SW215 Final Research Paper Detailed Instructions and Guidelines

This paper represents the final version of your two-semester research project. Some students completed this project individually, and others worked as part of a research group. Regardless of your project format, this paper should clearly tell the story of your research—what you asked, what you did, what you found, and why it matters—using professional social work research standards.

You will receive feedback on drafts throughout the semester. Please use office hours or meetings if you want help—this is one of the fastest ways to strengthen your paper.

Overall Expectations (Applies to Everyone)

All papers—individual and group—must:

- Use APA format throughout
- Include in-text citations and a References section
- Clearly distinguish your own writing and analysis from sources
- Be free of grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors
- Maintain a clear, consistent academic writing style

Working Individually vs. Working in Groups

Individual Projects

If you completed your research on your own, you are responsible for:

- Writing all sections of the paper
- Conducting and reporting the data analysis
- Creating at least one APA-formatted table, figure, or chart

Group Projects

If you completed your research as part of a group, the expectations are slightly different to ensure that all group members contribute meaningfully.

Division of Work

- Groups are expected to divide work as evenly as possible among members.
- Each group member should have a clearly defined role in the project (e.g., literature review lead, methods lead, data analysis lead).
- All members are responsible for understanding the entire project, even if sections were drafted by different people.

Important: Uneven contribution may affect individual grades if concerns are raised or documented.

Expanded Data Analysis Requirement for Group Projects

To ensure that each group member has hands-on experience with data analysis, group papers must include expanded data analysis.

What This Means:

- Group projects must include multiple APA-formatted tables, figures, or charts
- Each group member should:
    - Create at least one table or figure
    - Be responsible for writing the corresponding results text that describes that table or figure
- All tables and figures must follow APA formatting, be clearly labeled, and be referenced in the text

Example:

- One group member creates a table describing sample demographics
- Another creates a figure showing differences between groups
- Another creates a table summarizing qualitative themes

This expanded analysis ensures that everyone gains experience working with data, which is a key goal of this course.

1. **Abstract**

(You may write two versions: one early version for your LAS application, and a final version at the end of the semester that includes findings and implications.)

The abstract is a **brief summary of your entire research project**. It should be **200–250 words** and include:

a) The **focus of the study**, including your research question and/or hypothesis
b) The **methods** you used
c) A **brief summary of findings and key implications**

Tip: Read abstracts from articles you used in your literature review to get a sense of appropriate tone, level of detail, and flow.

2. **Introduction** (Completed.in.Fall)

You completed the introduction during the fall semester, but this is a good time to **revisit and refine it**. As you reread this section, consider:

- Are there parts that no longer fit with the overall direction of your project?
- Is anything missing that would help the reader better understand the purpose and importance of your study?
- Does the introduction clearly connect to the methods and findings you now have?

Make edits as needed to improve clarity, logic, and flow.

3. **Literature Review** (Completed.in.Fall)

You completed your literature review in the fall, but you may want to:

- Add a source you did not include earlier
- Include a new source you found since last semester
- Proofread carefully for grammar, clarity, and APA formatting

As you revise, think about how well your literature review **sets up and supports your research question and methods**.

4. **Research Question and Hypothesis** (Completed.in.Fall)

Although this section was completed in the fall, research questions and hypotheses often **evolve during the research process**. Review this section to make sure that:

- Your research question and hypothesis are **clearly stated**
- The question aligns with what you actually did in your study
- Neutral, objective language is used
- The **null hypothesis** is clearly framed
- Your **independent and dependent variables** are clearly explained

5. **Methodology**

You created a research plan in the fall, but your final methodology section should reflect **what you actually did**, not just what you originally planned.
Be sure this section clearly describes:

- Your **sample** (who participated)
- How your survey or data collection tools were **distributed and collected**
- Any **quantitative and/or qualitative measures** used
- Any changes made after submitting your IRB application

If you used validated measures, **cite the original source**. If you adapted or created questions, explain **how and why** you made those changes.

6. **Data Analysis and Findings**

This section focuses on **what you found**, not what it means. You may report simple findings, but **do not interpret or explain their meaning** in this section. Save interpretation for the Discussion section.

Include:

- A description of your sample
- **Descriptive statistics** for relevant variables
- A list of the **statistical tests** used (e.g., mean, median, standard deviation, chi-square, independent or dependent t-tests)
- A description of your qualitative data (number of responses, length, etc.)
- An explanation of your **coding process** and identified themes

Tables and Figures (APA Required)

- Individual projects: At least one table, figure, or chart
- Group projects: Multiple tables and/or figures, with one created by each group member

All tables and figures must:

✓ Follow APA format
✓ Be numbered and titled
✓ Be referenced in the text (e.g., "see Table 2")
✓ Present data clearly without interpretation

7. **Discussion**

In this section, you will **interpret your findings**. This is where you begin to **make meaning** of your results.

Consider:

- How do your quantitative and qualitative findings relate to each other?
- How do your findings connect to the literature you reviewed earlier?
- Do your results support, contradict, or extend existing research?
- What new insights did you gain through this research?

8. **Limitations**

All research has limitations, and acknowledging them strengthens your work.

Discuss:

- What you would do differently in the future related to sampling, measures, or analysis
- Any threats to **internal or external validity**
- The realities and constraints of being an **undergraduate researcher completing a course-based project**, and how this shaped your study

9. **Implications and Conclusions**

In your final section, think about the **bigger picture**:

- How might your findings be useful to researchers or professionals in related fields?
- Are there practice or policy issues that deserve more attention?
- What is a logical **next research question**?
- How does your work contribute to either scientific knowledge or social work practice?

Based on your literature review and findings, share **original ideas** that move the research or practice conversation forward. You may include **additional peer-reviewed sources** to support your conclusions.

10. **References**

This section needs to include all of the sources you used for your paper, in APA style. A complete **APA-formatted References section must have**:

- All in-text citations included
- Alphabetized entries
- Hanging indents
- Correct APA formatting