

Systematic Inquiry in Social Work

SWRK 3100

Syllabus

Contacting your instructor

For information on contacting your instructor as well as other important information from your instructor see the Instructor Letter in your course website.

Course description

The *Undergraduate Calendar* of the University of Manitoba states that SWRK 3100 Systematic Inquiry in Social Work:

Relates systematic methods of scientific inquiry to social work practice; theory building for practice; information collection; descriptive data for decision-making, understanding technical research material, introduction to issues of research design.

Course objectives

Explain and discuss the relationship between research and practice:

1. Evaluate research as a systematic process of developing questions, reviewing literature, measuring concepts and collecting data, designing procedures to reduce bias, and analyzing data;
2. Develop a beginner's knowledge of statistics used in social work research; to be able to read and explain the implications of basic statistical findings;
3. Develop a beginner's knowledge of qualitative data analysis used in social work research; to be able to read and explain the implications of qualitative data analysis;
4. Evaluate research reports and develop an informed confidence in understanding reported research findings and usefulness;
5. Develop basic academic skills, including accessing and searching electronic journals, appropriately using American Psychological Association (APA) styles, and writing literature reviews.;
6. Develop a beginning understanding of the ethical issues in research involving diverse populations, especially Aboriginal people; and
7. Understand research as a core aspect of social work practice.

Course overview

The field of social work is broad, encompassing many populations. Within this context, information develops rapidly in terms of new understandings of people's behaviours, the interaction between people and the structures of society, and in informing social workers of effective ways of working with diverse populations. Because the field is constantly changing, it is important that social workers have the skills needed to become active, informed consumers of research. With growing demands for accountability within and outside the profession, it is also important that social workers have the basic skills and knowledge needed to do community based research and conduct needs/strengths assessments, and program and practice evaluations.

Course materials

Required textbooks

The following required materials are available for purchase from the [University of Manitoba Bookstore](#). Please order your materials immediately, if you have not already done so. See your [Distance and Online Education Student Handbook](#) for instructions on how to order your materials. There are three required textbooks:

Van de Sande, A. & Schwartz, K. (2011) *Research for social justice: A community-based approach*, Fernwood Publishing, Halifax.

Csiernik, R, Birnbaum, R., & Decker Pierce, B. (2010) *Practising social work research: Case studies for learning*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto.

Learning methods

Several methods will be used to teach and evaluate your progress in this course. Teaching involves the course notes and text books, You Tube videos, and your participation in on-line discussions and verbal discussions. Student involvement in your own learning is a very important part of learning, hence the emphasis on your participation.

The assignments are intended to assist with your learning related to various goals in this course, but they are also designed to be as personally interesting as possible

Evaluation and grading

You should acquaint yourself with the University's policy on plagiarism, cheating, and examination impersonation as detailed in the General Academic Regulations and Policy section of the *University of Manitoba Undergraduate Calendar*. Note: These policies are also located in your *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook* or you may refer to Student Affairs at <http://www.umanitoba.ca/student>.

Grading will be based on completed assignments and attendance, Grading systems are as per calendar statements and the *Student Handbook*, with regard to the conversion of numerical values into a letter grade, and the interpretation of letter grades.

Grading

Letter Grade	Percentage Range	Description
A+	> 93	Exceptional
A	86 – < 93	Excellent
B+	79 – < 86	Very Good
B	72 – < 79	Good
C+	65 – < 72	Satisfactory
C	58 – < 65	Adequate
D	50 – < 58	Unacceptable
F	< 50	Failure

Note: All final grades are subject to departmental review.

Appeals of final grades are to be directed to the Appeals Committee, Faculty of Social Work after discussion with the instructor. Requests to re-read an assignment or to re-consider a grade may be directed to the instructor with a supporting rationale in writing within two weeks of receiving the graded assignment. Please refer to the Student Handbook for further details on academic regulations and procedures.

Things I expect of YOU

- Participate and communicate—with each other, and with me.
- Edit papers carefully before you hand them in.
- Papers can be sent to the Academic Learning Center for feedback prior to submission—they will answer ONE question about a specific concern you might have. If you do this, please submit the paper you sent to Academic Learning Center **and** the one with their corrections made.
- Do the assigned readings and watch the You Tube videos.
- If you are experiencing difficulties with your studies or assignments, or have a disability or illness which may affect your course of study, you should discuss these issues with the instructor as soon as possible.
- Contact DE at de_support@umanitoba.ca with any technical problems related to the course.

Make yourself aware of policies in the following areas

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined in the University of Manitoba General Calendar, and it carries serious academic penalties. If you are unsure of the appropriate practices to avoid plagiarism please consult with the instructor.

Student and academic staff responsibilities

The University of Manitoba has expectations regarding student behaviour. Policies concerning inappropriate or disruptive behaviour are online:

http://um_anitoba.ca/admin/governance/governing_documents/students/279.htm.

And policies regarding student discipline are online:

http://umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/governing_documents/students/student_discipline.html

In addition, policies regarding academic staffs' responsibilities regarding students are available online:

http://www.umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/governing_documents/students/278.html

Confidentiality is to be practiced and maintained whether in written assignments, in-class discussions, or in discussions about the course outside of class.

Professional unsuitability

The BSW student handbook has a section on professional unsuitability.

The Faculty of Social Work may require any student to withdraw from the Faculty pursuant to the procedures set out in this By-Law when the student has been found unsuited, on considerations of competence or professional fitness, for the practice of

http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/social_work/media/BSW_Handbook_2012-2013_Final_updates_April_26_12.docx

In the normal course of events students are expected to meet deadlines and complete all course requirements within the regular academic session.

Things you can expect of ME

- Treat you with respect
- Provide timely feedback on assignments
- Make myself available via email and telephone as often as possible.

Assignments

Assignments should use the **APA reference style**:

American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Szuchman, L. & Thomlison, B. (2003). *Writing with style: APA style for social work* (2nd ed.) Toronto: Nelson Thomson Learning.

Examples of this reference style can also be found online at OWL

Late assignment policy

All assignments are due on the class day indicated. If you are ill and unable to hand an assignment in on time, please send the assignment with a doctor's note attached, after notifying me via email the reasons for the late assignment.

Distribution of marks

Assignment	Percentage
Assignment 1: Literature Review	20%
Assignment 2: Participation in Online Discussion	20%
Assignment 3: Critical Appraisal of Research	40%
Assignment 4: Final Take Home Exam	20%

Assignment due dates

Assignment due dates will be posted by your instructor in the Course Announcements.

Assignment Overview

Assignment 1: Literature Review

Length: 5-7 pages

Before engaging in any form of research, a comprehensive review of the literature should be done in order to inform the project. A literature review does not have to prove a point. Rather, it is a summary, by topic, of what is known on a particular topic. Using the University of Manitoba Library's electronic data bases (e.g., EPSCOHOST or PSYINFO) you will select five (5) academic E-journal articles that provide a summary of the current state of knowledge on a particular issue in which you are interested.

While one of these articles can be theoretical in nature, the other four will be empirical. At least one article must be from a social work journal.

Articles should be written within the last five–seven years. More details will be provided in a separate handout. Search for five (5) research journal articles that provide a summary of the current state of knowledge on a particular issue in which you are interested. Two journal articles can be theoretical or conceptual in nature. For example, the article may be a review of the literature on your topic of interest.

The other four must be research articles for which the author used original empirical data (quantitative or qualitative). All five articles should be written within the last 5-7 years and should come from peer reviewed professional journals (not magazines or newspapers). Try to find social work/ human service journals (rather than technical medical journals, for example). All assignments should be typed, double-spaced, and use APA style (the basic description of APA format can be found at <http://www.apastyle.org/apa-style-help.aspx>). You will receive a grade reduction if your work contains many spelling errors and/or punctuation errors and/or grammatical errors. **So check your work before you hand it in.** Always keep a copy of your work for your own records

Assignment 2: Participation in Online Discussion

You will be provided a grade for both the frequency and quality of your online postings, as a “class participation” mark. At the end of the term, the instructor will read the posts provided by each class member and evaluate their quality and frequency (an outline of the expectations is contained in the table below). These submissions are learning opportunities and not just an opportunity to gain marks. Ideas for the content of these submissions will come from the readings for each unit. These submissions can also be an opportunity for each student to raise a question about an aspect of their critical appraisal assignment (For example, a good discussion of a type of sampling procedure from the assigned reading for that unit combined with a description of the sample from the student’s chosen research article—what does the material from the reading suggest about the sample in the article or what question does this raise about the sample in relation to the research topic?)

It is expected that the submissions will be the equivalent of about 2 or 3 well-structured paragraphs. The evaluation of the submission is based on quality, not just length.

Quality and Frequency of On-line Submission	Potential Mark
Students’ postings occur frequently – there are 4 submissions to 4 different unit discussions. The quality of each submission is good to excellent, either using the assigned reading to begin a discussion or add to a discussion that has begun (demonstrating evidence of having thoroughly read and thought about the material in these readings). These four submissions should occur across the term – please do not do these in the first four weeks, but use these as opportunities to learn across the term.	15-20
Postings occur frequently – there are 4 submissions to 4 different unit discussions. While there is evidence that the assigned readings have been read and understood – the level of thinking is limited and basic. The submission quality suggests that these were completed simply to gain marks rather than add to the student’s learning about the unit material.	10-14
Frequency of postings is minimal – only occurring 2 or 3 times across the term. The submissions do little to being or engage with the current discussion for the unit to which it was posted.	5-9
Little evidence of online submission. Postings to discussion did not occur or were infrequent (1 or 2 times) across the term. Quality of postings is limited in that these did not add to the discussion or contain material that draws upon the assigned readings for that unit.	0-4

Assignment 3: Outline for Critical Appraisal of Research Assignment

Social workers should be knowledgeable consumers of research. This assignment provides the opportunity for you to take what you learn from each of the units and apply this to the appraisal of either a qualitative or quantitative research article. The article will be chosen from the five that were reviewed for assignment one. Appraisal means both critiquing the research to point out areas that demonstrate sound research procedures and findings that contribute to the social work knowledge base as well as pointing out weaknesses.

Two separate outlines for both qualitative and quantitative research are provided below. Each question should be thoroughly answered with reference to the chosen research article. Given this, there is no expected length for the overall assignment, as this will vary depending on the research article chosen for the assignment.

This assignment is very time consuming and should not be left until the end of the term (close to the due date). The assignment is best completed across the term, as each set of questions references material from different units. The online submissions are an opportunity to discuss and provide questions about

the unit material and how this applies to some aspect of the article that you critiquing (see assignment two above).

Quantitative research

1. What is the stated purpose of the study? Is the chosen research design appropriate for the stated purpose?
2. What is the theoretical model being examined in the study? Use your practice knowledge to examine the described model and question what is included and how. What has been left out? Focus on the outcomes (variables): Are these specific observable and measurable outcomes? Do these have good face validity? Are they reliable and valid? What are the sources of information for each of the measures (i.e., client self-report)? Is there a reliance on one source or is there some attempt to gather information from a variety of sources?
3. Examine the sample. How were these participants recruited? Who is in this sample? How diverse are these participants (i.e., age, gender, race, income, etc.)? Based on this information about the sample, is it possible to generalize the results of this one study to different settings?
4. What are the limitations of the design? Are these fully described?
5. What are the findings or potential findings? What is the contribution of this study to the social work knowledge base?

Qualitative research

1. What is the stated purpose of the study? Is the chosen research design appropriate for the stated purpose?
2. What are the theoretical concepts being examined in the study? Does the theory provide a good background for the project? Are the relevant areas of interest covered and fully explored in their diversity and complexity? Are the procedures designed to ensure that the dependability, credibility, and confirmability of the findings?
3. Examine the sample. How were these participants recruited? Who is in this sample? How diverse are these participants (i.e. age, gender, race, income, etc.)? Based on this information about the sample, is it possible to transfer the results of this one study to others in different settings?
4. What are the limitations of the design? Are these fully described?
5. What are the findings or potential findings? Are the findings linked to the data? Can an outsider follow the logic from the data to the final product? Are the results related to the context and participants, and not just a reflection of the inquirer? Are all voices present in the data and analysis? What is the contribution of this study to the social work knowledge base? In what ways is the contribution limited?

Final take home exam

This will be a time-limited final take home exam that covers the entire course.

Assignment submission

Assignments must be submitted online. The instructor's comments on your answers will give you some idea of your level of understanding of the material. Instructions for assignment submission are located in the assignments area on the course home page.

Plagiarism, cheating, and examination impersonation

You should acquaint yourself with the University's policy on plagiarism, cheating, and examination impersonation as detailed in the General Academic Regulations and Policy section of the University of Manitoba *Undergraduate Calendar*. Note: These policies are also located in your *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook* or you may refer to Student Affairs at <http://www.umanitoba.ca/student>.

Distance and Online Education (DE) Student Resources

In your course website there are links for the following:

- Contacting Distance and Online Education Staff
- Distance and Online Student Handbook
- Distance and Online Education Website

Acknowledgments

Content Specialists: Colin Bonnycastle, M.S.W.
Assistant Professor of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Colin Bonnycastle has taught at the Faculty of Social Work and been the Director of the Northern Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Program located in Thompson, Manitoba since 1998. Prior to joining the faculty he spent 17 years in direct social work practice in the Northwest Territories and Saskatchewan. His research has included projects involving homelessness, poverty, and male violence. He is currently involved in a large prairie wide longitudinal study of abused women after they leave shelters. His research interests also include needs assessments program evaluations. In addition to this course, Colin teaches social policy courses.

Brenda Bacon, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Brenda Bacon has taught at the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba since 1998. Her research has included several projects examining outcomes of domestic violence treatment groups for men and women, a project with women charged with domestic assault, and several projects evaluating parent education programs for separating/divorcing parents, including a national study of Best Practices in Parent Education for Separating/Divorcing Parents. Her research interests also include family violence, community mental health, and practice effectiveness. In addition to this introductory course in research methods, Dr. Bacon teaches clinical practice courses in the undergraduate and graduate programs.

Instructional designer: Bonnie Luterbach, M.Ed.
Distance and Online Education
University of Manitoba

Web developer: Lorna Allard
Distance and Online Education
University of Manitoba

Copyright © 2005, minor revisions 2007, 2009, 2010, revision 2012
All rights reserved. No part of the material protected by this copyright may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission from the copyright owner.

University of Manitoba, Distance and Online Education