

A. Scholastic Expectations
   Please refer to the 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 be carefully proofread 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 (DDS) at CUA and submit documentation of a disability: http://disabilityservices.cua.edu/ or 202-319-5211. 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.

D. Attendance/Participation
   Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to arrive to class on time. If you know you must be absent for a particular session, please notify the instructor in advance, or, in the case of illness, as soon as possible. Students are responsible for obtaining any materials they missed due to absence. Unexcused or multiple absences will result in a reduction of the final grade. Students are also expected to read all designated assignments for each class session and to actively participate in class discussion and exercises.

Important Information for Fall 2008 Semester

1. For Monday Classes:

   10/13/08 is an ADMINISTRATIVE MONDAY by the university, which means that all Monday classes for that week take place on the next day, Tuesday, 10/14/08. ALL STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO ATTEND THIS MONDAY CLASS ON TUESDAY PLEASE LET YOUR FIELD PLACEMENT KNOW ABOUT THIS CHANGE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SEMESTER.

2. COURSE RESOURCE: CUA SAKAI
   Sakai works best when using an Internet Explorer Web browser on a PC, not a MacIntosh! If you run into difficulties, please email: Nancy Yeager at yeager@cua.edu and she will give you an alternate login method that works on MacIntosh.
SAKAI ACCESS

1. Access: http://home.cua.edu/

2. Click on top-page tab that shows Sakai and Blackboard:

3. Click on Sakai bulleted Login link :

4. LOGIN: use your CUA username/password to login to CUA Sakai

   CUA User Name: [Your Username]@cua.edu
   Password: [Your Password]
   Login

5. A new page will open:

   Login Success!

   Please click here to continue to your Sakai Home Page.

6. Click on the tab to continue Sakai

7. On the left side, you see several tabs that can be accessed: We shall be using primarily “Announcements”, and “Resources” tabs. All class contents will be stored under “Resources” and each class will have its own folder with relevant information when the course begins.
CLASS SCHEDULE

1  Introduction to Practice Evaluation
   8.25.08 Parallels between social work practice and practice evaluation research
              General types of practice evaluation research
              Review of ethical issues in practice evaluation
              Review of diversity and social justice issues in practice evaluation

              Readings:
              Engel & Schutt: Chapter 10
              Bloom, Fischer, & Orme: Chapter 1

   Handout: Instructions for completing graded assignment #1

9.1.08 NO CLASS - Labor Day Holiday – Enjoy!

2  Problem Formulation
   9.8.08 Developing a problem statement and review of the knowledge base
              The role of the literature review in problem formulation
              Shaping and refining the research question and research hypotheses
              Specifying independent and dependent variables

              Readings:
              Engel & Schutt: Chapter 2, Chapter 13, Appendix D, & Appendix G

   Handout: Instructions for completing ungraded assignment 2,
              Topic for developing a Research Proposal paper

***DUE: Graded Assignment #1: Ethical Conduct in Research – Part A
              Post into the individual password protected Sakai folder

3  Variable Measurement
   9.15.08 Conceptual and operational definitions of variables
              Levels of measurement
              Assessing measurement reliability and validity
              Selecting a measure

              Readings:
              Engel & Schutt: Chapter 3
              Bloom, Fischer, & Orme: Chapters 2 & 10

***DUE: Ungraded Assignment: Selecting a topic for research proposal in
              order to evaluate the effect of a given practice intervention
              Post into the individual password protected Sakai folder

4  Measurement Approaches in Practice Evaluation I
   9.22.08 Specifying problems and goals
              Individualized rating scales
              Client logs

              Readings:
              Engel & Schutt: Chapter 3
              Bloom, Fischer, & Orme: Chapters 3, 6, & 8
5 Measurement Approaches in Practice Evaluation II
9.29.08 Behavioral observation
Standardized questionnaires
Reactivity of measures

Readings:
Bloom, Fischer, & Bloom: Chapters 5, 7, & 9

6 Sampling
10.6.08 Review of probability and non-probability sampling strategies
Implications for generalizability of findings

Readings:
Engel & Schutt: Chapter 4

***DUE: Problem Formulation Paper 1
Post into the individual password protected Sakai folder

NOTE: 10.13.08 NO CLASS on Monday – Make-up Tuesday 10.14.08 at the same time

7 Practice Evaluation Designs: Group Designs
10.14.08 Pre-experimental, quasi-experimental, and true experimental group designs
Threats to internal and external validity

Readings:
Engel & Schutt: Chapters 5 & 6

8 Analysis of Group Design Data
10.20.08 Descriptive statistics: Measures of central tendency and measures of variability
Inferential statistics: Categorical data (chi-square)
Inferential statistics: Continuous data (t-tests and ANOVA)

Readings:
Engel & Schutt: Chapters 11 & 12
Weinbach & Grinell: Chapters 10 (Cross-tabulation) & 11 (t-tests and Analysis of Variance)

***DUE: Graded Assignment 1: Evaluating Ethics in Research – Part B
Post into the individual password protected Sakai folder

9 Practice Evaluation Designs: Single-System Designs I
10.27.08 Principles of single-system designs
Developing baselines
Basic single-system design: AB
Experimental single-system designs: ABA, ABAB, BAB

Readings:
Engel & Schutt: Chapter 7
Bloom, Fischer, & Orme: Chapters 11, 12, 13, & 14
10 Practice Evaluation Designs: Single-System Designs II
11.3.08 Multiple designs for single systems
Changing intensity and successive intervention designs
Complex and combined designs
Selecting a design
Readings:
Bloom, Fischer, & Orme: Chapters 15, 16, 17, & 18

11 Analysis of Single-System Designs I
11.10.08 Developing a measurement and recording plan
Basic principles of analysis
Visual analysis of single-system design data
Readings:
Bloom, Fischer, & Orme: Chapters 4, 19 & 20

***DUE: Methodology Paper 2
Post into the individual password protected Sakai folder

12 Analysis of Single-System Designs II
11.17.08 Descriptive statistics: Measures of trend and effect size
Inferential statistics: Proportion-frequency approach, 3 SD Band approach, Chi-square, t-test
Readings:
Bloom, Fischer, & Orme: Chapters 21 & 22

13 Critique of Evaluation Studies
11.24.08 Class Exercise: Assessing elements of published studies in instructor-provided journal articles
Readings:
Engel & Schutt: Appendix B, Appendix C

***DUE: Data Analysis Paper 3
Post into the individual password protected Sakai folder

14 Practicing Design Development and Exam Review
12.1.08 Class Exercise for Exam Review: Developing group and single-system design studies in an instructor-provided case context
No Assigned Readings
Handout: Final Take-Home Examination

12.8.08 ***DUE: Final Take-Home Exam must be posted by noon!
Post into the individual password protected Sakai folder