SALEM STATE COLLEGE
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

SWK380: RESEARCH METHODS
Fall 2004
Monday & Friday: 2:30 – 3:45
Academic Building 105

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course provides an introduction to the general principles of research methods in the social sciences with a particular emphasis on social work intervention and evaluation research. Students will become familiar with basic research concepts and with a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Students will learn to critique research articles from academic journals, and students will have an opportunity to develop a research proposal. Students will also develop competencies in using library information technology and the computer-based Internet telecommunications system. In addition, the course includes computer-based data processing and statistical analysis using the SPSS software program.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: Upon completion of this course, the student is expected to:

• Understand social work research as a specialized form of problem solving for social work practice.
• Appreciate the value and function of social work research in the advancement of social work theory, knowledge, and practice.
• Recognize the limitations of social work research in addressing complex social phenomena of concern to social work.
• Understand the steps of the research process, including both quantitative and qualitative approaches.
• Have developed competency in the use of library computer-based information technology and the Internet telecommunication system.
• Have developed competency in the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data.
• Have developed competency in data processing using the SPSS computer software program.
• Accept responsibility for operating within social work values and ethics in the conduct of social research.
• Integrate research findings with one's framework of social work knowledge.

COURSE TEXT:


GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Mid-Term Exam: 30%
2. Final Exam: 40%
3. Class Participation 10%
4. Reports: 20%

   Reports:  
   A. Research Article Critique (5 %)  
   B. Computer-Based Research Lab Reports (5%)  
   C. Research Proposal (10%) 

ATTENDANCE:  
Class attendance is mandatory; students are permitted to miss class only in exceptional circumstances. Failure to meet this requirement will be reflected in a student's grade for the course.

Salem State College "Equal Access Statement": "Salem State College is committed to providing equal access to the educational experiences for all students in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and The Americans with Disabilities Act and to providing all reasonable academic accommodations, aids, and adjustments. Any student who has a documented disability requiring an accommodation, aid or adjustment should speak with the instructor immediately. Students with disabilities who have not previously done so should provide documentation to and schedule an appointment with the Office for Students with Disabilities and obtain appropriate services."

Plagiarism

Salem State College assumes that all students come to the College with serious educational intent and expects them to be mature, responsible individuals who will exhibit high standards of honesty and personal conduct in their academic life. All forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, are considered to be serious offenses against the College community.

Definition of Academic Dishonesty: Submitting another person’s work as one’s own. This includes, for example, copying another person’s work during examinations;
purchasing papers; copying papers, reports or portions of papers, material from a website; copying laboratory or computer results; and presenting material from another course or paper without proper acknowledgment, citations and references.

Penalties for plagiarism and academic dishonesty can include an automatic grade of F for the course as well as being reported to the Vice President, Academic Affairs, and can lead to suspension or expulsion from the college. See the current Salem State College Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogues for complete descriptions of College policies on academic dishonest and the appeals procedures.

MAJOR COURSE UNITS

UNIT ONE: SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH: QUESTIONS, THEORIES, METHODS -
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WEEKS 1-3 (Sept. 6-20)

a. An introduction to social science methods
b. Theory and research integration
c. Qualitative and quantitative methods
d. NASW Code of Ethics; values, ethics and political issues of research
e. Human and cultural diversity issues
f. Steps in the social research process
g. Inductive and deductive reasoning
h. Library information technologies
i. Social work practice and social research
j. Defining variables

UNIT ONE, CONT’D


Articles:


UNIT TWO: Research for Practice -- WEEKS 4-6 (Sept 27 – Oct. 11)

a. Problem identification and formulation
b. The language of science: variables, hypotheses, and causation
c. Concepts and measurement (operationalization)
d. Levels of measurement
e. Scales, indexes, and social indicators
f. Reliability and validity of measures
g. Experimental and quasi-experimental designs
h. Primary and secondary survey research
i. Evaluating social work practice and programs; needs assessment
j. Journal article critique

READINGS: Marlow, chapters 5 - 7

Articles:


ASSIGNMENT: Research Article Critique - Due October 15th.

MID-TERM EXAM: WEEK 7 (Oct. 18-22) – Mid term – October 22nd.

UNIT THREE: QUANTITATIVE DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS Weeks 8-10 (Oct. 25 – Nov. 8)
a. Introduction to SPSS
b. The Web and the Internet: Research technology
c. Data coding, “cleaning,” and entry
d. Statistical report and analysis
e. Quantitative data sources (e.g. National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health)

Reading: Marlow, chapters 10, 12, 13; class handouts

Babbie, E.  A Primer for SPSS.  http://sociology.wadsworth.dom/babbie/basics3e/

Article:


Assignment: Statistical Data Report – Due November 12

UNIT FOUR: Sampling and Data Collection -- WEEKS 11-13 (Nov. 15-22)
a. The qualitative interview
b. Participant/observation and ethnography
c. Questionnaire construction
d. Identifying major concepts, settings, and participants
d. Information/data collection, coding, and record keeping
e. Analyzing qualitative data
f. Grounded theory and phenomenology
g. Issues of reliability and validity
h. Qualitative research and the evaluation of social work practice and programs
i. Sampling methods

READINGS: Marlow, chapters 8, 9, 11, 14, 15

Articles:


UNIT FIVE: Research Proposal Presentations -- Weeks 14 & 15 (Dec. 6 & 13)

December 8 (Wednesday)
December 10 (Friday)
Final Exam: To Be Announced