Introduction to Social Work Research
3844:0BBB; 0CCC

The University of Iowa
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Spring, 2026

Course Meets Tuesday & Thursday in 332 North Hall

- 0BBB: 9:30 – 10:45 AM
- 0CCC: 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM

School of Social Work

Instructor
Megan Ronnenberg, MSW, PhD
Assistant Professor

Phone
319-533-2972

Email
Megan-ronnenberg@uiowa.edu

Office location
North Hall, 353

Student drop-in hours
1:30-3:00, Tuesdays & Thursdays In-Person

I am available to meet via zoom or during additional times at your request.

Teaching Assistant
Erin Bughman

Email
Erin-bughman@uiowa.edu

Office location

Student drop-in hours

School of Social Work Departmental Executive Officer (DEO)
Miriam Landsman, Director, Associate Professor

Email
Miriam-landsman@uiowa.edu

Role
The DEO is responsible for supervising the delivery of courses in their department.

Student Complaints
Students with a complaint about a grade or a related matter should first discuss the situation with the instructor and finally with the DEO (Chair) of the School of Social Work. From there, students will sometimes be referred to the department or program's Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) or Director of Graduate Studies (DGS).

Undergraduate students should contact CLAS Undergraduate Programs for support when the matter is not resolved at the previous level. Graduate students should contact the CLAS Graduate Affairs Manager when additional support is needed.

Course's College (Administrative Home)
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) is the home of this course, and CLAS governs the add and drop deadlines, academic misconduct policies, and other undergraduate policies and procedures. Other UI colleges may have different policies.

Drop Deadline for this Course
You may drop an individual course before the drop deadline; after this deadline you will need collegiate approval. You can look up the drop deadline for this course here. When you drop a course, a "W" will appear on your transcript. The mark of "W" is a neutral mark that does not affect your GPA. To discuss how dropping (or staying in) a course might affect your academic goals, please contact your Academic Advisor. Directions for adding or dropping a course and other registration changes can be found on the Registrar's website. Undergraduate students can find policies on dropping CLAS courses here.

UI Student Email Policy
Students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their UI email address (uiowa.edu) and must use this address for any communication with instructors or staff in the UI community. For the privacy and the protection of student records, UI faculty and staff can only correspond with UI email addresses.

Description of Course
This course teaches a scientific approach to knowledge building, with emphasis on critical use of research, including quantitative and qualitative methods, evaluation of practice, computerized data analysis, ethics and diversity in social work research.

Learning Outcomes
At the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. Describe the ways people engage with research and evidence daily, and assess quality or credibility of evidence
2. Identify, evaluate, and synthesize research literature on social work topics
3. Apply anti-racist and anti-oppressive perspectives to formulate research implications for social work policy and practice
4. Design and justify a research study on a social work topic

Textbooks/Materials

You do not need to purchase a textbook for this course. You may download your textbook for free at PressBooks

- Title: Scientific Inquiry in Social Work
- Author: Matthew DeCarlo
- Publisher: Open Social Work Education
- Copyright @ 2018

Course ICON site

To access the course site, log into Iowa Courses Online (ICON) using your Hawk ID and password.

Grading System

For CLAS undergraduate grading guidelines and procedures, see this page.

Final grades will be awarded based on the following ranges:

A		**B**		**C**		**D**		**F**	
A+	*99-100*	B+	*87-89*	C+	*77-79*	D+	67-69	F	59 or >
A	*94-98*	B	*83-86*	C	*73-76*	D	63-66		
A-	*90-93*	B-	*80-82*	C-	*70-72*	D-	60-62		

Course Grades

Grades in this course are based on completion of required assignments, some of which are individual and some of which are in groups.

Course Requirements	**Points**
1. Weekly Reflections (Weeks 1-3) (Individual)	*4 Pts Each* 12 Pts Total
2. Research in the News Discussion Facilitation (Individual)	10 Pts
3. One Found Article* (Individual)	Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory
4. Annotated Bibliography (Group)	12 Pts
5. Research Question(s) & Hypotheses (Group)	10 Pts

6. Bridge to Belonging Lab – Memo Activity	Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory
7. Research Proposal Methods Paper (Group)	16 Pts
8. Implications Write-Up (Individual)	10 Pts
9. Research Proposal Poster and Presentation (Group)	20 Pts
10. Group/Team Rating & Participation Points (Individual)	10 Pts
11. 3 Lab Assignments* (Individual)	Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory
12. Demonstration of professional and ethical behavior	Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory
Total	100
*Students must complete all three lab assignments, the found article assignment, and the Bridge to Belonging memo activity to pass this class	

Late Work

If you know you are not going to turn an assignment in by the due date/time, please notify me in advance. I can work with you on extensions but prefer communication. When students do not turn in an assignment by the due date, I will enter a grade of "0" until the work is complete, at which time I am happy to grade it. Assignments submitted more than two weeks past due date/time without communication may not be accepted.

Attendance and Accommodations

Students are responsible for attending class and for knowing an instructor's attendance policies, which vary by course and content area. All students are expected to attend class and to contribute to its learning environment in part by complying with University policies and directives regarding appropriate classroom behavior or other matters.

Absences from Class

University regulations require that students be allowed to make up examinations which have been missed due to illness, religious holy days, military service obligations, including service-related medical appointments, jury duty, or other unavoidable circumstances or other university-sponsored activities. Students should work with their instructor regarding making up other missed work, such as assignments, quizzes, and classroom attendance.

Absences for Religious Holy Days

The university is prepared to make reasonable accommodations for students whose religious holy days coincide with their classroom assignments, test schedules, and classroom attendance expectations. Students must notify their instructors in writing of any such religious holy day conflicts or absences within the first few days of the semester or session, and no later than the third week of the semester. If the conflict or absence will occur within the first three weeks of the semester, the student should notify the instructor as soon as possible. See Policy Manual 8.2 Absences for Religious Holy Days for additional information.

Absences for Military Service Obligations
Students absent from class or class-related requirements due to U.S. veteran or U.S. military service obligations (including military service–related medical appointments, military orders, and National Guard Service obligations) shall be excused without any grading adjustment or other penalty. Instructors shall make reasonable accommodations to allow students to make up, without penalty, tests and assignments they missed because of veteran or military service obligations. Reasonable accommodations may include making up missed work following the service obligation; completing work in advance; completing an equivalent assignment; or waiver of the assignment without penalty. In all instances, students bear the responsibility to communicate with their instructors about such veteran or military service obligations, to meet course expectations and requirements.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
The University is committed to providing an educational experience that is accessible to all students. If a student has a diagnosed disability or other disabling condition that may impact the student's ability to complete the course requirements as stated in the syllabus, the student may seek accommodations through Student Disability Services (SDS). SDS is responsible for making Letters of Accommodation (LOA) available to the student. **The student must provide an LOA to the instructor as early in the semester as possible, but requests not made at least two weeks prior to the scheduled activity for which an accommodation is sought may not be accommodated.** The LOA will specify what reasonable course accommodations the student is eligible for and those the instructor should provide. Additional information can be found on the SDS website.

Communication About Accommodations: If you need accommodations for religious or military related reasons, please email to let me know as soon as possible. If you need disability related accommodations, please email me with your LOA as soon as possible. In either case, you should email to request a meeting with me to discuss what constitutes a reasonable accommodation in this class.

Other Expectations of Student Performance

Free Speech and Expression
The University of Iowa supports and upholds the First Amendment protection of freedom of speech and the principles of academic and artistic freedom. We are committed to open inquiry, vigorous debate, and creative expression inside and outside of the classroom. Visit the Free Speech at Iowa website for more information on the university's policies on free speech and academic freedom.

Non-discrimination Statement
The University of Iowa prohibits discrimination in employment, educational programs, and activities on the basis of race, creed, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, pregnancy (including childbirth and related conditions), disability, genetic information, status as a

U.S. veteran, service in the U.S. military, sexual orientation, or associational preferences. The university also affirms its commitment to providing equal opportunities and equal access to university facilities. For additional information on nondiscrimination policies, contact the Senior Director, Office of Civil Rights Compliance, the University of Iowa, 202 Jessup Hall, Iowa City, IA 52242-1316, 319-335-0705, ui-ocrc@uiowa.edu. Although not required, students have the option to share their pronouns and chosen/preferred names in class and through MyUI. Instructors and advisors can find information about a student's chosen/preferred name in MyUI.

Classroom Expectations

Students are expected to comply with University policies regarding appropriate classroom behavior as outlined in the Code of Student Life. While students have the right to express themselves and participate freely in class, it is expected that students will behave with the same level of courtesy and respect in the virtual class setting (whether asynchronous or synchronous) as they would in an in-person classroom. Failure to follow behavior expectations as outlined in the Code of Student Life may be addressed by the instructor and may also result in discipline under the Code of Student Life policies governing E.5 Disruptive Behavior or E.6 Failure to Comply with University Directive.

Technology Use in Class: To support an inclusive learning environment, laptops and tablets are permitted for note-taking purposes only. As an instructor, I find off-task technology use—such as browsing, social media, or messaging—**highly noticeable and distracting**, which significantly interferes with my ability to facilitate the lecture. I ask that you respect our shared learning space by remaining present and focused on class. Because professional presence is important in social work practice, consistent misuse of technology will be addressed as a professional and ethical behavior issue, which may result in a letter of concern or, in extreme cases, an "Unsatisfactory" mark for your professional and ethical behavior competency.

Class Recordings

The unauthorized video or audio recording of academic activities (e.g., lectures, course discussions, office hours, etc.) by a student is prohibited. Students with a reasonable accommodation for recording approved by Student Disability Services should notify each instructor and provide the Letter of Accommodation prior to using the accommodation. A student may record classroom activities with prior written permission from the instructor and notice to other students in the class that audio or video recording may occur. Any and all classroom recording must be for personal academic use only. The distribution, sharing, sale, or posting of recordings on the internet (including social media), in whole or in part, is prohibited and doing so may be a violation of the Code of Student Life and/or state or federal privacy, copyright, or other laws.

Academic Honesty and Misconduct

All students in CLAS courses are expected to abide by the college's standards of academic honesty. Undergraduate academic misconduct must be reported by instructors to CLAS according to these procedures. Graduate academic misconduct must be reported to the Graduate College according to Section F of the Graduate College Manual. Academic misconduct is also reported to the BA, MSW, or Ph.D. program director, who may take further disciplinary action. See your BA in SW Handbook, MSW Handbook or Ph.D. Handbook, Student Advancement Policy, and the Graduate College Manual of Rules and Regulations for details.

In the School of Social Work, academic honesty violations include, but are not limited to:

- o presentation of the ideas of others without credit to the source
- o use of direct quotations without quotation marks and without credit to the source
- o paraphrasing without credit to the source
- o participation in a group project that presents plagiarized material
- o failure to provide citations for material obtained through electronic research
- o downloading and submitting work from electronic databases without citation
- o submitting material created/written by someone else as one's own
- o copying from someone else's exam, homework, or laboratory work
- o allowing someone else to copy or submit one's work as their own
- o accepting credit for a group project without doing one's share
- o submitting the same paper in more than one course
- o using notes or other materials during a test without authorization
- o not following the guidelines specified by the instructor for "take home" exams
- o the fabrication of research data

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

I understand that AI writing tools like ChatGPT are readily available and can be tempting to use for coursework. However, for writing assignments in this course**, you may not use AI to generate initial drafts or main content.** Research shows that using AI to generate writing can interfere with your ability to develop critical thinking skills.[1] The struggle of writing is where much of your learning happens. When AI does this work for you, you miss out on that developmental process of grappling with complex ideas and organizing your thoughts. As future social workers, you'll need to think critically about research, assess client needs, and communicate complex ideas clearly—abilities that are strengthened through writing, not bypassed by it.

Process for Suspected AI Use: Because AI detection software is not always reliable, I do not rely on it as a sole source of evidence. Instead, if a submitted assignment is inconsistent with your previous work, lacks specific course-related depth, or otherwise appears to be AI-generated, I will initiate an AI Use Inquiry Meeting including:

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[1] Kosmyna, N., Hauptmann, E., Yuan, Y. T., Situ, J., Liao, X. H., Beresnitzky, A. V., ... & Maes, P. (2025). Your brain on chatgpt: Accumulation of cognitive debt when using an ai assistant for essay writing task. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2506.08872*.

Stadler, M., Bannert, M., & Sailer, M. (2024). Cognitive ease at a cost: LLMs reduce mental effort but compromise depth in student scientific inquiry. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *160*, 108386.

1. **Initial Meeting**: You will be asked to meet with me to discuss your writing process and the content of your paper.
2. **Evidence of Process:** During this meeting, you may be asked to explain your logic, clarify specific citations, or show your drafting history (such as Google Doc version history or rough notes).
3. **Determination:** If, following this meeting, it is determined that the work was generated by AI rather than the student, it will be treated as academic misconduct.

Consequences of AI Misconduct: The assignment will receive an initial grade of zero and the student will have another opportunity to complete the paper. Per CLAS and School of Social Work policy on academic honesty, the incident will be reported to CLAS and BA in Social Work program director.

Overview Calendar of Course

Week	Date	Topic(s)	Due
1		Course Introduction	Self-Intro Quiz (non-graded) Week 1 Reflection
2		Research and Theory in Social Work Practice	Week 2 Reflection
3		Everyday Engagement with Research	Week 3 Reflection
4		Selecting Research Topics	
5		Synthesizing the Literature/Writing the Annotated Bibliography	
6		Overview of Research Design	One Found Article
7		Measurement of Concepts	Facilitations
8		Research Questions and Hypotheses to Address the Gaps	Annotated Bibliography Facilitations
X	Spring Break		
9		Sampling and Data Collection	Research Questions & Hypotheses Facilitations
10		Data Analysis – Descriptive Statistics	Lab Assignment 1 Facilitations
11		Evidence Based Practice in Social Work	Lab Assignment 2
12		Data Analysis – Bivariate Statistics	Bridge to Belonging Memo Facilitations
13		How Does Research Inform Practice? Finding the implications	Methods Papers Lab Assignment 3
14		How To Present a Scientific Study	Poster Due for Feedback Implications Write-Up
15		Poster Presentation Event	
X	Finals week- No Class, No Final		Teamwork Ratings

Student Support Resources and Related Policies

School of Social Work Resources for Obtaining Additional Help
The School of Social Work provides support and assistance to students who, for a variety of reasons, may be experiencing academic problems. Students should speak with their advisers, the undergraduate or graduate program director, or the DEO about support services. The School of Social Work's Resources page includes a list of resources to support students.

Academic Support Outside the SSW
The Writing Center and Tutor Iowa may be useful supports.

Mental Health
Students are encouraged to be mindful of their mental health and seek help as a preventive measure or if feeling overwhelmed and/or struggling to meet course expectations. Students are encouraged to talk to their instructor for assistance with specific class-related concerns. For additional support and counseling, students are encouraged to contact University Counseling Service (UCS). Information about UCS, including resources and how to schedule an appointment, can be found at counseling.uiowa.edu. Find out more about UI mental health services at: mentalhealth.uiowa.edu.

Basic Needs and Student Support
It can be difficult to maintain focus and be present if you are experiencing challenges with meeting basic needs or navigating personal crisis situations. The Office of the Dean of Students can help. Contact us for one-on-one support, identifying options, and to locate and access basic needs resources (such as food, rent, childcare, etc.).

Student Care and Assistance: 132 IMU, dos-assistance@uiowa.edu, 319-335-1162

Basic Needs info:

- Food Pantry at Iowa
- Clothing Closet
- Basic Needs and Support Resources

Sexual Harassment/Sexual Misconduct and Supportive Measures
The University of Iowa prohibits all forms of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and related retaliation. The Policy on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct governs actions by students, faculty, staff, and visitors. Incidents of sexual harassment or sexual misconduct can be reported to the Office of Civil Rights Compliance or to the Department of Campus Safety. Students impacted by sexual harassment or sexual misconduct may be eligible for academic supportive measures and can learn more by contacting the Office of Civil Rights Compliance. Information about confidential resources can be found on the Office of Civil Rights Compliance website.

Conflict Resolution

The Office of the Ombudsperson is a confidential, impartial, informal, and independent resource for any member of the university community with a problem or concern. The Office of the Ombudsperson offers a safe place to discuss conflicts or concerns. Students are encouraged to reach out for assistance. The office will brainstorm with students to help identify options, answer any questions, and provide referrals to other offices as appropriate. More information about the Office of the Ombudsperson, including how to schedule an appointment, can be found at ombudsperson.org.uiowa.edu.