SW880 Advanced Seminar in Substance Use Research

Fall Semester 2015: Wednesday, 12:30-3:10 pm, Hepner Hall 212 or Center for Alcohol and Drug Studies and Services, 6386 Alvarado Ct, Ste 224

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Course Description

Research is the heart of social inquiry. In a Ph.D-granting program, one important goal is to train students to be disciplined, productive researchers. This course is designed to introduce students to the process of research as a sequence of events, systematically organized to further knowledge. This class, which will include lectures, discussions, student-led presentations, and an independent research proposal is designed to give students a broad view of the variety of approaches to designing good social research, with a focus on substance use. We will survey many topics, techniques, and methodologies; therefore, the emphasis of this course tends to be on breadth rather than depth into any one method.

The class is designed in a seminar format, with discussion and analysis of assigned readings at the heart of the class. Therefore, you must read all assigned materials before class, think about these issues thorough the semester, debate these issues with your classmates, and integrate these issues mentally to develop as a researcher. Please note that if you come to class unprepared, you will be lost and not learn anything from the class. Being a doctoral seminar, this course will entail a higher workload than a mastersâ€™ level course. It will involve a heavy dose of readings and a large amount of critical and often frustrating thinking.

Learning Goals

The focus of the class will be on how to make reasonable choices among research methods and design options. By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Characterize the different approaches to experimental and non-experimental substance use research design
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various research designs and methods, including that described in an experimental design article
- Understand measurement issues, including those related to reliability and validity
- Gain an understanding of different sampling procedures
- Apply various design and methods concepts to the development of a research proposal due at the end of the semester
Course Materials

The required text for this course is:

Babbie, E. 2014. The practice of social research. 14th edition. This is a big textbook that costs about $185 from Cengage Learning or Amazon, although you can rent it too. You will refer to it for the rest of your career.

Other readings as assigned, often provided on Blackboard.

Course Assignments

To meet these learning goals, and to show the extent to which you have moved toward them, you will complete several assignments that include in-class presentations, a research article critique, and a final research proposal. These assignments are described in more detail below.

In-Class presentations (30 percent of final grade)

Each of you will have the opportunity to present on two relevant topics to the class. These topics, generally outside of typical class content and sometimes considered emerging or controversial, are listed in the Schedule of Meetings below. You will pick your topics early in the semester. You will present your topics and be responsible for facilitating discussion in the last hour of class. Your presentation should set out what you see as the key concepts related to this topic, and may include slides, discussion, and in-class exercises. The topic titles may be a bit cryptic, so please check with Dr. Woodruff that your idea is consistent with the class objectives.

Methods critique exam (30 percent of final grade)

Past the mid-point of the semester, you will write a methods critique of an article that describes results of an experimental study. I will provide you a published article that uses a pre-, quasi-, or experimental design, and you will have a week to write an appreciation and critique of the research design and methods of inquiry presented there. This critique will be 5 single spaced pages, excluding references and appendices, and is due October 14, 2015, in class. Look at this assignment as your opportunity to demonstrate the extent to which you have, by that point, met the relevant learning goals.

Research proposal (40 percent of final grade)

You will apply your learning about the research process into a proposal that is due at the end of the semester. This proposal will be 10-12 single spaced pages, excluding AMA or APA style references and appendices. Please select an alcohol or drug use problem, preferably in the positivist tradition of inquiry. The proposed research must be original (not something you’re doing for another class), must examine a real problem, and should be at least conference-level quality. Please let Dr. Woodruff know your idea if you have any questions about its relevance. Your proposal should include these six sections: (1) research problem and significance, (2) literature review, (3) theory and hypotheses, (4) research design, (5) relevant procedures, and (6) research methods. Data collection or analyses are not necessary, but certainly, you can describe a plan with regard to these areas if you’d like. You will be evaluated on the extent to which your proposal conforms to the letter and spirit of the requirements of soundly-designed, ethical substance use research. The proposal should be turned into the School of Social Work office by 4:00 pm on December 16, 2015. Failure to turn this in on time will result in point deductions as discussed in this syllabus.
Discussion participation

Graduate study means learning from every possible source--from your readings, your peers, your life experience, your professors, and your assignments. Participating in discussions is one of the best ways to learn. You are expected to contribute insights to the class. The culture of the class will, I hope, be a congenial one. Doing excellent written work is not enough to demonstrate adequate performance in graduate school. So, organize yourselves in whatever way you need to ensure broad participation in the discussion. Say anything you can defend against reasoned argument. Treat your colleagues’ contributions with respect (which means taking them seriously and challenging them, as well as extending basic courtesy).

Attendance and Grading

Attendance and Late Assignments

This should go without saying, but attendance at each scheduled class meeting is required. More than one absence that is not due to extraordinary circumstances (you have to fly to Sweden to accept the Nobel Prize, for example) will result in a lowered grade.

Moreover, you are expected to keep up with the readings and to complete assignments on time. Late assignments will lose 1/2 a letter grade for each day they are late. If you cannot complete assignments on time due to an emergency, you must let me know before the assignment is due if this is humanly possible. You are expected to have read the readings by the day on which readings are assigned and are expected to participate actively in class discussions.

Grading

There are no extra credit opportunities for this course.

Grading Scale: Grades are posted (in percentages) on Blackboard. Grades will be administered in accordance with the policies set forth in the Graduate Bulletin. The following grading scale will be utilized:

- A = 100-95
- A- = 94-90
- B+ = 89-87
- B = 86-84
- B- = 83-80
- C+ = 79-77
- C = 76-74
- C- = 73-70
- D+ = 69-67
- D = 66-64
- D- = 63-60
- F = 59 or less

Grading Guidelines:

1. Grades of A or A- are reserved for student work that not only demonstrates excellent mastery of content, but also shows that the student has (a) undertaken complex tasks, (b) applied critical thinking skills to course assignments, and/or (c) demonstrated creativity in her or his approach to course assignments. The degree to which the student demonstrates these skills determines whether he/she receives an A or an A-.

2. A grade of B+ is given to work that is judged to be very good. This grade denotes that the student has demonstrated a more-than-satisfactory understanding of the material being tested, and has exceeded expectations of the course assignments.
3. A grade of B is given to student work that meets the basic requirements of course assignments. It denotes that the student has done satisfactory work on assignments and meets the expectations of the course.

4. A grade of B- denotes that the student’s performance was less than satisfactory on course assignments, reflecting only a moderate grasp of content and is below expectations.

5. A grade of C+ reflects a minimal grasp of course assignments, poor organization of ideas and/or several significant areas requiring improvement.

6. Grades below a C+ denote a failure to meet minimum standards, reflecting serious deficiencies in the student’s performance on assignments.

The instructor will evaluate students’ written work in accordance with the graduate grading guidelines. Completion of all components of a written assignment would result in a grade of B. As per the guidelines above, a grade of B is given to student work that meets the basic requirements of the assignment. It denotes that the student has done satisfactory work on the assignment and meets the basic expectations of the course. Grading will begin with the assumption that the student has met the requirements of the assignment, and all written work for this course (i.e. paper) will begin with a score of 85%, slightly higher than a mid-range B. Areas of the assignment that are judged to demonstrate more-than-satisfactory understanding of the task will receive additional credit and areas that are less than satisfactory effort, including omissions or reflecting only moderate grasp of content and/or expectations, will have credit deducted.

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**Schedule of Meetings, Readings, and Assignments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings to be done before class</th>
<th>In-Class Presentations/Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Session 1 | 8/26/15 | • Course Introduction  
• Syllabus review  
• Assignment of student in-class presentations that will begin next week | n/a                             |                                                             |
| Session 2 | 9/2/15 | • Human Inquiry  
• Paradigms, Theory, & Social Research  
• Student Presentation | Babbie chapters 1-3  
PRESENTATION: Theories of Substance Misuse |                                                             |
| Session 3 | 9/9/15 | • Overview of Research Design  
• Student Presentation | Babbie chapter 4  
PRESENTATION: Ethics and Politics of Social Research/Substance Use Research |                                                             |
| Session 4 | 9/16/15 | • Conceptualization, Operationalization, & Measurement  
• Student Presentation | Babbie chapter 5  
PRESENTATION: Biological or Other Objective Measures in Substance Use Research |                                                             |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Presentations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 5</td>
<td>9/23/15</td>
<td>Indices, Scales and Typologies</td>
<td>Babbie chapter 6</td>
<td>PRESENTATION: Technology-based Data Collection</td>
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<td>Session 6</td>
<td>9/30/15</td>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>Babbie chapter 7</td>
<td>PRESENTATION: Sampling Bias Implications for Substance Use Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 7</td>
<td>10/7/15</td>
<td>Experimental Designs</td>
<td>Babbie chapter 8</td>
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<td>Session 8</td>
<td>10/14/15</td>
<td>Causal Inference</td>
<td>Article on Bb</td>
<td>Critique of experimental study article due in class</td>
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<td>Session 9</td>
<td>10/21/15</td>
<td>Survey Research</td>
<td>Babbie chapter 9</td>
<td>PRESENTATION: Observational Study Designs in Substance Use Epidemiology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 10</td>
<td>10/28/15</td>
<td>Qualitative Field Research</td>
<td>Babbie chapter 10</td>
<td>PRESENTATION: Lead the class in an Exercise in Content Analysis</td>
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<td>Session 11</td>
<td>11/4/15</td>
<td>Unobtrusive Research</td>
<td>Babbie chapter 11</td>
<td>PRESENTATION: Big Data Analytics for Substance Use Studies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11/11/15</td>
<td>Veterans’ Day</td>
<td>No class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 12</td>
<td>11/18/15</td>
<td>Evaluation Research</td>
<td>Babbie chapter 12</td>
<td>PRESENTATION: Emerging Analyses, eg, Propensity Scores and Agent-based Models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11/25/15</td>
<td>Thanksgiving Break</td>
<td>No class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 13</td>
<td>12/2/15</td>
<td>Quantitative Data Analysis</td>
<td>Babbie chapters 14&amp;16</td>
<td>PRESENTATION: Single System Research Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 14</td>
<td>12/9/15</td>
<td>Catch up</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12/16/15</td>
<td>Research Proposal due in School of Social Work office by 4:00 pm</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Class Policies

1. **Classroom Etiquette**: Mobile phones should be turned off during class time to avoid distracting others and detracting from the learning process. Resist the urge to check Facebook, tweet, text, surf the web, email, etc. during class. Please make every effort to come to class on time as late arrivers can be distracting to the class.

2. **SDSU Faculty Senate Disability Policy**: If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

3. **Accommodation for Religious Observances**: Students will be allowed to complete examinations or other requirements in advance of a religious observance. However, it is the student's responsibility to contact me in advance so that I can make the necessary arrangements.

4. **Academic Misconduct**: Academic misconduct is an act in which a student seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation, uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise, forges or falsifies academic documents or records, intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others, engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance, or assists other students in any of these acts. Academic misconduct, including plagiarism, is a serious offense in academia and will be treated according to the university policy, as written in the SDSU catalog/Graduate Bulletin. Any Academic misconduct, including plagiarism infractions, will be reported to the SDSU Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities as is mandated by the CSU Chancellor.

   If you are unsure as to what is plagiarism, you can take the 30-minute pre- and post-online quiz: **SDSU Plagiarism: The crime of intellectual property** by SDSU librarian Pamela Jackson, found at: http://library.sdsu.edu/guides/tutorial.php?id=28

   For more information on the topic, visit the Office of Student Rights and Responsibility: http://studentaffairs.sdsu.edu/srr/academics1.html

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**Additional Resources**


http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=oa_textbooks


DRAFT [Pg. 6]
Some Details about Methods Critique Exam

The article provided to you will be a peer-reviewed journal article with a pre-, quasi-, or experimental design that will likely include sections for Background, Methods, Results and Discussion. The article will include the collection and analysis of data. Your critique of the article is due in class on October 14, 2015. The critique that you write should include the following sections, as applicable:

I. **Background** - This section should briefly identify the characteristics of persons/communities that are affected by the problem as well as some indication of the size of the problem and its impacts on individuals and the community. (10%)

II. **Assessment** - In this section, you should provide a summary of your assessment of the quality of the research conducted in each article that lead to the findings presented. For each you must present evidence for your assessment (i.e., why is the study design weak? Why is the sampling approach weak?). (65%)
   
   a. **Sampling issues.** What type of sampling was conducted, was it probability or nonprobability? What are the strengths and limitations of the sampling used? Are there problems with the sample size? What are some of the issues related to sample size? How do sampling issues affect external validity?
   
   b. **Measurement issues.** What are the dependent and independent variables for each study? What is the level of measurement for the measure? What are the strengths and limitations of the measures? Reliability/validity of the measures?
   
   c. **Conceptualization and operationalization.** How are the variables and hypotheses conceptualized and operationalized, if at all? What are the strengths and weaknesses of how these are conceptualized and operationalized?
   
   d. **Study design issues.** What is the study design? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the design? What are the external validity issues as they relate to the design?
   
   e. **Analysis.** Does the analysis seem logical and well presented, at least to the degree that we have discussed?
   
   f. **Discussion/Conclusions:** Are conclusions drawn by the authors driven by the results, and are they reasonable given the strength of the design and methods?

III. **Ethical issues** - addressed sufficiently? Why or why not? (10%)

IV. **Generalization** - Provide your assessment of the extent to which the findings of this articles are applicable to underrepresented cultural or disadvantaged populations. To whom do the results generalize, who is not included? (10%)

V. 5% of the paper grade is allotted to organization, sentence structure, spelling, grammar, and appropriate citation/reference page (either APA or AMA style).