Course Overview

This is the first of two courses that focus on the methods of social work research and evaluation. This course seeks to train students to be "practitioner-researchers" who are able to use research skills, along with other professional skills, to assist people who are experiencing serious problems in living associated with poverty, mental or physical illness, disability, aging, addiction, neglect, physical or emotional abuse, homelessness, crime and delinquency, and so on. The course is designed to acquaint students with a wide variety of research and evaluation tools that can be incorporated into social work practice.

The course emphasizes problem formulation, measurement, research design, ethical issues, issues of cultural and ethnic diversity, and the application of research findings in social work practice. Students will develop skills that will enable them to monitor and evaluate their practice. Through critical reading of research reports, students will also develop skills in using empirically-based literature. By creating a foundation for empirically based practice, the course will prepare students to use research in their practice.

Course Objectives

Students will:

1. Understand the importance of values in research and the ethical issues involved in conducting research and evaluation;

2. Design evaluation and research that protects the interests of those who have been the victims of oppression, such as people living in poverty and racial and ethnic minorities, women, and gays and lesbians;

3. Read research reports critically by evaluating the appropriateness of the question, the methodology, relevant cultural and diversity issues, ethical issues, and the conclusions of each effort;

4. Design research and evaluation projects that are culturally sensitive and address the needs of
vulnerable populations;

5. Understand and value the role of research and evaluation in social work practice;

6. Design research and evaluation projects that are directly relevant to social work practice; and

7. Evaluate practice with individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations, communities, and policy-making bodies.

**Text**


Additional readings available through Adams Library reserves: http://www.ric.edu/adamslibrary/

**Course Requirements and Expectations of Students**

The structure of this course includes a highly interactive format using discussions, student presentations, and other experiential activities. Students’ knowledge and experience are of great value and significant participation is very important for the success of the class. Thus I expect the following of all students:

1. Completion of all required readings.

2. Participation in class discussions (20% of final grade). Participation will be graded according to the following criteria: application of assigned readings to class discussion; asking relevant questions; responding constructively to issues and questions raised by others in class; sharing relevant information and experiences with the class; maintaining focused discussion; and contributing to small group exercises.

3. There will be two course assignments. The first assignment will ask students to describe a compelling issue or problem in social work practice, locate and summarize relevant literature, and present a researchable question (40% of final grade). In the second assignment, students will describe the methods they propose using to collect data to address the research question identified in the first assignment (40% of final grade).

4. Students with special learning needs should notify the instructor in order to discuss appropriate accommodations. Rhode Island College is committed to making reasonable efforts to assist individuals with documented disabilities. If you are seeking reasonable classroom accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, you should register with the Student Life Office (Craig-Lee Hall, 456-8061). To receive accommodations for this course, please
obtain the proper Student Life Office forms and meet with your instructor at the beginning of the semester.

5. Students’ participation in all aspects of the course is expected to be in accord with provisions in the NASW Code of Ethics and the School of Social Work’s Academic Manual. One of our goals is to encourage students to formulate, critique, and express their points of view on issues addressed in this course, and to assess their consistency with core social work values articulated in the NASW Code of Ethics. Students should feel free to express their views and opinions about topics and issues addressed in class. Students should express their opinions and do so respectfully, in a manner consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics. When expressing their views, students should “uphold and advance the values, ethics, knowledge and mission of the profession” and engage in “active discussion and responsible criticism of the profession” (National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, 2008, standard 5.01[b]).

6. Students will use of active listening skills to ensure full understanding of the material and discussion.

7. Students will engage in respectful communication that expresses beliefs and ideas without personal attack.

8. All assignments are due by the date assigned. Any exceptions must be negotiated with the course instructor prior to that date. Papers handed in past the due date for which an extension has not been negotiated will be graded as late papers with one letter grade deducted for each week the paper is late.

Expectations of the Instructor

1. I will provide detailed written feedback when I grade your papers. Feedback may take the form of comments or questions written on the paper. Suggestions will be provided whenever possible.

2. Office hours: I will announce my office hours on the first day of class. I can be reached at other times by phone (401.456.8248) or e-mail: freamer@ric.edu

3. I will adhere to the course outline and will negotiate any changes in format with the class.

4. I have high expectations for student performance and will let students know if and when their performance is not meeting those expectations.

5. I will make every attempt to assure that papers are returned within two weeks of submission.

6. I will begin class on time and will permit a ten-minute break halfway through each class. It is
expected that students will return from breaks on time and ready for work.

**Grades for this Course**

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**Grade of Incomplete**

A report of Incomplete can be given in place of a grade when the work for the semester has been passing but has not been completed, because of illness or some other reason that, in the opinion of the instructor, justifies such a report. It is the student’s responsibility to initiate a request for an incomplete. The student must initiate the request prior to the final day of class. The instructor has the prerogative to grant or deny the student’s request. If an incomplete is granted, a contract for completion must be negotiated between the student and the faculty member.

College policy requires that all Incompletes be completed by the end of the next semester). However, in both the BSW and MSW programs, when successful completion of one course is required for beginning the succeeding course in the next semester, students must complete assignments prior to the beginning of the following semester.

**Academic Honesty**

The School of Social Work at Rhode Island College recognizes that the profession of social work is based on a standard of honesty and personal, as well as professional integrity. Guided by the National Association of Social Workers’ Code of Ethics, the school promotes high ethical standards and views academic honesty as an integral component of those standards. Each of us is responsible for maintaining an honest environment and all of us must work together to ensure that academic honesty is pervasive. To promote academic honesty, students and faculty should present their work without plagiarism, cheating, obtaining unauthorized assistance, or submitting materials authored by others as their own.

A student who is academically dishonest is subject to a range of consequences, including grading
penalties, academic probation, or expulsion from the College, depending on the seriousness of the act (excerpted from the Rhode Island College Student Handbook, 2006).

Course Outline

I - Introduction to Social Work Research and Evaluation: Identifying Issues for Study

Uses of research in social work practice; social workers as practitioner-researchers; integration of research and practice; introduction to Internet resources; case examples; identifying research and evaluation issues; cultural competence; value awareness; the distinction between deductive and inductive approaches to research; engaging agency personnel. Examples from students' field agencies and workplaces.

Required readings:

Chapter 1: Introduction
Chapter 2: Research Questions and Research Approaches
Chapter 5: Research Ethics
Chapter 6: Research with Minority and Disadvantaged Groups


II-III - Conceptualizing Issues to Study

Quantitative and qualitative approaches to problem formulation; reviewing the literature; identifying concepts and variables; research and evaluation questions and hypotheses.

Required readings:

Chapter 3: The Quantitative Research Approach
Chapter 4: The Qualitative Research Approach
Chapter 7: Reviewing the Literature
Chapter 8: Finding Existing Knowledge
Chapter 26: Evaluating Quantitative Research Studies
Chapter 27: Evaluating Qualitative Research Studies

IV-V - Research and Evaluation Designs

Knowledge objectives; qualitative and quantitative approaches to research design; experimental and quasi-experimental designs; survey and ex post facto designs; program evaluation; positivistic and naturalistic research; identifying target problems; specifying objectives for
intervention; measures for evaluating practice; single case (N=1) designs; diversity issues; ethical considerations and protection of human participants; case exemplars.

Required readings:

Chapter 9: Evaluating Evidence
Chapter 10: Evidence-based Practice
Chapter 14: Case-level Designs
Chapter 15: Group-level Designs


VI - Measurement

Operationalizing concepts; measurement error; assessing instruments for cultural bias; content and criterion/predictive validity; stability, inter-observer, and inter-measure reliability.

Required readings:

Chapter 11: Measurement


VII - Sampling

Probability and non-probability sampling; sampling error; sample size; representation of diverse populations; external validity.

Required readings:

Chapter 13: Sampling


**VIII-X - Data Collection**

Data collection procedures - types of surveys; research interviewing; participant observation; secondary analysis of existing data; structured observation. Designing culturally appropriate data collection strategies. Standardized and non-standardized instruments; selecting measures; instrument design. Students will meet in small groups to work on data collection instruments.

Required readings:

Chapter 12: Standardized Measuring Instruments  
Chapter 16: Structured Observation  
Chapter 17: Qualitative Interviewing  
Chapter 18: Survey Research  
Chapter 19: Secondary Analysis  
Chapter 20: Content Analysis  
Chapter 21: Using Existing Statistics  
Chapter 23: Selecting a Data Collection Method

**XI - Evaluating Social Work Programs**

Assessing program needs, program implementation, outcomes, and efficacy.

Required readings:

Chapter 28: Writing Research Reports from Research Studies  
Chapter 29: Program Evaluation

**XII-XIV - Student Presentations and Critique/Discussion**

- Student presentations  
- Review of key concepts; course evaluation.

Required readings:

Appendix A: Quantitative Research Proposals and Reports  
Appendix B: Qualitative Research Proposals and Reports
GUIDELINES FOR CRITIQUING REPORTS OF RESEARCH

I. What is the general purpose of the study?

II. What assumptions does the author make?
   A. Do you agree with the author's assumptions?
   B. If not, why not?

III. How is the author's study related to other studies that have been done in the area?

IV. What are the hypotheses or questions guiding this study?
   A. Identify the variables in these hypotheses or questions.

V. What is the design of the study?
   A. Is it adequate for the purposes of the study? If not, why not?
   B. How did the author control for threats to internal and external validity? What threats are not controlled?

VI. How did the author select his or her sample?
   A. What are the characteristics of the sample?
   B. Is it a probability or non-probability sample?
   C. What is the size of the sample?
   D. What are the limitations of the sample?

VII. How were the data collected?
   A. What measures/ instruments were used to collect the data?
   B. What information does the author provide about the reliability and validity of the measures used (e.g., content, face validity)?

VIII. What were the author's major findings?

IX. What are the author's conclusions?
   A. Do the conclusions follow from the data? If not, how do they go beyond the data?
   B. Do you agree with the author's conclusions?

X. What are the implications of this study for policy and/or practice, based on the findings and conclusions?
Assignments

Students will complete two papers designed to develop their skills in reviewing and critiquing literature for evidence-based practice, identifying issues and questions for research, exploring the implications of research findings, and designing research that addresses practice-based questions. Areas of practice may include work with individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations, or communities. Topics can focus on clinical, policy, advocacy, organizational, or administrative issues.

Assignment 1: Problem Statement

The principal purpose of the problem statement is to acquaint readers with the issues you plan to address in your hypothetical research project and to review relevant literature. This section of your research proposal sets the stage for the methodology section (Assignment 2) and should briefly cover the following topics:

Identification of the problem or issues. Include a concise description of the problems or issues you plan to explore.

Importance of the problem and the study. Explain why it is important to address these issues.

Relevance to social work. How might the findings be useful to the field? What gaps in knowledge might the results fill?

Literature review. Use the literature search strategies reviewed in class to identify pertinent publications. You must conduct a comprehensive literature search using the Rhode Island College library’s electronic search tools (casual Google searches are not satisfactory). Discuss how your project relates to research that has already been conducted, based on your review of published and unpublished literature. The literature review should be presented in a way that supports your approach to the research issues, i.e., the importance of the topic, the appropriateness of the methodology. Avoid summarizing publications one by one, in serial fashion (According to Smith . . . According to Jones . . . According to White . . .). Instead, organize your discussion around relevant concepts and themes, using references from the literature to support your points.

Conceptual framework. Present the research question(s) that will guide your study. Be sure to operationally define the concepts and variables you plan to explore. Be sure to provide a succinct summary of the project you have in mind and the key issues you plan to address. Do not include specific methodological details, e.g., sampling approach, data collection methods, measurement issues; this information will be included in the second assignment.

Although all of these topics must be addressed in the problem statement, you do not have to use the sub-headings or the order listed here. Your discussion should flow smoothly, however. Be
Your problem statement should be about 6 pages. Please double space and use 12-point type. Margins should be 1.5 inches on the left, 1.0 inch elsewhere. Evaluation of your work will be based on your ability to draw on relevant literature; your coverage of the items described above; and the quality of your writing, i.e., overall organization, spelling, syntax, grammar, punctuation. Please be sure to proofread your work before turning it in.

Assignment 2: Methods Section

The primary purpose of this assignment is to develop and present a hypothetical plan to collect the data to address the issue or problem identified in the first assignment. Your paper should cover the following topics:

Research or evaluation design. Briefly state whether your study is exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory. Describe the design’s key features. If you plan to use experimental, control, or contrast groups, be sure to describe the procedures for assignment of clients/research participants.

Sampling procedures. If you plan to use a sample, describe and provide rationale for (a) the type of sample you plan to use (probability, non-probability, purposive, random, stratified, quota, etc.), (b) the proposed sample size, and (c) the specific procedures you would use to generate the sample.

Data collection. Describe the instruments or other data collections tools you would use. Indicate (a) whether you would use standardized or non-standardized instruments (e.g., questionnaire, interview, survey, paper-and-pencil test), (b) the instrument’s format (e.g., open- v. closed-ended items, content of items, number of items, response format), (c) scoring procedures (if appropriate), and (d) the instrument’s reliability and validity. Also describe the specific procedural steps you would take to collect the data, e.g., who will collect the data, where, when, using what procedures, and plans to pretest instrument. [NOTE: Please attach a draft of the instrument.]

Limitations. Comment on any relevant limitations, e.g., study design, instrument validity or reliability, data collection procedures, data validity, external validity, sample size.

Ethical issues. Identify any ethical issues raised by the research question, data collection procedures, dissemination of the findings, and so on (consult the book and section 5.02 of the NASW Code of Ethics for an overview of relevant issues). Discuss how you plan to handle these issues. Include an informed consent form and description of informed consent procedures, if appropriate.

Your methods section should be approximately five double-spaced, typed pages (not including...
draft of the data collection tools or consent forms). Please double space and use 12-point type. Margins should be 1.5 inches on the left, 1.0 inch elsewhere. Evaluation of your work will be based on your ability to cover the above topics and the quality of your writing, i.e., overall organization, spelling, syntax, grammar, punctuation. **Please be sure to proofread your work before turning it in.**