

**AZUSA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF GRADUATE SOCIAL WORK**

**SOCW 521: INTRODUCTORY RESEARCH METHODS  
2 Units**

Spring 2011

**Class meets: Tuesdays 4:20-6:20pm (PT) and Thursdays 12:20-2:20 (FT)**

**Professor:** Olivia Sevilla, MSW, LCSW

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays by appointment before and after class

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**University Mission Statement:** Azusa Pacific University is an evangelical Christian community of disciples and scholars who seek to advance the work of God in the world through academic excellence in liberal arts and professional programs in higher education that encourage students to develop a Christian perspective of truth and life.

**MSW Mission Statement:** The MSW Program in the Department of Social Work at Azusa Pacific University seeks to develop competent advanced social work practitioners who can integrate the knowledge, values, and skills of social work to advance social justice and provide services to assist individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Grounded in the profession's Code of Ethics and sensitivity to diversity, the MSW Program is committed to excellence in our teaching and scholarship, the integration of faith and learning, the development of professional leadership, and the strengthening of communities in local, national, and international contexts.

**Course Description:** This course will provide overviews of quantitative and qualitative research methods, evidence-based practice models, and the necessary integration of research in social work practice. Assignments will focus on the evaluation of practice and program effectiveness and the development of mixed methods studies to better understand social problems. Prerequisite: *Prior Statistics course.*

**Student Learning Outcomes:** *(Each measurable learning outcome is followed by assignment or activity used to assess learning outcome)*

Upon successful completion of this course, class participants will be able to:

1. Demonstrate basic knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research methods appropriate for use in social work practice and research. (foundation objectives 5, 8, 10)

*Activities/assignment: exam questions, integrative final paper*

2. Demonstrate understanding of the relationship of research to social work practice, including abilities to apply research findings to practice and evaluate the effectiveness of practice interventions at individual and agency levels. (foundation objectives 5, 8, 10)  
*Activities/assignment: exam questions, short papers*
  
3. Demonstrate critical thinking skills relevant to the relationships between social work theory, research methods, and religious worldviews, with attention to relevant professional values, ethical standards, and commitments to social and economic justice. (foundation objectives 2, 3, 4)  
*Activities/assignment: exam questions, lecture content and class discussions*
  
4. Demonstrate abilities to critically analyze and evaluate research studies and practice evaluation strategies, including relevant ethical considerations and implications for diverse and at-risk groups. (foundation objective 4, 10)  
*Activities/assignment: exam questions, short papers, integrative final paper*
  
5. Apply methodologies, skills, and values associated with evidence-based practice models, including uses of research knowledge to provide high-quality services, to initiate change, and to improve practice, policy, and social service delivery. (foundation objective 5, 8, 10)  
*Activities/assignment: exam questions, short papers*

***Required Textbook and Instructional materials:***

Grinnell, R., & Unrau, Y. (2008). *Social work research and evaluation: Foundations of Evidence-based Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**Peer-reviewed journal articles;** all articles will be available on-line via the EBSCO host/Academic Search Premier database. Students are expected to have reviewed each article prior to class for discussion of research questions, methodologies, limitations, and relevance to social work. These questions will be the focus of group discussions in class.

***Assignments:***

1. **Concept Paper:** 1-2 page paper which briefly summarizes the range of activities you engage in which could be measured in terms of effectiveness. This will be the foundation of your 3<sup>rd</sup> assignment (described below) (25 pts)
2. **Program evaluation assignment:** Paper requiring students to explore measures and methods used to evaluate program effectiveness in their field agencies, including discussion of relevant ethical considerations and the perceived usefulness of these evaluation strategies with agency administrators and staff members (3-5 pages)
3. **Measurement Instrument and Evaluation Paper:** Paper requiring students to develop measurement instrument(s) to evaluate their existing practice skills and the effectiveness of practice interventions (3-5 pages; due March 13, will require field supervisor assistance).

4. **Integrative paper** presenting a proposal for a **mixed method study** to enhance understanding of a current social problem relevant to the student's current field experience or future professional plans. The proposal will include a professional literature review and requirement for students to critically assess existing research studies of the social problem with attention to issues of research ethics, population risk factors, quality of methodology, discussion of findings, and practice implications (**10-12 pages**). In their proposals, students will be required to clearly identify the following:
- Research rationale linking social problem to activities/mission of field agency
  - Research questions to be addressed by proposed mixed method study
  - Links between research questions and selected qualitative/quantitative methodologies
  - Potential ethical and/or human subjects concerns & possible resolutions
  - Descriptions of proposed qualitative and quantitative methodologies
  - Description of how findings could be reported/disseminated
  - Discussion of how findings could affect agency practice and be used to seek necessary organizational change
  - Discussion of the relevance of proposed study to student professional goals
  - Relevance of the integrative paper to the two shorter papers earlier submitted

***Evaluation/ Assessment Rationale for Grade Determination:***  
***(final grade is based on a weighted average)***

Concept Paper  
 Program evaluation paper  
 Practice evaluation paper  
 Participation (attendance/discussions based on articles)  
 Integrative paper

***Criteria for Letter Grade:***

A	=	93-100%	C	=	73-77%
A-	=	90-92%	C-	=	70-72%
B+	=	88-89%	D+	=	68-69%
B	=	83-87%	D	=	63-67%
B-	=	80-82%	D-	=	60-62%
C+	=	78-79%	F	=	below 60%

***Course Policies:***

***Policy on class preparation, attendance, and participation:*** All assigned readings must be completed prior to class so that students are prepared to fully participate in discussions and exercises. Cell phones and laptops should be turned off and removed from desks during class periods. After two unexcused absences, ten points will be deducted from the student's final point total for each additional unexcused absence. Absences will only be excused with notes from the health center or a physician documenting the time at which medical services were sought. Field emergencies will not justify missed classes or cell phone use during class.

*Policy on Exams:* Exams must be completed at the assigned times. A late exam may be given to individuals who have an urgent medical excuse or a university petition. In special circumstances a make-up exam may be given with a ten-point deduction. Any evidence of cheating will result in a failing exam grade.

*Policy on Late Papers:* Five points will be deducted each day a paper is late. Exceptions will be granted only under emergency circumstances, and require written student documentation of the need for an extension and identification of an alternate due date. Computer/printer problems do **not** constitute an acceptable excuse for lateness. Written instructor approval of extension requests is required to avoid point deductions. No credit will be given for assignments turned in following the date identified on an extension request unless further documentation of emergency circumstances can be provided by the student **and** their physician or another emergency service provider.

*Policy on E-mailed papers and papers submitted by mail or after-hours:* Instructors may choose whether or not to accept e-mailed papers. Students accept all risks related to computer, server, and attachment problems. Papers received by e-mail following the due date are subject to the late paper policy. Likewise, papers submitted by mail or after hours (under the instructor's office door or other locations) require instructor permission and are subject to the late paper policy. Students accept all risks related to delayed mail delivery, custodian actions and other circumstances of misplacement.

*Policy on Incompletes:* Incompletes will only be assigned in medical emergency situations involving the student or a person with a close personal relationship to the student. Formal, signed documentation from a physician, nurse, or other emergency service provider will be required, and may be faxed if necessary. Both student and instructor must also fully complete and sign a contract for incomplete grade assignments; this may also be done by fax if necessary. Both formal documentation of the emergency situation and the contract must be provided by the date the final assignment is due for the student to receive an incomplete. If signed documents are not received, then the student will be graded according to assignments previously completed in the course. Assignments of failing grades will be permanent. In order to avoid this situation, students are strongly encouraged to complete assignments well in advance of due dates.

*Policies on Alternative Assignments and Extra Credit:* In unique circumstances, instructors may contract with students to complete alternative assignments. Such circumstances will typically focus on specific student interests and opportunities unlikely to be shared by other class members. Alternative assignments require instructor-student contracts to assure that relevant learning objectives will be met. Instructors may also offer extra credit opportunities for all class members, and are responsible for clearly communicating expectations and the amount of credit students may anticipate receiving.

*Policy on Academic Dishonesty:* An incident of academic dishonesty may result in grade reduction for the assignment, an F for the course, or more serious penalties depending upon the severity of the transgression. Academic dishonesty includes:

1. Cheating- intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise.
2. Fabrication- intentional falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.
3. Facilitating academic dishonesty- intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another commit an act of academic dishonesty.
4. Plagiarism- intentionally or knowingly representing the words, ideas, or work of another as one's own in any academic exercise.

***Policy on Disability/Special Needs:***

Any student in this course who has a disability that might prevent her/him from fully demonstrating her/his abilities should meet with an advisor in the Learning Enrichment Center as soon as possible to initiate disability verification, and discuss accommodations that may be necessary to ensure his/her full participation in the successful completion of course requirements.

***Session Topic and Reading Schedule:***

<p><b>Week 1, January 11/13:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approaches to social work knowledge &amp; research: Scientific &amp; faith perspectives</li> <li>• Critical analysis of research articles (guide for future class discussions)</li> <li>• Retrieving on-line articles using Ebsco Host, Academic database</li> <li>• Readings:</li> </ul> <p>Text: Chapter 1 will be reviewed in class ***Program eval assignment discussed</p>
<p><b>Week 2, January 18/20: No Class Meeting (work on assignment, due Week 3)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A 1-2 page <b>concept paper</b> which describes your practice setting. Discuss activities you engage in which could be measured in terms of effectiveness.</li> </ul> <p>Readings:</p> <p>Text: Chapters 2 &amp; 16</p>
<p><b>Week 3, January 25/27: Turn in concept paper</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research ethics, processes and problems</li> <li>• Diversity issues in research, relevance of research to at-risk populations</li> <li>• Finding existing knowledge</li> <li>• Evaluating evidence</li> <li>• Uses of evidence-based research to provide high-quality services, initiate change, and improve practice, policy, and social service delivery</li> </ul> <p>Readings:</p> <p>Text: Chapters 22 &amp; 23</p> <p>Articles:</p> <p>Tan, S. (2008). Potentially harmful therapies: Psychological treatments that can cause harm. <i>Journal of Psychology and Christianity</i>, 27(1), 61-65.</p> <p>Fayard, C., Harding, G., Murdoch, W. &amp; Brunt, J. (2007). Clinical implications for psychotherapy from the Seventh-day Adventist tradition. <i>Journal of Psychology and Christianity</i>, 26(3), 207-217.</p>

**Week 4, February 1/3:**

- Evidence-based practice and program evaluation; importance of evaluating one's own practice and agency practice through supervision, consumer feedback, instrument development, and research

Readings:

Text: Chapters 25 & 26

Article:

Epp, K. (2008). Outcome-based evaluation of a social skills program using art therapy and group therapy for children on the autism spectrum. *Children & Schools*, 30(1), 27-36.

**Week 5, February 8/10:**

- Quantitative and qualitative research approaches
- Selecting a data collection method

Readings:

Text: Chapters 3, 4, and 15

Article:

Nicotera, N. (2008). Children speak about neighborhoods: Using mixed methods to measure the construct neighborhood. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 36(3), 333-351.

\*\*\*\*Integrative assignment discussion **\*\* Program evaluation assignment due**

**Week 6, February 15/17:**

- Designing Research Studies I: Conceptualization, Measurement & Sampling

Readings:

Text: Chapters 5 & 6

Article:

Eckhardt, E. & Anastas, J. (2007). Research methods with disabled populations. *Disability and Social Work Education*, 6(1/2), 233-249.

**Week 7, February 22/24:**

- Designing Research Studies II: Case-level designs

Readings:

Text: Chapter 7

Article:

Ma, J. (2007). Meanings of eating disorders discerned from family treatment and its implications for family education: The case of Shenzhen. *Child and Family Social Work*, 12, pp. 409-416.

**Week 8, March 1/3:**

- Designing Research Studies III: Group-level designs

Readings:

Text: Chapter 8

Article:

Armour, M., Windsor, L., Aguilar, J. & Taub, C. (2008). A pilot study of faith-based restorative justice intervention for Christian and Non-Christian offenders. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 27(2), 159-167.

**Week 9, March 8/10:**

- Survey research

Readings:

Text: Chapter 12

Article:

Slovak, K., Brewer, T. & Carlson, K. (2008). Client firearm assessment and safety counseling: The role of social workers. *Social Work*, 53(4), 358-366.

**Week 10, March 15/17:**

- Quantitative data analysis
- Evaluating quantitative research studies

Readings:

Text: Chapters 17 & 20

Article:

DiFranks, N. (2008). Social workers and the NASW Code of Ethics: Belief, behavior, disjuncture. *Social Work*, 53(2), 167-176.

**\*\* Personal practice evaluation/Instrument development assignment due**

**Week 11, March 22/24:**

- Participant observation
- Qualitative interviewing

Readings:

Text: Chapters 10 & 11

Article:

Simpson, G. & Cornelius, L. (2007). Overlooking African-American males: A qualitative perspective of urban African grandmother caregivers' reliance on family members. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 15(1), 149-170.

**Week 12, March 22/24:**

- Qualitative data analysis
- Evaluating qualitative research studies

Readings:

Text: Chapters 18 & 21

Article:

Lee, P. (2008). Christian conversion stories of African-American women: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 27(3), 238-252.

**Week 13, March 29/31:**

Writing reports from research studies

Strategies for research dissemination and local venues for presentation

Secular and Christian scholarship: Similarities and differences

Readings:

Text: Chapter 19

Article:

Tangenberg, K. (2004). Spirituality and Faith-based Social Services: Exploring Provider Values, Beliefs, and Practices. *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work*, 23(3), 3-23.

**Week 14, April 5/7:**

Presentations based on integrative assignments; attendance required

\*\*\*\*Integrative assignments due

No readings for this week

**Week 15, April 12/14:**

Presentations based on integrative assignments; **attendance required**

\*\*\*\*Integrative assignments due

No readings  
for this week

**Spring Break: April 19/21**

**Week 16: April 26/28**

Presentations based on integrative assignments; **attendance required**

**\*\*\*Integrative assignments due**

No readings for this week

**Finals Week: May 3/5**

## Bibliography

- Alexander, L. B., Solomon, P. (2006). *The research process in the human services*. Thompson/Brooks-Cole.
- Becker, H. (2007). *Writing for social scientists* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Booth, W., Colomb, G. & Williams, J. (2008). *The craft of research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Campbell, D., & Stanley, J. (1963). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
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- Royse, D. (2004). *Research methods in social work*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole.

Rubin, A., & Babbie, E. (2005). *Research methods for social work*, (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Stringer, E. (2007). *Action research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles CA: Sage Publications

Yegidis, B., & Weinbach, R. (1996). *Research methods for social workers*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.