

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

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| <b>Course Number:</b>      | N385R                      | <b>Instructor's name:</b> | Allen Rubin                            |
| <b>Unique Number:</b>      | 66320                      | <b>Office Number:</b>     | 3.130E                                 |
| <b>Semester:</b>           | Fall 2007                  | <b>Office Phone:</b>      | (512) 471-9218                         |
|                            |                            | <b>E-mail:</b>            | arubin@mail.utexas.edu                 |
| <b>Meeting Time/Place:</b> | Tues, 8:30 AM<br>2.122 SSW | <b>Office Hours:</b>      | Thurs, 1:30-3:00<br>and by appointment |

**SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH METHODS I**

**I. Standardized Course Description:**

This Foundation course is designed to help students gain an understanding of and appreciation for the use of research as a tool for professional evidence-based practice. Students are introduced to the concepts and skills underlying a systematic approach to social work research, including basic research terminology, the scientific method in social work, the value of research in social work, research ethics and the social work value base, problem formulation and conceptualization, measurement, research designs to evaluate programs and practice, sampling, alternative quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analytic techniques, and preparation and use of research reports. The emphasis in the course is on equipping students with the research knowledge and skills they'll need to engage in the evidence-based practice process at all levels of social work practice. As part of that process, they will learn how to critically appraise sources of scientific evidence and how the criteria for that appraisal will vary depending upon the purpose of the research.

**II. Standardized Course Objectives:** Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Formulate answerable evidence-based practice research questions;
2. Efficiently conduct advanced searches of electronic bibliographic databases and other sources to find evidence bearing on evidence-based practice research questions;
3. Critically appraise sources of scientific evidence and explain how the criteria for that appraisal will vary depending upon the purpose of the research;
4. Discuss why research evidence needs to be integrated with practice expertise and idiosyncratic client preferences, circumstances and values in the evidence-based practice process;
5. Design evaluations as part of evidence-based practice.
6. Explain how both qualitative and quantitative research processes apply in evidence-based practice;
7. Define basic qualitative and quantitative research concepts and describe the basic principles of causal inference, and their relationship to the various types of research designs;
8. Describe key concepts in measurement bearing on evidence-based practice, such as sources of measurement error, reliability and validity, and measurement equivalence across cultures.
9. Find measurement instruments applicable to evidence-based practice, sources of evidence bearing on the suitability of those instruments for specific practice scenarios, and critically appraise those sources from the standpoint of measurement principles and cultural sensitivity.

10. Describe the logic of probability sampling procedures, issues in the use of non-probability sampling procedures, how sampling issues bear on conducting evidence-based practice research at mezzo and macro levels of practice, and the implications of sampling for appraising and integrating sources of evidence in guiding practice decisions;
11. Describe how particular values and sensitivity to ethical issues influence the conducting of research;
12. Give examples of the issues that diversity (e.g., gender, ethnicity, culture, age, sexual orientation, race, class, and physical or mental ability) raises in the conduct of research and in appraising and utilizing research to guide practice decisions;
13. Critically appraise how social work commitment to equity and social justice influences and differentiates the social work research process.

### III. Teaching Methods:

The primary means of instruction will be in class exercises and class discussions from the assigned readings. Students will be expected to have done the assigned readings before class.

### IV. Required Texts:

Rubin, A., & Babbie, E. (2008). Research Methods for Social Work, 6th ed. Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole.

Rubin, A., Practice-Oriented Study Guide for Research Methods for Social Work, 6th ed. Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole.

Other readings are found on the course agenda. Hard copies will be made available for your use in the School Of Social Work, Learning Resource Center. Electronic copies can be downloaded on Blackboard.

### V. Grading

10 points      There will be a 5-item true/false quiz at the beginning of most class sessions. Each quiz will assess whether the student read and recalls the main points of the assigned readings for that session. The overall percentage of correct answers across all but two quizzes will account for **10 percent** of the course grade. The two quizzes with the lowest percentage of correct answers will be dropped from this calculation. Regardless of the reason for absences or tardiness, any quizzes that are missed due to absence or tardiness will be included among the two dropped quizzes. If more than two quizzes are missed (regardless of the reason) those additional quizzes will be included (with a score of zero) in the overall calculation.

40 points      Exam 1 (Multiple choice and/or true/false, only)

25 points      Exam 2 (Multiple choice and/or true/false, only)

25 points      Term paper (described later in Section VIII of this syllabus)

All grades will be determined in the following manner:

#### **Accumulated Points and Grading Scale**

100 - 94 = A  
 93 - 90 = A-  
 89 - 87 = B+  
 86 - 84 = B  
 83 - 80 = B-  
 79 - 77 = C+

76 - 74 = C  
73 - 70 = C-  
69 - 67 = D+  
66 - 64 = D  
63 - 60 = D-  
59 and below = F

## VI. Course Requirements

Two exams, quizzes at the start of most class sessions, and a term paper. Class attendance and thoughtful participation reflecting advanced studying of the assigned readings before class, with a special emphasis on in-class article critiques.

## VII. Class Policies

Drops: May be approved by instructor up to November 13.

Incompletes, late submissions and make-up examinations: Should be approved in advance by instructor and will be considered only in the case of compelling circumstances.

The university recommends that instructors specify policies on scholastic dishonesty. In this course, scholastic dishonesty may result in a grade of an F in the course and a report to the MSSW Program Committee and the Office of Graduate Studies. While I do not anticipate scholastic dishonesty occurring, 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/academicintegrity.html>).

Persons with Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability (physical or cognitive) who requires academic accommodations should contact the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259 (voice) or 471-4641 (TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing) as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations.

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 also notify instructor regarding any safety concerns.

## VIII. Term Paper: Evidence-Based Practice Review and Plan

30 points      Approximately 10-15 pages, double-spaced, stapled      Due in class on December 4

The focus of the paper should be on selecting and describing an evidence-based intervention and evaluation plan for a problem (or a real client or a fictional client that you make up) related to social work practice. The level of practice can be micro or macro. A few examples of problems might be: abusive parents (prevention or treatment), traumatized children or adults, welfare reform, community development, family preservation, substance abuse, homelessness, depression among nursing home residents, preventing hospitalization among individuals with chronic brain disorders, coping with death and dying, marital problems, runaways, school dropout, HIV/AIDS prevention, caregiver burden, and many more – these are just some illustrations to help you consider what you may want to choose.

The paper should reflect appropriate implementation of all Steps of the Evidence-Based Practice process, which include: 1) Formulating a practice question, 2) Searching for the best available evidence to answer that question, 3) Critically appraising that evidence, 4) Integrating the critical appraisal of this evidence with our clinical expertise and client values and preferences, and 5) Evaluating the effectiveness of our practice decision. The intervention plan you select should emerge from a review of recently published outcome studies, meta-analyses, and/or systematic

reviews on the effectiveness of interventions that have been tested in the past for your selected problem. If there is adequate empirical evidence suggesting that a particular intervention approach may be the most effective way to intervene with your selected problem, then you should select that approach and justify your selection based on the evidence and the internal validity of at least one methodologically strong study, methodologically strong meta-analysis, or methodologically strong systematic review. In other words, the intervention you select should be the one with the best scientific evidence supporting its effectiveness for the practice problem in question.

Be sure to critically appraise the key studies, meta-analyses, and/or systematic reviews you review. Show that you can distinguish those that are sufficiently sound methodologically to guide practice from those whose methodological weaknesses imply the need for more rigorous research before evidence-based practice implications are warranted. Explain/justify your intervention plan based on the evidence you have found in your review.

Your rationale for the selection also should take into account the similarity or dissimilarity between your practice scenario and the research setting and participants. It also should address how well the researched intervention is likely to fit your practice scenario. If the best scientific evidence available does not fit your practice scenario then you should acknowledge that and explain and justify your selection of the next best scientific evidence in light of that.

There is no specific minimum number of studies that you need to review. Just make sure you've found the most relevant recent studies. For some problems, this may be just one or two rigorous studies, particularly if the study is a systematic review or meta-analysis. For others, it may be more. One highly rigorous, internally valid study or methodologically strong systematic review or meta-analysis is worth much more than a multitude of studies with weak validity. Thus, it is possible to base your selection on only one very strong study or very strong systematic review or meta-analysis. However, you should **NOT** base it exclusively on a study included in the article critique readings in this syllabus. **Important** – Do **Not** just select an intervention plan in advance and then restrict your literature review exclusively to that intervention. Instead, review recent outcome studies, systematic reviews, or meta-analyses on whatever interventions have been tested for your selected problem, and then select and describe an intervention plan based on your review and appraisal. Your paper can be guided by the following outline:

- I. Briefly describe the practice problem and evidence-based practice question.
- II. Describe the way you searched for the best evidence (internet search engines, websites, abstracts, etc.)
- III. Briefly describe the chosen intervention plan
- IV. Critically appraise the main study(s) that led you to choose this plan
- V. Compare the study(s) above to others, explain why it had the best evidence, and justify your intervention selection taking into account how well it fits your practice scenario.
- VI. Formulate a single-case design<sup>1</sup> to evaluate your own effectiveness in implementing the chosen intervention plan. This section should:
  - A. Describe your research design and why you chose it (e.g., AB, ABAB, B+, etc.)
  - B. Describe and justify what you will measure, source of data (Self-report? Behavioral observation? etc.), any measurement instruments used (i.e., reliability? validity?), who will measure, and when each measurement will be taken.
  - C. Identify and justify how many data points you will have in each phase.

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<sup>1</sup> If a single-case design does not fit your situation, you may formulate an experimental or quasi-experimental design (including a simple time-series design)

## IX. Course Schedule

| Date     | Description  | Readings  |
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| Sept. 4  | Introduction to Course; Role of Scientific Method and Research in Social Work; Research concepts and terminology; Philosophical issues | Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 1, 3 (pp. 39-52, 62-64), 7 (pp. 151-156)<br>Study Guide, Ch. 1, 3, 7  |
| Sept. 11 | The Evidence-Based Practice Process  | Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 2<br>Study Guide, Ch. 2<br>Thyer (2004). What is evidence-based practice? <i>Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention</i> , 4, 2, 167-176.   |
| Sept. 18 | Measurement  | Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 7 (pp. 156-169), 8<br>Study Guide: Ch. 7, 8   |
| Sept. 25 | Causal Inference; Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Evaluating Programs and Practice                                     | Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 10 (pp. 229-240), 11<br>Study Guide, Ch. 10, 11   |
| Oct. 2   | Article Critiques  | Shapiro, "Efficacy of the Eye Movement Desensitization Procedure in the Treatment of Traumatic Memories"<br><br>Edmond et. al. "The Effectiveness of EMDR with Adult Female Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse"<br><br>Black et al. "Evaluating a Psychoeducational Sexual Assault Prevention Program Incorporating Theatrical Presentation, Peer Education, and Social Work"<br><br>Johnson et al. "Thought Field Therapy – Soothing the Bad Moments of Kosovo" |
| Oct. 9   | Single-Case Evaluation Designs   | Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 12<br>Study Guide: Ch. 12   |
| Oct. 16  | Article critiques  | Taber, "Cognitive behavior modification treatment of an aggressive 11-year old boy"<br><br>Wolfe, et al., "Intensive Behavioral Parent Training for a Child Abusive Mother"<br><br>Ronen, T. & Rosenbaum, M. (2001).  |

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|         |   | “Helping Children to Help Themselves: A Case Study of Enuresis and Nail Biting.”  |
| Oct. 23 | Exam 1  |   |
| Oct. 30 | Library day for term paper research   |   |
| Nov. 6  | Understanding and utilizing inferential statistical findings in group experiments and quasi-experiments | Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 21<br>Study Guide: Ch. 21   |
| Nov. 13 | Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses  | Rubin & Babbie, pp. 528-530<br><br>Rubin, <i>Practitioners’ Guide to Using Research for Evidence-Based Practice</i> , Ch. 8, “Critically Appraising Systematic Reviews And Meta-Analyses”<br><br>Maxfield & Hyer, (2002) “The Relationship Between Efficacy and Methodology in Studies Investigating EMDR Treatment of PTSD,” <i>Journal of Clinical Psychology</i> , 58, 23-41.<br><br>Bisson, et al., “Psychological Treatments for Chronic PTSD: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” <i>British Journal of Psychiatry</i> , 190, 2, February 2007.<br><br>Seidler & Wagner, “Comparing the Efficacy of EMDR and TF-CBT in the treatment of PTSD: A Meta-analytic Study,” <i>Psychological Medicine</i> , 36, 11, November 2006 |
| Nov. 20 | Sampling and surveys  | Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 14-15<br>Study Guide: Ch. 14-15   |

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| Nov. 27 | Exam 2  |   |
| Dec. 4  | Qualitative Methods<br><b>TERM PAPER DUE IN CLASS</b> | Rubin & Babbie, Ch. 17-18<br>Study Guide, Ch. 17-18 |