

SOCIAL WELFARE RESEARCH

General Description

The Council on Social Work Education calls on Schools of Social Work to prepare social workers who 1) draw on practice/policy-related research, 2) can carry out practice/policy-related research, and 3) know how to evaluate their practice. Both practice and research require posing well-structured questions related to decisions and locating and critically appraising related research findings. In both practice and research, the soundness of decisions may be enhanced by clarifying assumptions, clearly describing outcomes, careful use of language, viewing mistakes as learning opportunities, being aware of potential biases, critical discussion, and relying on intellectual standards such as clarity, relevance, accuracy, and honesty.

This section is designed to enhance students' skills in integrating practice and research drawing on developments in evidence-based practice and policy and related critical thinking skills. Evidence-based practice involves "the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions regarding the welfare of individuals including consideration of clients' values" (Sackett et al., 1996). Critical thinking values, knowledge and skills are integral to evidence-based practice. They contribute to avoiding biases that can get in the way of making sound decisions.

Course Objectives

- Search effectively and efficiently for practice and policy related research.
- Increase skills in carrying out practice/policy-related research. Design a research project related to your field work setting focused on a question that can be answered via the method suggested and accurately critique it.
- Enhance practice/policy evaluation skills.
- Write clearly and concisely.
- Recognize links between evidence-based practice and policy and ethical obligations
- Pose well structured answerable questions related to practice and policy decisions.
- Accurately describe different kinds of research studies and the questions they can and cannot answer.
- Track down the best evidence with which to answer these questions.
- Accurately appraise evidence for its validity (closeness to the truth), impact (size of effect), and applicability (usefulness to practice and policy).
- X Draw on clinical expertise to integrate this critical appraisal with information about clients' unique characteristics and circumstances including their values and expectations as well as available resources.
- Accurately identify common errors in reasoning.

- Demonstrate accurate critical appraisal of claims and arguments; Accurately identify professional propaganda.
- Demonstrate accurate understanding of reliability and validity.
- Demonstrate understanding of basic statistical concepts.
- Distinguish between facts, opinions, hypotheses, and preferences.
- Demonstrate effective use of databases related to practice-and policy questions as well as computer programs for data collation and analysis.

Teaching Format

Lecture/discussion, in-class practice in applying course content and hands-on learning regarding computer skills.

Requirements

Completion of required reading and assignments by date given in class. All assignments must be satisfactorily completed to pass the course. Written assignments must be typed double spaced unless otherwise noted and references must be in APA style (consult handout distributed in class). The required product for 282A is a completed research proposal that includes a clear description of the question posed related to services offered in your field work agency, data collection methods, measures used and suggested data analysis and ethical concerns. Criteria for grading proposals include: 1) potential of research method to answer question, 2) feasibility, 3) relevance to field work agency, 4) interest to student, 5) validity and reliability of measures, 6) clarity, completeness, and organization of proposal, 7) up-to-dateness in building on available well-argued theory and related research, and 8) accuracy and completeness of critique. Research proposals are due last day of class. Brief one-two page summaries of proposals must be presented to the class.

A proposal draft is due Session 8. (A proposal outline will be distributed in class.) Student will critique other student's proposals and prepare brief critiques due Week 9. Guidelines for this review will be distributed in class. Other requirements include satisfactory completion of mastery quizzes on basic concepts and their application.

Grading:

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| • Research proposal and related class presentations | 60% |
| • Demonstration by class participation that assigned reading has been carefully read. Assignments/completion of mastery quizzes | 40% |

Required texts (Used in both 282A and 282B.)

Gibbs, L. E. (2003). Evidence-based practice for the helping professions. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Greenhalgh, T. (2001). How to read a paper (2nd Ed.). London: BMJ.

SPSS 10.0 Student Version. (2000). Upper Saddle River, NJ; Prentice-Hall.

Weinbach, R. W. & Grinnell, R. M. (2001). Statistics for social workers (5th ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Review 280 text (or appropriate alternative) as needed: Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (1997). Research methods for social work (3rd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole

Recommended: See separate list.

Session 1: Overview and Introduction August 29

- Overview
- Evidence-based practice and policy and their rivals (e.g., authority, pseudoscience, quackery, superstition)
- Ethical issues: Examples of harm caused by ignoring practice-related research
- Skeptics, believers and cynics
- Common fallacies/biases
- Pseudoscience, fads, quackery, and fraud in the helping professions and related propaganda strategies
- Validity and reliability

Required Reading (Please read over first two sessions)

Gibbs (op.cit.), Chapter 1, 2, and 3, pp. 1-87.

Greenhalgh (op.cit.), Chapter 1, pp. 1—14.

Review Rubin & Babbie (op.cit.) as needed, or similar source such as Sommer & Sommer.

ASSIGNMENT 1: (Due Session 2). Bring in typed (double spaced) description of your 280 proposal. What kind of question does it involve and what method did you recommend to answer it? Estimate the likelihood that the method described can answer the question asked using a scale ranging from 1 (none) to 6 (very good). Include a brief typed description explaining your estimate.

ASSIGNMENT 2: (Due Session 2). Describe a research question you would like to pursue for your 282 AB research project and suggest a method for doing so. Estimate the likelihood that the method you suggest can answer your question using the scale described in Assignment 2.

ASSIGNMENT 3: (Due Session 2). Pose a well-structured, answerable question related to the effectiveness of the most important service offered by your agency.

Recommended Reading: See separate list.

Session 2: Posing Questions and Searching for Answers Sept. 12

- Different kinds of questions.
- Review of questions.
- Data collection options
- Common errors.
- Validity and reliability of measures
- Accessing research findings related to important practice decisions.
- Use of the Internet
- Library resources

Required Reading

Gibbs (op.cit). Review required reading Session 1. Review Chapter 3 and read Chapter 4, pp. 88-146.

Greenhalgh (op.cit), Chapters 2-4, pp. 15-75, Chapter 7, pp. 105-119.

Review Rubin & Babbie (op.cit.) as needed. Chapters 2 and 4 or Sommer & Sommer, (op.cit.), Chapter 20, pp. 284-296.

ASSIGNMENT 4: (Due Session 3). Ask your supervisor for a question of interest re: agency services.

ASSIGNMENT 5: (Due Session 3). Conduct a search for research findings related to your question. Complete a Search Planning Form and a Search Log using forms in Gibbs text and submit to instructor together with a copy of the best evidence you discovered.

Recommended Reading: See separate list.

Session 3: Effectiveness and Prevention Questions: Does a method do more good than harm? Sept. 19

- Purpose
- Randomized Controlled Trials
- Alternatives to RCTs and their advantages and disadvantages
- Sources of bias
- Reviewing the validity and reliability of measures
- Critical Appraisal Checklist
- Hierarchies of evidence
- The many kinds of evidence

Required Reading

Campbell, D. T., & Stanley, J. C. (1963). Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally, 5-22.

Gibbs (op.cit.), Chapter 5, pp. 147-184.

Greenhalgh (op.cit.), Chapter 6, pp. 94-104.

Review Rubin & Babbie (op.cit.) or sources such as Sommer & Sommer, op.cit., as needed.

Session 4: Locating and Evaluating Meta Analyses and Systematic Reviews Sept. 26

- Purpose
- Contrast Cochrane and Campbell systematic reviews and authoritarian reviews
- Critical Appraisal Checklist
- Effect size
- Effectiveness and efficiency
- Cochrane and Campbell Collaborations

Required Reading

Gibbs (op.cit.), Chapter 6, pp. 185-195.

Greenhalgh, (op.cit.), Chapters 8-11, pp. 120-165.

ASSIGNMENT 6: (Due Session 5). Computer Lab assignment given in class.

Session 5: Computer Session: Search Strategies; Hands on Searching: Review of Statistical Tests Oct. 3

Required Reading

Greenhalgh (op.cit.), Chapter 5, pp. 76-93.

ASSIGNMENT 7: (Due Session 6.) Complete a literature search related to your supervisor's question. (Complete and turn in a Search Planning Form and your Search Log together with a copy of the best evidence you found.)

ASSIGNMENT 8: (Due Session 6). Clarify your research question and make any changes you think necessary in how you would pursue this based on review of related literature. Must be typed double-spaced with margins to allow comments. Clearly describe how you would measure key variables.

Session 6: Descriptive Questions (Who, What, Where, When, How many?) Oct. 10

- Purposes
- Populations and samples
- The normal distribution
- Central tendency and variance

- Introduction to data entry
- Introduction to SPSS
- Qualitative research

Required Reading

Gibbs (op.cit.), Chapter 8, pp. 218-236.

Weinbach & Grinnell (op.cit.), Chapters 1-5, pp. 1-91. (This should be a review of content covered in SW 280 in Rubin and Babbie (op.cit.).

Recommended Reading

See separate list.

Session 7: Questions Regarding Association Oct. 17

- Options for investigation (e.g., surveys, observation)
- Correlation and regression
- Sampling considerations
- Sources of bias
- Statistical analyses
- Examples

Required Reading

Gibbs (op.cit.), Chapter 7, pp. 196-217.

Greenhalgh (op.cit.), pp. 166-178.

Review relevant sections in Rubin and Babbie as needed or similar source such as Sommer and Sommer (op.cit.).

Weinbach and Grinnell (op.cit.), Chapters 8 and 9, pp. 131-170.

ASSIGNMENT 9: (Due Session 8). Describe how you could evaluate your current work with a client using a single case design.

Session 8: Single Case Studies and Introduction of Qualitative Research Oct. 24

- Varieties of single case studies
- Questions that can be answered
- Selecting measures
- Different kinds of measures

Required Reading

Gibbs (op.cit.), Chapter 9, pp. 237-249.

ASSIGNMENT 10: (Due Session 9). Three copies of your draft of your research proposal (one to be given to student reviewer).

Recommended Reading: See separate list.

Session 9: Review of Students' Research Questions Oct. 31Required Reading

Review Weinbach & Grinnell (op.cit) as needed.

ASSIGNMENT 11: (Due Session 10): Computer assignment.

Session 10: Computer Lab Nov. 7**Session 11: Qualitative Research Nov. 14**

- Varieties
- Data analysis options
- Common errors

Recommended Reading: See separate list.

Sessions 12-14 Proposal Presentations and Critiques (November 21, 28 and December 5)

Proposal drafts due. (Bring 3 copies.)