I. Course Description

This foundation course is designed to provide an introduction to research methods and to produce an appreciation of the research process. It will explore generic issues that are related to the conduct of social work research as applied to social work practice and service delivery in complex, urban environments as well as program evaluation and policy development.

In this course, students will review the characteristics and logical processes of social work research and understand the applicability of scientific and scholarly inquiry in advancing professional knowledge and improving social work practice to diverse clientele in urban settings. Students will gain a conceptual and operational understanding of the various quantitative and qualitative methodologies used in the conduct of social work related research. Students will be prepared to participate in a range of research activities including (a) conceptualization of research problems; (b) review of the literature; (c) research design; (d) sampling; (e) measurement and scaling; (f) data collection; (g) data analysis (h) ethical considerations in the conduct of research on human subjects and (i) understanding the basics of evidence based social work practice. Attention will also focus on how racial, ethnic, gender, and lifestyle issues impact each stage of the research process.

Students will not be expected to carry out an actual study; however, they will complete a series of assignments that together form the basis for a research proposal. Students will hopefully achieve a level of disciplined, conceptual and analytical thinking in the process of developing and critiquing their proposal.
II. Course Objectives

After completing this course, students should be able to do the following:

1. Understand basic research principles and concepts within the framework of ethical practice;

2. Identify ethical issues involved in social work research, including informed consent, confidentiality, use and abuse of sensitive data and the issue of withholding treatment to control groups and the honest disclosure of findings;

3. Understand and be sensitive to issues in the research process as they relate to various populations such as racial and ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, and women;

4. Formulate studies appropriate to the level of knowledge about a particular problem and conduct a review of the literature to support problem conceptualization;

5. Identify and describe the major types of designs used in social work research, including exploratory, descriptive and explanatory designs;

6. Understand basic sampling methods;

7. Understand issues and principles of measurement and scaling;

8. Distinguish among various methods of data collection, such as interviews, questionnaires, and observations;

9. Differentiate between descriptive and inferential statistics, assess and critique the benefits and drawbacks of each type, to understand what statistics to use to answer basic research questions;

10. Demonstrate the ability to draw relevant conclusions related to practice and policy;

11. Demonstrate the ability to develop a research proposal in an area relevant to social work practice; and

12. Understand the basics of evidence based practice (EBP) including evidence search, evidence appraisal, and implementation of evidence in the context of individuals, groups or communities.
III. Course Format

Course content will be covered through readings, individual and group exercises, lectures, and discussions. Handouts and readings will be provided in class where appropriate. Students are also encouraged to help each other whenever possible. Active participation and full preparation by each student for each class is expected. The instructor may also call on students to lead discussions based on the readings assigned for the week. Students are expected to prepare for each class.

Instructor Role
The instructor will a) prepare and deliver course material; b) be available to students during office hours and by appointment for consultation; and c) provide timely and clearly explained feedback on student performance.

Class Attendance and Participation
The instructor expects students to: attend each class on time; complete all assignments in a timely manner; come to class prepared, having read all assignments; participate in class discussions; seek any necessary clarification regarding course expectations from the instructor; and provide the instructor with feedback about the effectiveness of the course. The instructor will conduct in-class exercises to evaluate learning in a class session. Any problems with attendance, meeting deadlines, or completing assignments should be discussed promptly with the instructor. E-mail is a useful way to contact the instructor or you can call the instructor at his office. The instructor will allow for extreme family emergency such as death in the family. Health-related issues will need to be documented with a certificate from the doctor attesting to the student’s ill health.

Expectations for Written Work
All written assignments must be doubled-spaced, typed with a 12-point font and have 1-inch margins. Text citations and references list must be in correct APA (5th Ed.) format. All sentences must comprise of student’s own words. Ideas, information, and concepts that originated with any other source must always be noted as such (based on APA format). Material that is not correctly cited is considered plagiarized and provides grounds for academic discipline. Assignments should be carefully proofed for spelling and grammar. Students are encouraged to use the assistance and services of tutoring services.

Academic Honesty
Academic honesty during testing periods and in the composition of assigned papers is expected. If problems do arise for the student regarding any aspect of the course, he/she should talk with the instructor so that the problem(s) may be remedied. Violations of academic honesty in the preparation of papers (e.g., plagiarism) will result in notification to the Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs at the University of Southern California School of Social Work. Any hint of violation during the exam period will result in no grade for the exam/assignment.
IV. **Course Assignments**

Students will be expected to complete the reading assignments and use them as the basis for informed and active participation in class discussions throughout the semester.

Assignments are designed to enable students to integrate and apply class content. All written work will be assessed in light of clarity of presentation, organization and the ability to integrate and apply various concepts presented through readings, lectures, and class discussions. There will be five written assignments, one in-class presentation, and two in-class examinations totaling 100%. The maximum number of points for the course is 100 and grading will be based on the total number of points earned. Detailed assignment outlines will be posted on blackboard as well as discussed in class.

**Scholarly Research Proposal, parts 1-5 (50 points total = 50% of final grade)**

- **Part I: Formulating the Research Problem (10 points) – Assignment 1**
- **Part II: Literature Review (10 points) – Assignment 2**
- **Part III: Methods (Design, Sample, & Instrumentation) (10 points) – Assignment 3**
- **Part IV: Complete Proposal with Data Analysis Plan (10 points) – Final Project Proposal**
- **Part V: Formal Oral Presentation of Proposal (10 points)**

**Two In-Class Exams (20 points each - 40 points total = 40% of final grade)**

There will be two one hour in-class examinations consisting of multiple choice, true/false, and short-answer type questions. Each exam will constitute 20% of the final grade.

**Class/Course Participation (10 points total = 10% of final grade)**

This includes participating in class discussions, in-class exercises and/or virtually on blackboard.

Course grades will be based upon:

- Scholarly Research Proposal, parts 1-5  
  **50 points**
- In-class Examinations  
  **40 points**
- Class Participation  
  **10 points**

100 points

**Scholarly Research Proposal**

Students will work collaboratively in small groups or ‘research teams’ (members in these teams will be randomly assigned) to prepare a scholarly research proposal for this course. While students are expected to develop the proposal, they will **not** be expected to actually carry out the proposed study. Research teams will complete a series of four assignments which will form the basis for their proposals. The assignments will create deadlines to assist teams and individual students in keeping up with course work. The assignments also give the instructor an opportunity to provide constructive feedback to students regarding their progress in the class. Research teams will also be randomly assigned to times at the end of the semester for PowerPoint presentations of their proposals.
In-Class Participation / Reading
Students are expected to contribute to the development of a positive learning environment and to demonstrate their learning through written and oral assignments and through active, oral class participation. Class participation should consist of meaningful, thoughtful, and respectful participation based on having completed required and independent readings and assignments prior to class. When in class, students should demonstrate their understanding of the material and be prepared to offer comments or reflections about the material, or alternatively, to have a set of thoughtful questions about the material.

Students are further expected to complete assignments on or before the due date and notify the instructor if they are having difficulty comprehending the course material or keeping up with the assignments. Failure to meet these expectations will result in reduction of grades.

V. Course Grading
Course grades will be based on the following letter grades:

- 3.85 – 4.00 A
- 3.60 – 3.84 A-
- 3.25 – 3.59 B+
- 2.90 – 3.24 B
- 2.60 – 2.87 B-
- 2.25 – 2.50 C+
- 1.90 – 2.24 C

The above-mentioned letter grades correspond to the following points:

- 93 – 100 A
- 90 – 92 A-
- 87 – 89 B+
- 83 – 86 B
- 80 – 82 B-
- 77 – 79 C+
- 73 – 76 C
- 70 – 72 C-

Final grades for the course will be determined on the basis of points earned on each assignment and on class participation.

Within the School of Social Work, grades are determined in each class based on the following standards which have been established by the faculty of the School:

Grades of ‘A’ or ‘A-’ are reserved for student work which not only demonstrates very good mastery of content but which also shows that the student has undertaken a complex task, has applied critical thinking skills to the assignment, and/or has demonstrated creativity in her or his approach to the assignment. The difference between these two grades would be determined by the degree to which these skills have been demonstrated by the student.
A grade of ‘B+’ will be given to work which is judged to be very good. This grade denotes that a student has demonstrated a more-than-competent understanding of the material being evaluated in the assignment.

A grade of ‘B’ will be given to student work which meets the basic requirements of the assignment. It denotes that the student has done adequate work on the assignment and meets basic course expectations.

A grade of ‘B-’ will denote that a student’s performance was less than adequate on an assignment, reflecting only moderate grasp of content and/or expectations.

A grade of ‘C’ would reflect a minimal grasp of the assignment, poor organization of ideas and/or several significant areas requiring improvement.

Grades between ‘C-’ and ‘F’ will be applied to denote a failure to meet minimum standards, reflecting serious deficiencies in all aspects of a student’s performance on the assignment.

VI. Course Textbooks and Other Resources

Required Textbook
(This book is available at the campus bookstore)

Recommended Supplements


**Recommended Guidebook for APA Style Formatting**


**Recommended Websites**

- National Associate of Social Workers: [http://www.naswdc.org](http://www.naswdc.org)
- Forum: Qualitative Research – An online journal of qualitative research: [http://www.qualitative-research.net](http://www.qualitative-research.net)
- Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research: [http://www.iaswresearch.org](http://www.iaswresearch.org)
- Society for Social Work Research: [http://www.sswr.org](http://www.sswr.org)
- Coalition for Evidence Based Policy: [http://www.evidencebasedprograms.org/](http://www.evidencebasedprograms.org/)
- The Elements of Style – A rule book for writing. You can read it online: [http://www.bartleby.com/141/](http://www.bartleby.com/141/)

Additional readings may be suggested at the discretion of the instructor.

**VII. Attendance Policy**

Students are expected to attend every class and to remain in class for the duration of the session. Failure to attend class or arriving late may impact students’ ability to achieve course objectives which could affect their course grade. Students are expected to notify the instructor by telephone or email of any anticipated absence or reason for tardiness.

University of Southern California policy permits students to be excused from class, without penalty, for the observance of religious holy days. This policy also covers scheduled final examinations which conflict with students’ observance of a holy day. Students must make arrangements in advance to complete class work which will be missed, or to reschedule an examination, due to holy days observance.

Please refer to Scampus, pg. 86 and to the USC School of Social Work Student Handbook, pp. 12-14 for further details.
VIII. Academic Accommodations

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to the instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

IX. Emergency Response Information

To receive information, call main number (213)740-2711, press #2. “For recorded announcements, events, emergency communications or critical incident information.”

To leave a message, call (213) 740-8311
For additional university information, please call (213) 740-9233
Or visit university website: http://emergency.usc.edu

If it becomes necessary to evacuate the building, please go to the following locations carefully and using stairwells only. Never use elevators in an emergency evacuation.

University Park Campus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
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<td>SWC</td>
<td>Lot B</td>
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<tr>
<td>WPH</td>
<td>McCarthy Quad</td>
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<tr>
<td>VKC</td>
<td>McCarthy Quad</td>
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City Center

Front of the building (12th & Olive)

Orange County Campus

Faculty Parking Lot

Skirball Campus

Front of building

Do not re-enter the building until given the “all clear” by emergency personnel.

X. Complaints

If students have a complaint or concern about the course or the instructor, they need to discuss it first with the instructor. If the students feel they can’t discuss it with the instructor, they need to contact the chair of the policy sequence. If the students don’t receive a satisfactory response or solution, they may contact their advisor and/or the Associate Dean for Student Affairs for further guidance.
Tips for Maximizing Student Learning Experience in this Course

- Complete required readings and assignments BEFORE coming to class.
- BEFORE coming to class, review the materials from the previous session AND the current session, AND scan the topics to be covered in the next session.
- Come to class prepared to ask any questions you might have.
- Participate in class discussions and/or in blackboard-based virtual discussions.
- AFTER you leave class, review the materials assigned for that session again, along your notes from that session.
- If you don't understand something, ask questions!! Ask questions in class, during office hours, and/or through email!
- Keep up with the assigned readings.
- Don’t procrastinate or postpone working on assignments.
## Course Overview

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SPRING BREAK / NO CLASSES MARCH 17 – 23

No Classes between May 3 and May 6

Final Project Paper Due on May 8!
Course Topics and Assignments

Session 1  1/17/2008

Topic:
› Course Overview/Expectations and Introduction to Social Work Research

Overview:
Instructor and students will introduce themselves. Instructor will present the syllabus.
Class will discuss why it is important for social work practitioners to understand research methodology and utilize research in their practice.

Required Readings:

📖 Rubin & Babbie
   Chapter One: An Introduction to Scientific Inquiry in Social Work
   Chapter Two: Evidence-Based Practice

Session 1 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 1 and 12.

Session 2  1/24/2008

Topic:
› Problem formulation/Literature Review/Theory

Overview:
Instructor will help students understand the framework for how methods of theory and research are used as part of scientifically oriented social work practice. Instructor will also describe inductive and deductive reasoning, steps in the research process, and key research terminology.

Required Readings:

📖 Rubin & Babbie
   Chapter Three: Philosophy and Theory in Social Work Research
   Chapter Six: Problem Formulation and Measurement

📖 Sherraden
   Asking Questions Well: The Role of Theory in Applied Social Research, Keynote Address

Session 2 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 1, 4, and 11.
Session 3

Topic:

- Values and Ethics in Social Work Research

Overview:

Students will learn about the ethical, political and cultural context of research including examples of controversial research studies such as the Tuskegee Syphilis study.

Required Readings:

- Rubin & Babbie
  - Chapter Four: The Ethics, Political and Cultural Context of Social Work Research
  - Chapter Five: Culturally Competent Research

Recommended Supplement:


Session 3 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 1, 2, and 3.
**Session 4** 2/7/2008

**Topic:**
- Conceptualization and Operationalization
  - Measurement – Reliability and Validity

**Overview:**
The instructor will describe different levels of measurement, identify three types of reliability and validity, and explain how each can be assessed.

**Required Readings:**
- Rubin & Babbie
  - Chapter Seven: Conceptualization and Operationalization
  - Chapter Eight: Measurement

**Project Proposal Part I Due!**

*Session 4 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 4, 7, 11 and 12.*

**Session 5** 2/14/2008

**Topic:**
- Instrumentation and Survey Design
  - Sampling

**Overview:**
Instructor will present key terminology related to surveys and interviews. The instructor will describe what constitutes a good question versus a bad question, when to use closed- versus open-ended questions, common types of questions, questionnaire format and presentation, and steps one can take to increase response rates. The instructor will also present key sampling terminology, and types of probability-based and nonprobability-based sampling designs.

**Required Readings:**
- Rubin & Babbie
  - Chapter Seven: Constructing Measurement Instruments
  - Chapter Fifteen: Survey Research
  - Chapter Fourteen: Sampling

**Recommended Supplement:**

*Session 5 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 6, 7, 8 and 12.*

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**Session 6**

**Examination I**

*Session 6 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.*

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**Session 7**

**Topic:**

- Research Design (Single and Group)

**Overview:**

Instructor will present the concept of unit of analysis, errors in causal conclusions, time dimensions of research, internal and external validity, and discuss different types of group research designs.

**Required Readings:**

- Rubin & Babbie
  - Chapter Ten: Causal Inference and Correlational Designs
  - Chapter Eleven: Experimental Designs

**Recommended Supplement:**


*Session 7 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 5, 11 and 12.*

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**Session 8**

**Topic:**

- Research Design (Single and Group)

**Overview:**

Instructor will discuss the concept of single system research design and its various components.
**Required Readings:**

- Rubin & Babbie
  - Chapter Twelve: Single-Case Evaluation Designs

**Recommended Supplement:**


*Session 8 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 5, 11 and 12.*

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**Session 9**

**3/13/2008**

**Topic:**

- Qualitative Research

**Overview:**

Instructor will discuss the strengths and limitations of several qualitative research methods and introduce students to the coding aspect of qualitative data analysis.

**Required Readings:**

- Rubin & Babbie
  - Chapter Seventeen: Qualitative Research: General Principles
  - Chapter Eighteen: Qualitative Research: Specific Methods
  - Chapter Nineteen: Qualitative Data Analysis

**Recommended Supplement:**


**Project Proposal Part II Due!**

*Session 9 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 5 and 8.*

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**SPRING RECESS / NO CLASSES MARCH 17 - 23**
Session 10

Topic:
- Quantitative Data Analysis

Overview:
Instructor will introduce the class to descriptive statistics through an interactive data analysis session utilizing SPSS software. This class session will be held in the multi-media computer classroom.

Required Readings:
- Rubin & Babbie
  - Chapter Twenty: Quantitative Data Analysis

Recommended Supplement:
- Online Statistics Resource: www.statistics.com

Session 10 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 9, 10 and 12.

Session 11

Topic:
- Quantitative Data Analysis

Overview:
Instructor will introduce the class to inferential statistics through an interactive data analysis session utilizing SPSS software. This class session will be held in the multi-media computer classroom.

Required Readings:
- Rubin & Babbie
  - Chapter Twenty One: Inferential Data Analysis: Part 1
  - Chapter Twenty Two: Inferential Data Analysis: Part 2

Recommended Supplement:
- Online Statistics Resource: www.statistics.com

Project Proposal Part III Due!

Session 11 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 9, 10 and 12.
Session 12           4/10/2008

Topic:

- Program Evaluation and Participatory Action Research
  - Writing Research Proposal and Reports

Overview:

Instructor will discuss program evaluation and introduce student to the principles of participatory action research. The instructor will also present the modalities of writing a research proposal including the essential components of a social service agency grant proposal.

Required Readings:

- Rubin & Babbie
  - Chapter Thirteen: Program Evaluation
  - Chapter Twenty Three: Writing Research Proposals and Reports

Recommended Supplement:


*Session 12 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 1, 10, 11, and 12.*

Session 13           4/17/2008

- Examination II

*Session 13 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12.*

Session 14           4/24/2008

- Final Proposal – Student Oral Presentations

*Session 14 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 4, 5, and 6.*

Session 15          5/01/2008

- Final Proposal – Student Oral Presentations

*Session 15 addresses and contributes to the achievement of objectives 3, 4, and 5.*

STUDY HOLIDAYS / NO CLASSES MAY 3 - 6

- Final Project Paper Due! 5/8/2008