

George Warren Brown School of Social Work Research Specialization

Specialization Design

The Research Specialization in the MSW curriculum prepares students for research roles and responsibilities in social work practice. These students may be committed solely to research, or may be direct practice students who expect to move into evaluation and research positions after graduation. The specialization aims to provide students with an understanding of advanced research planning, design and implementation in both established and innovative social programs and projects. The specialization offers students contemporary technical procedures for target population selection, program monitoring and impact assessment.

The Research Specialization is an elected option above and beyond foundation and concentration requirements. It consists of a structured set of electives in the curricula, which combine with research content in the concentration practicum.

Project Requirement

Students learn scientific inquiry by conducting research in human services agencies. Each student completes a research project, writes an MSW thesis or publishable article, and makes an oral presentation of their research project.

The project demonstrates the student's ability to:

1. Select an area of study and justify its importance;
2. Review theoretical and empirical work related to the area of study and state the research question;
3. Identify social science theories relevant to the proposed question;
4. Specify hypotheses that follow from the theoretical framework;
5. Establish an appropriate research design and methodology to conduct the study;
6. Analyze the data using appropriate tools and;
7. Discuss implications of the findings and make recommendations based on study conclusions.

Course Requirements

The curriculum requirements for the specialization draw on the existing strengths and resources of the school. Because our curriculum has traditionally focused on quantitative methods, students in the Research Specialization acquire an advanced set of skills in this method of analysis. However, the specialization also supports the development of research expertise in other methods of scientific inquiry (e.g., qualitative methods), and assists students who choose these approaches.

The Research Specialization requires completion of:

S80-5001 Advanced Statistics
S81-5050 MSW Research Seminar I
S81-5051 MSW Research Seminar II

and one of:

S50-5050 Evaluation of Programs and Services
S40-5842 Social Policy Analysis and Evaluation

The above requirements are to be completed as part of the concentration course work.

S80-5001: Advanced Statistics: (3 credits) course will be required for all students taking the research Specialization. This is an advanced bivariate and multivariate statistics course that teaches students advanced skill in data analysis.

S81-5050, MSW Research Seminar I and S81-5051, MSW Research Seminar II: (6 credits) at two-semester course required of all students taking the Research Specialization. This course will start every fall semester and will meet three hours a week (2 hours of class work and one hour of lab work) for two semesters. The primary purposes of the MSW Research Seminars are to: 1) facilitate student progress in developing and implementing the research, and 2) provide research content not obtained in formal courses. Students will produce a written report at the end of the year. All students will be required to make an oral presentation of their research to the seminar group.

A major research project and written report is required for successful completion of the Research Specialization. The research must represent an attempt to answer a question in a substantive area as specifically and systematically as possible. The written report can include: 1) an academic thesis, 2) an agency document or final report, or 3) a publishable research article. There is no required oral defense but an oral presentation to the seminar group (or other appropriate forum) is recommended.

Practicum

Each student's concentration practicum must include a research project (e.g., involvement in program evaluation efforts, development and implementation of quality assurance indicators, systematic assessment of a clinical issue). The Research Specialization has identified several practicum sites that have field instructors who are particularly interested in research or are conducting research themselves. The Research Specialization does not have standardized practicum-learning objectives, which apply to all students. Rather, the student, the academic advisor, and the practicum instructor negotiate content for the research project in the practicum on a case-by-case basis. This content, although individually designed, must be clearly related to the outcomes of the Research Specialization, must build on research course work, and must lead to development of a written research report.

Faculty in the Research Specialization

Full-time faculty with interest in the Research Specialization include and Dr. Shanta Pandey, (Coordinator), Dr. David Gillespie, Dr. Peter Hovmand, Dr. Nancy Morrow-Howell, Dr. Yunju Nam, Dr. Enola Proctor, Dr. Ramesh Ragavan, Dr. Gautam Yadama, and Dr. Luis Zayas.