SOCW 516: Research Methodologies (MSWI)

THIS IS A SAMPLE OUTLINE. ACTUAL COURSE OUTLINE MAY VARY IN STRUCTURE, REQUIRED READINGS, TEXTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

“…the deeper I submerge myself into tribal knowledge systems the more I resist Western ways of knowing as a given for all academic research, even though I know that this demands a long swim against a strong current.”
(Kovach, 2009)

Course Description:

In this course we review the foundations of social research practice (ontology/worldview, epistemology, paradigm and perspective), with an emphasis on critical, Indigenous, feminist and poststructural ideas. All students have the chance to learn the basics of some research methodologies commonly used in social work, and to understand the ethical and political challenges of socially just research. Students choose either a thesis or evaluation stream for completion of the course.

Class Time and Location:

SOCW 516 is a distance course taught via Coursespaces. It follows a unit-per-week schedule, with the expectation that students will move through the course on this basis within outlined time frames.

Course Intentions:

The course provides you with the basics of a socially just approach to social work research and/or evaluation. Social work research is an immense area and it is not possible to cover all relevant approaches to research or evaluation in one course. Students have the opportunity to consider the opportunities and challenges presented by various approaches to knowledge creation (ontologies and epistemologies), and explore the fit between their topic(s) (what you are interested in researching), methodologies (ways of conceptualizing research) and methods (ways of carrying out research). Course-based students have the opportunity to consider the opportunities and challenges presented by various ways in which policies, programs and practice might be evaluated. All students should understand that successfully completing research or evaluation requires knowledge acquisition and skill development beyond what is offered in this course. This course provides a solid foundation for beginning exploration and further learning.
By the completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Critically reflect on your location/positionality (factors such as class, race, gender, ability, sexual orientation) and life history (with special attention to your previous encounters with research) and how these influence your perceptions, assumptions, beliefs and attitudes about research.

2. Critically analyse the basic assumptions and implications of research methodologies: what assumptions about reality, knowledge and worldview does each entail?

3. Identify and describe a range of research methodologies, including the underlying assumptions of various approaches, and their strengths and limitations, especially with reference to their applicability for social justice work.

4. Thesis students:
   - Identify the tasks and processes required to formulate a researchable topic or question, to design relevant research strategies, to select pertinent data sources, data collection and data analysis methods.

   Course-based students:
   - Explain the basics of a socially-just approach to evaluation/needs assessment;
   - Describe the major uses of evaluation/needs assessment;
   - Identify the tasks and processes required to: formulate an evaluation proposal or needs assessment; design relevant data collection and data analysis methods; and select pertinent data sources.

5. Critically analyse methods for assessing and evaluating qualitative research.

6. Compare and contrast the political and ethical dilemmas posed by various research approaches, with special attention to the self of the researcher.

7. Critically reflect on your knowledge base about qualitative research, your ability to understand critique and use relevant research literature, and your plan for additional learning.

**Educational method:** This course utilizes adult learning principles – students (and instructor) are expected to think critically, be self-reflective, and take considerable responsibility for their own learning. While the instructor takes responsibility for the overall structure of the course, for some content and for student assessment, students are responsible for some of the content and for actively and continuously engaging in learning. We anticipate that students will contribute to class learning by sharing their knowledge, experience, ideas and reflections, and by making the class a safe and respectful place in which others can do the same.

**Doing well in the course:** Students who hope to achieve a grade of B+ or higher should expect to work a minimum of 6 – 9 hours per week (on average) on the course – though the amount of time you spend will of course depend on factors like the reading, writing and analytical abilities
you bring to the course. It is a somewhat packed course, which is necessitated by it being the only research course most MSW students take.

**Pre-requisite skills:** In order to benefit from and succeed in this course, you need some key skills. The units are intended to contribute to your existing abilities to:

1. Read academic texts effectively; i.e., understand within reasonable time;
2. Write academic essays;
3. Summarize extensive pieces of academic writings;
4. Paraphrase extensive pieces of academic writings.
5. Synthesise information from different sources.

**Required Texts:**
- Readings posted or linked on the course site or (in the case of some journal articles) accessible through the UVIC library site. If no link is provided, please search through the UVIC library system (use SUMMON or Google Scholar database OR search on journal name, then choose correct volume and issue).

**Request for Accommodation:** If you need assistance in order to fully participate and complete the assignments due to disability or for any other reason, please discuss this with me as close to the outset of the course as possible. Accommodation requests received on or after the due date of an assignment are not accepted and late penalties will apply. All School policies on accommodation, grading, submitting assignments, participation, course evaluation, grading, etc. can be accessed at: [http://www.uvic.ca/hsd/socialwork/current/msw/policies/index.php](http://www.uvic.ca/hsd/socialwork/current/msw/policies/index.php)

Please note Faculty of Graduate Studies policies that apply to all graduate students: [http://web.uvic.ca/calendar2014-09/GRAD/index.html](http://web.uvic.ca/calendar2014-09/GRAD/index.html)

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism involves using other people’s work without due acknowledgement, irrespective of the site where the author’s work is published or posted electronically. Plagiarism may be done deliberately or unwittingly. Either way, it constitutes a serious act of academic misconduct and will result in failure in the course – NO EXCEPTIONS. Students at this level of study should understand this very well. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism and how you might prevent it from occurring, consult the most recent edition of the university calendar.

**Multiple submission:** Students cannot submit work that they have previously used in identical or similar form in other courses to fulfill any assignment in this course.

**Submitting Assignments:** This course has three assignments, as shown in the table. **Students are welcome to submit assignments in advance of the posted due dates.** Submit all assignments electronically to the appropriate Assignment Dropbox on the course site as a Word document file. Assignments submitted using other file formats will be returned for resubmission and late
penalties will be assessed. Please use the assignment number and your last name as the name of the file. For example, when I submit Assignment #1, the file name would be: 1 Strega.doc.

**Late Assignments:** A student who is unable to meet an assignment deadline due to illness, accident, or family affliction may be eligible for an extension. Except in exceptional circumstances, extensions must be negotiated prior to the assignment due date or the penalty for late assignments will be applied: a grade level penalty during the first week (or portion) of lateness (e.g. from A- to a B+, or B+ to a B) and a further grade level penalty during the second week (or portion) of lateness. Assignments are not accepted two weeks after the due date (hence a failing grade of N assigned for the course).

- Please note that extensions CANNOT be given for the final assignment due to university deadlines for submission of marks. If you are unable to complete the final assignment by the due date, you will need to apply for an academic concession and provide the appropriate supporting paperwork for a deferral prior to the assignment due date.

**Assignment Basics:** While each assignment has specific grading criteria, all your work should demonstrate that you are familiar with and able to integrate course and outside material; that you are able to understand and critically analyse the material and your learning experiences; that you have critically self-located; and that you have addressed the individual components of the assignments with intellectual honesty.

- Papers should be thoroughly proofread and corrected before submission. Papers must adhere to APA formatting requirements (i.e. 12-point font, double-spaced, 1 inch margins, page numbers, running header, etc.). Correct APA style and referencing system is required for all in-text and bibliographical references. Grammar, style (organization, flow, cogency and coherency) and referencing are considered in grading. If you are not familiar with APA referencing and style, please consult the APA guide on the UVIC library website.

- Please review the *Writing Expectations* document on the course site. Resources to support writing and critical reflection are provided or linked on the course site. Additional resources and support is available through the Centre for Academic Communication: [http://www.uvic.ca/learningandteaching/home/home/centre/](http://www.uvic.ca/learningandteaching/home/home/centre/)

- **IMPORTANT NOTE:** You are welcome to draw from your discussion posts (including “cut-and-paste”) when completing any assignment in the course. Material from discussion posts by your colleagues can also be used, and should be cited in APA format.

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<tr>
<th>Assignment and Description</th>
<th>Due Date and Time</th>
<th>Percent of Final Mark</th>
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<td>#1 – Critical Reflection</td>
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<td>#2 – Literature Review</td>
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<td>#3A – Research Proposal OR</td>
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<td>#3B - Evaluation Proposal</td>
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<td>Participation &amp; Contributions</td>
<td>Ongoing – Assessed after Unit 5 and at end of the course</td>
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Assignment #1 – Critical reflection: What ground am I standing on?

**Intentions:** The purpose of this assignment is to give you an opportunity to consolidate your learning from the first three units into an exploration of your beliefs and attitudes about research and the sorts of research questions and topics that interest you. It can provide a basis for your work in other assignments in the course.

**Length:** 6-8 double-spaced pages, exclusive of references.

**Instructions:** Drawing on the course materials in the first three units to support your work, write a critically reflective piece describing:

- The sorts of research or evaluation questions that particularly interest you, and how these interests are shaped and influenced by your social location/positionality;
- How you position yourself in relation to research/as a researcher, including where you locate yourself ontologically and epistemologically – and why;
- Your understanding of a socially just approach to research, and how this understanding is impacted by your social location/positionality.

**Grading criteria:**
- Extent to which your paper addresses each assignment component (approximately equal attention to each of the 3 components)
- Extent to which your engagement with course materials is demonstrated within your paper (no minimum or specified number of materials)
- Extent to which your paper demonstrates the application of principles of critical reflection
- Extent to which your writing is clear, succinct and well-organized, including correct grammar, spelling, and APA referencing style

Assignment #2 – Brief Literature Review

**Length:** 8-10 double-spaced pages, exclusive of references;

**Intentions:** This assignment develops your skills in finding, analysing, and using published research. It is intended to assist you in exploring your questions and ideas around research methodologies through a critical analysis of existing research on a topic that interests you. This assignment allows you to:

- Critically analyse assumptions about reality, knowledge, politics and values underlying and embedded within research and scholarly writing;
- Begin to understand the tasks and processes required to formulate research or evaluation questions, design relevant research strategies, and select pertinent data sources, data collection and data analysis methods
- Begin to critically analyse methods for assessing and evaluating qualitative research
- Compare and contrast the political and ethical dilemmas posed by various research approaches

**Overview:** In this assignment you are asked to locate, summarize and synthesize some of the existing empirical knowledge about the topic or question or policy or program or
intervention that will be the focus of your final assignment. The ability to effectively navigate, analyse and summarize relevant published research is a key practice skill that, post-graduation, will be useful on all levels from the micro to the macro.

What is a literature review? It is a synthesis and critical analysis of significant literature published on a particular issue or topic. A literature review is not an annotated bibliography, which is simply a sequential list of relevant publications, each of which is briefly summarized. The writer of a literature review is thinking about all the surveyed research at once, rather than sequentially, so that areas of agreement and disagreement can be talked about together. Additional information about literature reviews is posted on the course site. Note: your literature review can be included in a condensed form in your final assignment.

**Recommended Steps**

1. Find existing information relevant to your interest by scanning the literature using the databases accessible via the UVIC library (though you are welcome to go further afield).
2. Identify among the published literature a minimum of 3-5 readings that significantly inform your topic, e.g. information that is adds to, confirms, and/or challenges your existing thoughts. Students are welcome to use theses or published evaluation reports for some or all of their readings.
3. Critically analyze these readings, with particular attention to areas of agreement and disagreement.
   a. Identify any trends in what has been published about your topic: what “conversations” are taking place in the literature?
   b. Explain briefly what is and is not known, discussed or not discussed about the topic.
   c. Note whether the topic is being written about by insiders to it, or by those who are outside the experience or phenomenon.
      i. Consider the impact of researcher positionality on choice of methodology, report of findings and researcher analysis (often called “discussion” in journal articles)
      ii. Show what consideration if any has been given to the ethical and political issues involved with conducting research or evaluation in this area/on this topic.
4. Overall you are seeking to explain some ways the topic has been researched, looking especially for those ways likely to be compatible with what you are proposing to do OR identifying a gap in how a topic has been investigated.

**Grading criteria:**

- Extent to which your paper addresses each assignment component (approximately equal attention to each of the 3 components listed in Step #3)
- Extent to which your engagement with course materials is demonstrated through your critical analysis of the literature (no minimum or specified number of materials)
- Extent to which your writing is clear and succinct and well-organized, including correct grammar, spelling, and APA referencing style
Assignment #3 – Thesis or evaluation proposal

Recommended Length: 12-14 double spaced pages, excluding references

3A – Thesis Proposal

Assignment #3A provides an opportunity to “try out” one research methodology as preparation for your thesis work. It requires that you demonstrate familiarity and expertise with one methodology and apply it to a research topic of your choice. In order to prepare for writing this assignment, please review the guide to preparing a thesis proposal on the School of Social Work web site:

Recommended steps

- Identify a topic you are interested in researching.
- Prepare a research proposal that uses one of the research methodologies covered in the course. The proposal must include:
  - A clear statement of the research question (your topic)
  - A clear statement of your relationship to the topic: Why are you interested? What are the implications of who you are for taking up this research?
  - A very brief statement on the purpose and significance of the proposed research in the context of the existing literature (= very brief literature review)
    - This is where you explain why your research is important
    - Keep this section short – recommended length 2 pages
  - A description of the research design, with emphasis on describing the methodology (include methods of data collection and data analysis) (this is the “heart” of your proposal). Note: Once you’ve decided on a methodology, be sure to read/view all of the materials provided in that unit.
    - A rationale for the methodology chosen: explain how the methodology “fits” your topic.
    - A brief description of how the research might be evaluated or assessed
    - A brief critical analysis of the strengths and limitations of the methodology, including issues of social justice politics, research ethics and the self (location/positionality) of you as the researcher

3B – Evaluation/Needs Assessment Proposal

Because they engage with vulnerable populations, social workers have an ethical obligation to ensure that programs and/or interventions (for individuals, families, or communities) are needed and that they are effective. The neoliberal political climate has led to an increased emphasis on accountability and thus on evaluation. Social workers must be prepared to demonstrate that a policy, program or intervention is needed, or that a policy, program or intervention is effective. From a social justice perspective, the political and organizational context of evaluation must also be taken into account. This assignment provides you with an opportunity to prepare an evaluation proposal or a needs assessment, using one of the research methodologies covered in the course, in order to evaluate an existing policy, program or intervention, or to demonstrate that a proposed program, intervention or policy change is needed.
**Recommended steps**

Identify a policy, program or intervention that you are interested in evaluating. This can be an existing policy, program or intervention or a program, policy or intervention for which you want to demonstrate a need. Keep your focus narrow – for example, evaluate a program within an agency, not an entire agency.

- Introduce your proposal by providing:
  - A clear description of the policy, program or intervention you propose to evaluate. Include enough information on the organization in which the policy, program or intervention is currently delivered (or where it might be delivered, if you are making a case for a new program or policy) that the context is clear to the reader.
  - A clear statement of the objectives of your evaluation. Explain here your connection to this policy, program or intervention.
  - A very brief review of the existing literature on the policy, program or intervention (or policies, programs or interventions that are closely related). You can include prior evaluation findings (if they exist).
    - This is where you explain why the policy, program or intervention is important.
    - This is also where you explain the social justice connection.
    - Keep this section short – recommended length about 2 pages.
  - Explain how you will evaluate the policy, program or intervention OR, in the case of a needs assessment, how you will assess the need for the policy, program or intervention (this is the “heart” of your proposal)
    - Identify the type of evaluation are you proposing (e.g. process, outcome, needs assessment, client satisfaction study).
    - Identify your evaluation design (e.g. survey, questionnaire, qualitative interviews using one of the methodologies in the course).
    - Describe and provide a rationale for your choice of methodology, data collection (sampling) and data analysis methods.
  - Explain the ethics and politics of the methodology. How does it fit with the organizational and political context? How does it address social justice concerns?
  - Briefly describe how you will evaluate or assess the evaluation.
  - Briefly describe the strengths and limitations of the proposed evaluation.

**Grading criteria:**

- Extent to which your paper addresses each assignment component
- Extent to which your engagement with course materials is demonstrated through appropriate use of them in preparing your proposal
- Extent to which you make a clear and convincing rationale for each of your choices
- Extent to which your writing is clear, succinct and well-organized, including correct grammar, spelling, and APA referencing style

**Active and Ongoing Participation in the Course:** The fourth “assignment” is your ongoing participation and contributions to the class. This assignment requires that you post, dialogue and discuss readings, podcasts and other course materials with your colleagues in the virtual
classroom within required time frames. Participation and contribution comprise 20% of your grade and will be assessed at the mid-point and at the end of the course. Because there are many students in the class, students will be divided into separate discussion groups early on in the course and will work in these groups throughout the course, though forums will be open so that you can “drop in” to other groups. Unless students specifically request otherwise (which it is fine to do!), the instructor may occasionally also participate in discussions.

Instructions

- Post at least one substantive original contribution to your group’s weekly discussion: your critical analysis and reflection on the week’s course materials (readings, lecture notes, podcasts and videos), including any questions you wish to discuss or clarify. You may want to reflect on what you find useful, intriguing or challenging in course materials.
- Substantive posts are due no later than 4:30 pm PDT/PST of the Thursday pertaining to a unit. For example, Unit 2 begins on January 9, so your substantive post must be posted no later than 4:30 pm January 12. **Exception: Substantive posts for the first unit in the course are due by Sunday, January 8.**
- Recommended length: 250 words maximum (fewer is fine)
- Post at least two brief (= 150 words maximum - fewer is fine) substantive responses to other students’ postings within your group discussion. Responses must be posted no later than 8:30 am PDT/PST of the Monday when the following unit begins. For example, Unit 2 responses must be posted no later than 8:30 am January 16. **Exception: response posts are optional for Unit 1.**

Grading criteria

- Active use of course materials in posts – relevant and contextualized use of materials is more important than the number you use. Please do not directly quote a resource unless it is essential to your argument or comment.
  - No formal referencing is required though if you are quoting or referencing specific resource, please make that clear.
- Evidence of critical thinking and analysis applied to readings, other course materials and discussions.
- Engagement with, and respect for, other students’ discussion contributions and perspectives.
  - You are expected to build on other student’s contributions by respectfully raising questions or offering comments that contribute to discussions - including engaging in the respectful interplay of ideas and offering different perspectives.
- Participation within the assigned time frames. Late posts receive 0 marks unless the requirements of the School’s lateness policy have been met.
Dates, Class Topic, Readings and Links

**Week 1:** Coming into research: Thinking through what it means to gather, care for and share knowledge in a good way

**Required readings & viewing**


**Suggested/supplementary reading & viewing**

**Week 2:** Ontologies, epistemologies and paradigms

**Required readings & viewing**


Strega, S. (2015). The view from the post-structural margins: Epistemology and methodology reconsidered. In S. Strega & L. Brown (Eds.), Research as resistance (2nd ed.) (pp. 119-152). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press. (Course text) *(pages 120-131 will be especially helpful)*

Suggested/supplementary reading & viewing


Week 3: Locating ourselves: Researcher positionality, critical reflexivity and the practice of transparency in research

Required readings & viewing


Suggested/supplementary reading & viewing


Week 4: Research perspectives

Required readings & viewing


**Suggested/supplementary reading & viewing**


**Week 5: Research ethics**

**Required readings & viewing**


**Specific to course-based stream:**

Coy, M. (2006). This morning I’m a researcher, this afternoon I’m an outreach worker: Ethical dilemmas in practitioner research. International Journal of Research Methodology 9(5), 419-431

**Specific to thesis stream:**


**Suggested/supplementary reading & viewing**

Lewis, A. G. ( ). Ethics, activism and the anti-colonial social movement research as resistance. In K. Gillan & J. Pickerill (Eds.) *Research ethics and social movements* (pp. 91-104).


**Week 6: Decolonizing and Indigenous Approaches to research**

**Required readings & viewing**


**Course-based students may also wish to read:**


**Suggested/supplementary reading & viewing**


Week 7: Reading Week!

Week 8: Storytelling & Narrative Analysis

**Required readings & viewing**


Qwul’sih’yah’maht (Thomas, R.A.) (2015). Honouring the oral traditions of the Ta’t Mustimuxw (Ancestors) through storytelling. In S. Strega & L. Brown (Eds.), Research as resistance, 2nd edition (pp. 177-198). Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press. (Course text)

**Suggested/supplementary reading & viewing**


Week 9: Case studies & thematic analysis

**Required readings & viewing**


Week 10: Arts-based research

**Required readings & viewing**


Week 11: Discourse analysis & Foucauldian methods (Thesis stream)
Evaluation methods (Course-based stream)

**Required readings & viewing**


**Specific to course-based stream:**


**Suggested/supplementary reading & viewing**


**Week 12:** Grounded theory (Thesis stream) Evaluation methods (Course-based stream)

**Required readings & viewing**

**Specific to thesis stream:**


**Specific to course-based stream:**


**Suggested/supplementary reading & viewing**


**Week 13: Evaluating qualitative research**

**Required readings & viewing**


Tracy, S. (2010). Qualitative criteria: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(10), 837-851. [http://qix.sagepub.com/content/16/10/837.full.pdf+html](http://qix.sagepub.com/content/16/10/837.full.pdf+html)


**Suggested/supplementary reading & viewing**
