

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
College of Human Services and Health Professions
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Course Title: APPLIED RESEARCH IN SOCIAL WORK
Course Number: SWK 662 Section M001
Semester Taught: Fall, 2005
Credit Hours: 3
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Course Description

This course prepares students for the design and execution of research in human service settings. Emphasis is placed on the development of research skills for the integration of research and practice, and to increase understanding of the empirical social sciences literature. Students will have the opportunity to practice research activities through a set of exercises that require the development of a proposal, the critique of a data collection instrument, coding of data, and analysis of data on the computer.

Course Objectives

Students should acquire:

1. Understanding of the principles of scientific inquiry such that they can design a methodologically sound study of social work practice on a small scale.
2. Awareness of the need to consider scientific validity, practice procedures, ethical standards, and the protection of human subjects in the selection and execution of an appropriate research design.
3. Ability to participate in goal setting, formulation of research questions, research design, measurement plans and analysis, and in the execution of research in human service settings.
4. Ability to identify potential sources of bias in research stemming from data collection and data analysis choices.
5. Skills required to match research designs with the demands of different research problems in both the administrative and clinical social work spheres, for the purpose of evaluating one's own practice or that of other relevant systems.
6. Skills and understanding required to appropriately incorporate and account for the dimensions of race, gender, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation, in all phases of the research process.
7. Basic skills required for writing a research proposal, designing an instrument for data collection or assessment, coding data, quantitative and qualitative analysis of data, and presentation of research findings.
8. Ability to critically assess empirical research in social work.
9. Familiarity with the history of social work research and the application of research methodology to questions or issues of concern to social workers.
10. An overview of the importance of computer technology in social work research.

TEXT: Monette, Sullivan & Dejong (2005). *Applied Social Research: A Tool for the Human Services (6th edition)*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

[Available at the Orange Bookstore, Marshall Square Mall]

ASSIGNED JOURNAL ARTICLES (identified with a ➤ in the Course Outline) can be obtained via electronic access, as follows (**see exceptions in NOTES, below**):

1. GO TO: <http://libwww.syr.edu/> (Use Internet Explorer, if possible)
2. Click on *E-Journals* (under *Research Tools*)
3. Type the journal title in the search box, choose “exact” or “starts with”, and click on *GO*; Then click on the title of the journal (in red), and one or more ways to access it will be listed;
4. If you are using *Expanded Academic ASAP* or *ProQuest*, enter information for year, volume, issue & start page, and click *GO*. **IF** the only option is *Sage* or *Elsevier*, you simply click on the year and/or the appropriate volume and issue, and scroll down to the article.
5. Choose the **PDF version** to print, unless you are in *Expanded Academic ASAP*, in which case click on text (or text with graphics), then after the article is visible, scroll to the bottom and click on *Acrobat Reader*. You will need *Acrobat Reader* to retrieve most articles, which can be obtained for free if you need it.
6. Print the article for your use. (Note: Use the Print function that is *within* the program you are using, e.g. *Sage*).

Regarding remote access of E-journals: If you are accessing the full-text links from off-campus, you will be prompted to verify you are an SU student. You will be asked for your last name as it appears on your SUID (all lowercase) and your SUID number, which is all 10 digits (no hyphens). Usually on campus, students are only asked for the first 9 digits, but for this purpose provide all 10. After you enter this information, it should let you download the article. Advise the instructor of any difficulties accessing journals.

NOTE:

1. **Killeen & Brady (1997)** and **Briggs et al. (1996)** will be provided to you in class.
2. **Obtain all articles as soon as possible**, so that problems with access can be resolved.
3. Read articles for the class in which they are cited, **highlight key themes**, and **bring articles to class**, as they will often be used as examples or in classroom exercises.

Additional Resource: (set up by the Social Work Librarian, Adina Mulliken, to assist you with literature searches): Go to the Library homepage (<http://libwww.syr.edu/index.html>), click *Subject Guides* (under Research Tools), then click on *Social Work* and choose this course. Review this site as you wish.

ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE	PAGES	GRADE %
1. Journal Article Analysis #1	September 20	3	15%
2. <i>Children's Action Tendency Scale Analysis</i>	October 4	1-2	15%
3. <u>Research Proposal Part 1:</u> Intro/Purpose & Research Questions	October 18	3-5	25%
4. <u>Research Proposal Part 2:</u> Measurement, Sampling & Data Collection, Design	November 8	3-5	20%
5. Statistical Tables Worksheet	November 15	N/A	10%
6. Journal Article Analysis #2	December 6	2-3	15%

1. **Journal Article Analysis #1** (Due September 20)

Analyze the Jones (2004) article, using the **Overview of the Research Process** provided in Class #1. You will not be able to respond to every point in the outline, so describe the elements that are most obvious to you. Many of the concepts may be new to you, so do your best to understand and apply them to the article. During the semester, these concepts will become more familiar. Note that you may not exceed three pages (utilizing the *Guidelines for Written Assignments* described later in the syllabus), so you will need to present the information efficiently. The ability to present the important details of an issue succinctly is in itself a valuable skill. The main goal of the assignment is to help you to become more familiar with the process of empirical research, and the manner in which it is typically reported in the professional literature. You should also refer to the *Instructor's Version* of the Killeen & Brady article analysis completed in class #1 as a guide for this assignment.

We will review this article analysis in class, and you will have the chance to make annotations on your paper before submitting it. The grade for the paper will be based primarily on your original analysis, but will include consideration of your classroom annotations.

(Hint for adhering to page constraints with this article: Do not spend too much time describing the intervention).

2. **Children's Action Tendency Scale (CATS) Analysis** (Due October 4)

The *CATS* will be provided in class on September 27, along with a set of questions related to the *CATS* and the Briggs et al. (1996) article. Your responses should be typed according to the *Guidelines for Written Assignments*, described later in the syllabus. We will discuss the questions in class before you turn the paper in, and as above, in-class annotation will be considered in grading. For this analysis, brief answers are acceptable, i.e. complete sentences are not necessary for all answers.

Research Proposal

A research proposal is the plan that outlines what researchers will do in a research project. Such planning typically may take many months, and with research involving human subjects also requires approval by an agency and/or university Institutional Review Board before proceeding. Therefore, it is impractical to carry out a research project within the time frame of one semester. It is, however, possible to develop a draft of a proposal for a research study, and that will be the focus of this assignment.

Consistent with the research concerns in most human services settings, this assignment will focus on evaluation of a practice intervention or other service innovation (“program”) designed to produce a specific change (“outcome”) in a clearly-defined population served by social workers. Students may choose a topic from any area of interest, e.g. domestic violence, aging, substance abuse, mental health. The first challenge of the assignment is to develop a focus for the study. Note: Developing a “program” is **not** the focus, but rather developing a way to evaluate the program. You will describe your intended program in relatively simple terms.

The proposal assignment will be completed in two parts: 1) An introduction, rationale, and focus for your study, and the specific research questions you will try to answer by means of your research; and 2) A description of your variables, how you will measure them, the method by which you will obtain your sample and collect data, and the research design.

3. Research Proposal Part 1 (Due October 18)

a) Introduction/Purpose of the Study

In this section, briefly summarize the context and rationale for your study, with reference to relevant supporting literature. The literature review may reveal a gap in knowledge in the area of focus, or a need to clarify, refine, or verify earlier research. Locate 7-10 articles that you believe support the rationale for and focus of the study. If you are unable to obtain one or two of the relevant articles you locate, you may cite the abstracts.

This section should address the following:

- Establish that a concern (“problem”) exists for a specific group, using the literature to specify the nature and extent of the problem.
- Discuss why it exists, i.e. theoretical explanations for it, supported by the literature.
- Discuss what has been done about it (e.g. other programs), and their effectiveness.
- Describe the focus of your study, i.e. the Program → Outcome of interest, and the rationale for your program (e.g. why it is a sensible choice, if it has ever been evaluated), supported by the literature when possible.
- Discuss factors that might affect your outcome of interest, and specify those you will “control for” (i.e. include as variables in your study). Such factors include diversity characteristics (e.g. age, race, class, gender, sexual orientation) of the individuals involved, although it is important to ask what it is about a diversity characteristic that may be influencing a given situation. The decision regarding relevant control variables is guided by your theoretical framework, and grounded in the literature.

[Resources: Monette et al., Chapter 4. **Also: Review the formats in the introductory sections of journal articles reporting findings of empirical studies to see how authors present studies.**]

b) The Research Questions

In a study that evaluates an intervention, the first research question asks: What is the impact of the “program” on the outcome of interest? Additional questions take into consideration the impact of relevant "control" variables (the relationship between program and outcome in light of another factor). For this assignment, you will consider three control variables. Therefore you will develop four research questions.

[Resources: Monette et al., Chapter 4; **Class handout:** *Guidelines for Problem Formulation*]

- c) **References (not included in the total page count):** List "References" for all literature cited, according to APA Style Manual (5th Edition).

4. **Research Proposal Part 2** (Due November 8)

Note: Include your research questions (from Proposal assignment, Part 1) before the measurement section, as the measurement section must address the variables under consideration. You may make changes in the questions you submitted in the Proposal Part 1, based upon the further development of the proposal. Submit the latest version of the questions.

a) **Measurement: Definition and Operationalization of Concepts (variables)**

In four separate paragraphs, one for each variable, include the following for your dependent variable and three control variables:

- Clearly define the variable, i.e. what is meant by the term;
- Explain how it will be operationalized, i.e. measured. When a scale is used, include the number of items and values for the response categories (e.g. 0-4, or 1-7, or Yes/No), if provided, and describe how a score is calculated based upon these values, if relevant. Also note the level of measurement (nominal, ordinal, interval).
- Discuss the validity and reliability of the measure, including possible bias (i.e. limitations in measurement); also consider the diversity characteristics of your research participants, and whether these differences are relevant to your measures' validity. [If there are no studies showing validity or reliability information for a given measure, state that. You can discuss the face and content validity, and cite the source to support that, i.e. who developed the instrument, and why they are a credible source for face and content validity. You can speculate about any threats to reliability, e.g. is the instrument culturally relevant to the study population, is the reading level appropriate, are there reasons to be concerned about social desirability bias, or any other reasons why your study subjects might not respond reliably to the instrument(s) you are using? If you do your best to address these things, you'll be on solid ground.]
- You **must use at least one existing instrument** that has established validity and reliability.

[Resources: Monette et al., chapters 5, 7, 13; class handouts].

b) Sampling and Data Collection

- Describe the characteristics of the population of interest (who you are studying).
- Describe the sampling frame (source from which subjects will be drawn);
- Name and describe the specific sampling method you will use to obtain subjects;
- Note your intended sample size, and possible problems with sample size;
- Discuss possible sampling bias (representativeness), i.e. who might agree to participate (response/nonresponse) and possible problems with dropout (attrition);
- Consider diversity issues, i.e. do your sampling frame and sampling method promote the inclusion of the diversity characteristics relevant to your study? (or are some “groups” within your population of interest, as you defined it, likely to be excluded or underrepresented in your study).
- Describe the methods you will use to collect your data, e.g. how, when and where a questionnaire and/or interview will be completed, or how subjects will be observed;
- Briefly describe “human subjects protection” measures taken, i.e. informed consent procedure, possible risks and costs to participants (physical, psychological, social, legal, other), and how you would protect against or minimize such risks/costs.

[Resources: Monette et al., chapters 6 & 7; class handouts].

c) Research Design

- Briefly describe the program (i.e. “intervention,” which might be treatment, service, or policy) that you are evaluating, providing enough detail to inform the reader of the elements of the program. The goal is to distinguish the intervention from what is not the intervention (e.g. a control group).
- Identify the research design that is most logical for the purposes of your study, e.g. experimental, pre-experimental, quasi-experimental. The basic issues with Research Design are: Can you have a comparison (control) group, and if so, how is it created?
- Consider ethical concerns, including those associated with control groups.
- Address internal validity factors relating to your design.

[Resources: Monette et al., chapters 3 & 10].

5. Statistical Tables Worksheet (Due November 15)

A worksheet related to the Elze (2002) article, as well as statistical tables from several journal articles will be provided in class on November 8. The worksheet is due and will be discussed in class on November 15. **As with all assignments, answers must be typed.**

6. Journal Article Analysis #2 (Due December 6)

Analyze Carney & Buttell (2003) utilizing the guideline provided in class on November 22. [As in assignment #1, the article will be reviewed in class, and you will be permitted to make hand-written notes on your paper. The grade will be based primarily on your original analysis, but in-class annotations will be considered in grading.]

Guidelines for Written Assignments

Format for Papers: To assure equity as it relates to length of papers, all assignments should be typed **double-spaced**, in 12-point font, with **one-inch margins**. Please also **insert page numbers**. Use the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th edition)* as a guide for citation of references. Provide a cover page with your name and the assignment title, and staple the paper (please do not use folders or binders). **Do not exceed the assigned number of pages**. However, it is recommended that you “write to the topic, not the page limits,” i.e. write the paper based on information you have and what you have to say, then revise to the page limits, prioritizing and writing succinctly. Seek outside assistance if you need help with your writing, e.g. through the Writing Center of the university (call 443-1091 for information), or by having a colleague or mentor review your paper for writing quality.

Grading Criteria:

- 1) Relevance: Addresses the purpose of the assignment (if in doubt, ask for clarification);
- 2) Logical, well-supported, and well-reasoned;
- 3) Organization, sentence structure, grammar. (See last page of syllabus for specific criteria for Research Proposal assignments).

Attendance: If you miss a class, you are responsible for obtaining notes and handouts that may be relevant to your participation in subsequent classes before the next class session, if possible. Attendance will be reflected in the final grade in terms of grades “on the border” (e.g. A- vs. B+).

Late Papers: Discuss your inability to submit a paper on time with the instructor (in person, via phone or e-mail), as soon as you recognize that you are unable to meet the due date.

Academic Accommodations

In compliance with Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Syracuse University is committed to ensure that “no otherwise qualified individual with a disability ...shall, solely by reason of disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity...”

If you feel that you are a student who may need academic accommodations due to a disability, you should register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 804 University Ave., Room 309, 315-443-4498 or 315-443-1371 (TDD only). ODS is the Syracuse University office that authorizes accommodations for students with disabilities.

If you believe that you may need an accommodation for this course, please come see me so that appropriate arrangements can be made. If you have not yet registered with the Office of Disability Services, you should visit that office first to obtain the paperwork necessary to start the accommodation process.

COURSE OUTLINE

[**NOTE:** Readings are to be completed prior to the class for which they are assigned.

Also remember to: Highlight key themes in assigned journal articles & bring article to class.]

⇒ Class #1 (8/30) Course Overview

Topics: Review of syllabus, assignments, and the nature of the course.

In-class exercise: **Overview of the Research Process** via article analysis:

Killeen, T.K. & Brady, K.T. (1997). A preliminary study of the effects of auricular acupuncture on alcohol and drug withdrawal symptoms. *Substance Abuse*, 18(3), 119-124.

Handout: *Using the Syracuse University Library Website for Database searches.*

⇒ Class #2 (9/6) The Nature of Scientific Inquiry, Human Subjects Protection & Other Ethical Issues

Readings: Monette et al., chapters 1-3

For class #2: Search a database as explained in class #1, and find two empirically-based articles (i.e. articles in which data has been collected and analyzed) that are in an area of interest to you. You do not need to completely read them at this point, but evaluate whether they are suitable for your literature review. Bring them to class to share with others who may have an interest.

⇒ Class #3 (9/13) Finding a Focus for Your Research (aka Problem Formulation)

Readings: Monette et al., chapter 4

- Wolf, D.B. & Abell, N. (2003). Examining the effects of meditation techniques on psychosocial functioning. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 13 (1), 27-42. (bring article for class discussion)

In-class Exercise: Guidelines for Problem Formulation: Getting to the Questions

⇒ Class #4 (9/20) Problem Formulation (continued)

Readings: Monette et al., chapter 4 (continued)

Due (and discuss in class): Journal Article Analysis #1

- Jones, L.V. (2004). Enhancing psychosocial competence among black women in college. *Social Work*, 49(1), 75-84.

⇒ **Classes #5, #6 & #7** (9/27, 10/4, 10/11) **Measurement**

Readings: Monette et al., chapters 4, 7, 13

In-class Exercise 9/27: Conceptualization and Measurement Worksheet

9/27: Handouts for 10/4 (Briggs et al., *Children's Action Tendency Scale*, Worksheet)

Due (and discuss in class) 10/4: *Children's Action Tendency Scale Assignment*

- Briggs, H., Tovar, D., & Corcoran, K. (1996). The children's action tendency scale: Is it reliable and valid with Latino youngsters? *Research on Social Work Practice*, 6(2), 229-235.

Read for discussion in class 10/11:

- Pike, C.K. (2002). Measuring video gambling: Instrument development and validation. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 12(3), 389-407.

In-class Exercise 10/11: Questionnaire critique and development

⇒ **Class #8** (10/18) **Sampling**

Readings: Monette et al., chapter 6

In-class discussion: Sampling examples from students' research proposals

DUE: Research Proposal/Part 1

⇒ **Class #9** (10/25) **Research Design**

Readings: Monette et al., chapter 10

- Valentine, P.V. & Smith, T.E. (2001). Evaluating traumatic incident reduction therapy with female inmates: A randomized controlled clinical trial. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 11(1), 40-52.

In-class discussion: Research Design examples from students' research proposals

⇒ **Classes #10, #11 & #12** (11/1, 11/8, 11/15) **Quantitative Analysis**

Readings: Monette et al., chapters 14 & 15

For 11/15: ➤ Elze, D.E. (2002). Risk factors for internalizing and externalizing problems among gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents. *Social Work Research*, 26(2), 89-99.

DUE November 8: Research Proposal/Part 2

In-class Exercise (11/8): Class-based data analysis (from data collected on 11/1)

In-class Exercise (11/8): Reading and interpreting statistical tables

Nov. 8: Handout will be provided for 11/15 (*Reading Statistical Tables Worksheet*)

DUE (and discuss in class) November 15: *Reading Statistical Tables Worksheet*

In-class Exercise (11/15): Computer data analysis demonstration.

⇒ **Class #13** (11/22) **Qualitative Methods**

Readings: Monette et al., chapters 9 & 16

➤ Daaleman T.P., Kuckelman Cobb, A., & Frey, B.B. (2001). Spirituality and well-being: An exploratory study of the patient perspective. *Social Science & Medicine*, 53(11), 1503-1511.

In-class Exercise: Content analysis of qualitative data excerpted from a research study on Alcoholics Anonymous affiliation (Caldwell, 1994). Source will not be assigned reading.

November 22: Hand out Assignment #5 guideline (due December 6)

⇒ **Class #14 & #15** (11/29, 12/6) **Single-System Designs & Evaluation Research**

Readings: Monette et al., chapters 11 & 12

Due 12/6 (and discuss in class): Journal Article Analysis #2

➤ Carney, M.M & Buttell, F. (2003). Reducing juvenile recidivism: Evaluating the wraparound services model. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 13(5), 551-568.

Grading Criteria for Research Proposal Assignments

<u>CRITERIA for Part 1: Introduction and Research Questions</u>	<u>ITEM VALUE</u>
1. Clarity of focus in the introduction	20
2. Use of the existing literature to support focus and rationale	20
3. Organization, logical presentation, sentence structure, grammar	20
4. Independent, dependent and three control variables identified	15
5. Clarity of research questions	10
6. Research questions relate to the identified focus of the study (#1 & #2, above)	15
TOTAL (of 100)	

<u>CRITERIA for Part 2: Measurement, Sampling, Data Collection, Design, & Limitations</u>	<u>ITEM VALUE</u>
1. <i>All variables</i> identified in research questions are clearly <i>defined</i>	8
2. All variables are clearly <i>operationalized</i> ; item description, response categories, scoring and level of measurement are addressed	8
3. <i>Validity and reliability</i> issues are addressed (i.e. reported for existing instruments and discussed for measurements described by author), including measurement issues related to diversity characteristics of population being studied	8
4. <i>Population</i> to be studied is clearly identified	5
5. Source of sample (<i>sampling frame</i>) is explained, including representativeness of the sampling frame, e.g. to what extent is study population's diversity represented in the chosen sampling frame	5
6. Sampling method is clearly presented	10
7. Possible <i>bias related to sampling</i> (e.g. self-selection, non-response, attrition) and the implications for generalizability are addressed	10
8. <i>Data collection</i> methods are clearly explained in "nuts & bolts" manner	6
9. <i>Human subjects protection</i> issues are addressed	6
10. <i>Research design</i> is appropriate and clearly explained	8
11. Threats to <i>internal validity</i> are addressed	6
12. Organization, logical presentation, sentence structure, grammar	20
TOTAL (of 100)	

Score ® Letter Grade: 91+ = A 87-90 = A- 83-86 = B+ 77-82 = B 73-76 = B-
70-73 = C+ 64-69 = C 61-64 = C- £ 60 = F