

# SS5213: SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH METHODS

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## Effective Term

Semester B 2025/26

## Part I Course Overview

### Course Title

Social Work Research Methods

### Subject Code

SS - Social and Behavioural Sciences

### Course Number

5213

### Academic Unit

Social and Behavioural Sciences (SS)

### College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

### Course Duration

One Semester

### Credit Units

3

### Level

P5, P6 - Postgraduate Degree

### Medium of Instruction

English

### Medium of Assessment

English

### Prerequisites

Nil

### Precursors

Nil

### Equivalent Courses

Nil

### Exclusive Courses

Nil

## Part II Course Details

### Abstract

Social workers are guided by theories, research and practice wisdom in their work. It is important for students to be able to understand the importance of knowledge developed from research and to utilize this knowledge in their clinical

and administrative practice. In order to build a firm conceptual foundation for research practice and the integration of research into a wide range of social work activities, this course will expose students to social science research ethics and the fundamental elements of social science research methods. Approaches to intervention research, social research and development, clinical research with individuals and groups, single-subject design, case study, qualitative approaches, use of narratives, and process studies will be explored. Students will be required to design an intervention research project and assess its strengths and weaknesses.

This course aims to

- Develop a scientific attitude towards the empirical research process and become familiar with the basic characteristics of social research.
- Understand the nature of the components which are fundamental to the development, and completion of social science research.
- Critically examine the factors involved in the selection of research designs appropriate to the study of social services.
- Acquire knowledge and understanding of various research methods and statistical analysis applicable to social work settings.

### Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs	Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Understand the nature and methods of social research and program evaluation; comprehend the appropriate applications of each method.	x	x	
2	Understand the strengths and limitations of various research methods in scientific inquires.	x	x	
3	Demonstrate capabilities of applying research methods and statistical analysis to the social work settings in order to help build up an attitude of evidence-based practice; and can identify strengths and weaknesses of social work research in the process of professional inquires.	x	x	x
4	Develop a manner of scientific and logical inquires in social work practice for enhancement of the profession development.	x	x	x

#### A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

#### A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

#### A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

### Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

	LTAs	Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Lecture	Explain key concepts, theories, methods and skills related to social work research	1, 2	
2	Small study/ project group learning and class discussion	Students are organized into small study/ project groups to discuss and consult the relevant intellectual inputs they learnt in the lectures, and develop their own research projects by the research knowledge and skills they obtained.	1, 2, 3, 4	
3	SPSS workshop	Live demonstrations and hand-on exercises of using SPSS for data analysis are organized in workshop formats to enhance students' application of empirical data and evidence to their social work inquires.	1, 3, 4	
4	Group research proposal	Students in the small study/ project groups are required to work together to formulate a research proposal as a demonstration of their research knowledge and skills learned in the course.	1, 2, 3, 4	
5	Student consultation	Scheduled student group consultation is arranged to facilitate more teacher-student and student-student interaction and discussion, more in-depth learning and understanding of knowledge.	1, 2, 3, 4	

#### Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?	
1	AT1: Class Participation and Discussion Students' attendance, active involvement in class discussion, initiation in sharing and contributing ideas, attitudes in learning together, and willingness to improve learning will all be taken into account.	1, 2, 3, 4	10	-Use AI to clarify research concepts, skills and ideas for facilitating learning.	Yes
2	AT2: Quiz: A 1 hour and 15 minutes quiz in multiple-choice format will be carried out to test students' research methodology knowledge from the lectures, reference reading book list and essential texts.	1, 2	20	-	No
3	AT3: Research Paper Critique: Students need to review and criticize one of the three research papers provided to demonstrate their knowledge on social work research.	1, 2, 3, 4	15	-	No
4	AT4: SPSS Exercise:  Students in the class need to analyse a dataset that was collected by themselves as the practice of SPSS knowledge in order to enhance their statistical procedures skills.	1, 3, 4	15	-	No

5	AT5: Group Research Proposal: Students will team up not more than 4 classmates to write a research proposal based on social welfare issues as study topic to demonstrate the research knowledge, methodology and skills learned.	1, 2, 3, 4	40	-	No
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**Continuous Assessment (%)**

100

**Assessment Rubrics (AR)****Assessment Task**

1) Class Participation and Discussion (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

**Criterion**

1.1 Capacity for demonstrating the research knowledge and methods required for scientific inquiries in the social work settings

**Excellent**

(A+, A, A-) Strong evidence of competencies in understanding and presentation of social work research philosophy, knowledge, and skills, and data analysis.

**Good**

(B+, B, B-) Good evidence of competencies in understanding and presentation of social work research philosophy, knowledge, and skills, and data analysis.

**Fair**

(C+, C, C-) Fair evidence of competencies in understanding and presentation of social work research philosophy, knowledge, and skills, and data analysis.

**Marginal**

(D) Basic evidence of competencies in understanding and presentation of social work research philosophy, knowledge, and skills, and data analysis.

**Failure**

(F) Insufficient evidence of competencies in understanding and presentation of social work research philosophy, knowledge, and skills, and data analysis.

**Assessment Task**

2) Quiz (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

**Criterion**

2.1 Capacity for demonstrating the research knowledge and methods required for scientific inquiries in the social work settings

## 2.2 Ability to analyse and use the research knowledge and methods learnt

### **Excellent**

(A+, A, A-) Excellent evidence of understanding in social work research knowledge and methods.

### **Good**

(B+, B, B-) Good evidence of understanding social work research knowledge and methods.

### **Fair**

(C+, C, C-) Fair evidence of understanding social work research knowledge and methods.

### **Marginal**

(D) Basic evidence of understanding social work research knowledge and methods.

### **Failure**

(F) Insufficient evidence of understanding social work research knowledge and methods.

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## **Assessment Task**

3) Research Paper Critique (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

### **Criterion**

3.1 Ability to understand and grasp the core ideas of research purpose, theoretical framework, methodology of the published research paper.

3.2 Capacity for demonstrating the application of research knowledge and methods on evaluating the published research paper to assess its merits and shortcomings as well as provide improvements.

3.3 Demonstration of the capability to give research justifications on commenting the research paper.

### **Excellent**

(A+, A, A-) Excellent evidence of applying social work knowledge and methods required for scientific inquires in the social work settings, including its strengths and constraints, in evaluating research publications.

### **Good**

(B+, B, B-) Good evidence of applying social work knowledge and methods required for scientific inquires in the social work settings, including its strengths and constraints, in evaluating research publications.

### **Fair**

(C+, C, C-) Fair evidence of applying social work knowledge and methods required for scientific inquires in the social work settings, including its strengths and constraints, in evaluating research publications.

### **Marginal**

(D) Basic evidence of applying social work knowledge and methods required for scientific inquires in the social work settings, including its strengths and constraints, in evaluating research publications.

### **Failure**

(F) Insufficient evidence of applying social work knowledge and methods required for scientific inquires in the social work settings, including its strengths and constraints, in evaluating research publications.

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## **Assessment Task**

4) SPSS Exercise (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

### **Criterion**

4.1 Capacity for presenting knowledge and skills of statistical procedures for social work research purpose.

4.2 Ability to comprehend suitable statistical procedures to be used in an appropriate social work context.

**Excellent**

(A+, A, A-) Excellent evidence of using and applying statistical procedures for social work research purpose.

**Good**

(B+, B, B-) Good evidence of using and applying statistical procedures for social work research purpose.

**Fair**

(C+, C, C-) Moderate evidence of using and applying statistical procedures for social work research purpose.

**Marginal**

(D) Basic evidence of using and applying statistical procedures for social work research purpose.

**Failure**

(F) Insufficient evidence of using and applying statistical procedures for social work research purpose.

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**Assessment Task**

5) Group Research Proposal (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

**Criterion**

5.1 Capacity for demonstrating the research knowledge and methods required for scientific inquires in the social work settings

5.2 Ability to use and deliver the research knowledge and methods learnt

5.3 Demonstration of the application of acquired research knowledge and methods in the social work settings

5.4 Understating the strengths and constraints of research methods in the social work settings

**Excellent**

(A+, A, A-) Excellent evidence of presenting and using social work research knowledge and methods to construct a practical research work.

**Good**

(B+, B, B-) Good evidence of presenting and using social work research knowledge and methods to construct a practical research work.

**Fair**

(C+, C, C-) Moderate evidence of presenting and using social work research knowledge and methods to construct a practical research work.

**Marginal**

(D) Basic evidence of presenting and using social work research knowledge and methods to construct a practical research work.

**Failure**

(F) Insufficient evidence of presenting and using social work research knowledge and methods to construct a practical research work.

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### Assessment Task

1) Class Participation and Discussion (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

#### Criterion

1.1 Capacity for demonstrating the research knowledge and methods required for scientific inquiries in the social work settings

#### Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Strong evidence of competencies in understanding and presentation of social work research philosophy, knowledge, and skills, and data analysis.

#### Good

(B+, B) Good evidence of competencies in understanding and presentation of social work research philosophy, knowledge, and skills, and data analysis.

#### Marginal

(B-, C+, C) Moderate evidence of competencies in understanding and presentation of social work research philosophy, knowledge, and skills, and data analysis.

#### Failure

(F) Insufficient evidence of competencies in understanding and presentation of social work research philosophy, knowledge, and skills, and data analysis.

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### Assessment Task

2) Quiz (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

#### Criterion

2.1 Capacity for demonstrating the research knowledge and methods required for scientific inquiries in the social work settings

2.2 Ability to analyse and use the research knowledge and methods learnt

#### Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Excellent evidence of understanding in social work research knowledge and methods.

#### Good

(B+, B) Good evidence of understanding social work research knowledge and methods.

#### Marginal

(B-, C+, C) Fair evidence of understanding social work research knowledge and methods.

#### Failure

(F) Insufficient evidence of understanding social work research knowledge and methods.

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### Assessment Task

3) Research Paper Critique (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

#### Criterion

3.1 Ability to understand and grasp the core ideas of research purpose, theoretical framework, methodology of the published research paper.

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(B+, B) Good evidence of applying social work knowledge and methods required for scientific inquires in the social work settings, including its strengths and constraints, in evaluating research publications.

**Marginal**

(B-, C+, C) Moderate evidence of applying social work knowledge and methods required for scientific inquires in the social work settings, including its strengths and constraints, in evaluating research publications.

**Failure**

(F) Insufficient evidence of applying social work knowledge and methods required for scientific inquires in the social work settings, including its strengths and constraints, in evaluating research publications.

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**Assessment Task**

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**Marginal**

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**Failure**

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**Assessment Task**

5) Group Research Proposal (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

**Criterion**

5.1 Capacity for demonstrating the research knowledge and methods required for scientific inquires in the social work settings

5.2 Ability to use and deliver the research knowledge and methods learnt

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(B+, B) Good evidence of presenting and using social work research knowledge and methods to construct a practical research work.

**Marginal**

(B-, C+, C) Moderate evidence of presenting and using social work research knowledge and methods to construct a practical research work.

**Failure**

(F) Insufficient evidence of presenting and using social work research knowledge and methods to construct a practical research work.

## Part III Other Information

**Keyword Syllabus**1.1 Social Science Research Methods

Scientific inquiry. Scientific logic. Epistemology. Problem formulation. Reliability and validity of measurement. Single-subject design. Survey research. Qualitative research methods. Quantitative research methods. Mixed methods. Causal inference. Internal validity. Threats to internal validity. Alternative and rival hypotheses. External validity. Probability and non-probability sampling methods. Statistics. Descriptive and inferential data analysis. Program evaluation.

1.2 Research Ethics

Human subjects research. Informed consent. Voluntary participation. Protection of human subjects. Anonymous and confidential studies. Incentive vs. inducement. Ethics review boards. Expedited and full ethics reviews. Promoting the development of research knowledge.

**Reading List****Compulsory Readings**

	Title
1	Engel, R.J. & Schutt, R.K. (2010). <i>The Fundamentals of Social Work Research</i> , Thousand Oaks, CA:SAGE.
2	Engel, R. J., & Schutt, R. K. (2013). <i>The practice of research in social work</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
3	Shaw I. et al. (Eds) (2010). <i>The SAGE handbook of social work research</i> . Los Angeles: SAGE.
4	Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (2008) <i>Research methods for social work</i> (6th ed.) Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

**Additional Readings**

	Title
1	Blanksby P. E., & Barber, J. G. (2006). <i>SPSS for social workers : An introductory workbook</i> . Boston: Pearson.
2	Creswell, J. W. (2003). <i>Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches</i> (2 ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
3	Jones, J. H. (1981). <i>Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment</i> . London, England: Free Press.
4	Minkler M. & Wallerstein, N. (2003). <i>Community based participatory research for health</i> . San Francisco, CA.: Jossey-Bass.
5	Monette, D.R., Sullivan, T.J., & DeJong, C.R. (2005). <i>Applied social research: A Tool for the Human Services</i> . (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole-Thompson Learning.
6	Padgett, D. K. (2004). <i>The qualitative research experience</i> . Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

7	Strauss, A. L. & Corbin, J. (1998). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
8	Tashakkori & Teddlie (2002). Mixed methods for the social and behavioral sciences. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.