

The University of Melbourne School of Social Work

Research Process & Thesis Development

Research Process and Thesis Development is a subject which introduces postgraduate students to the process of designing research, through developing an understanding of the ethical, epistemological and methodological considerations. It also covers the development of an ethics proposal, a literature review and the writing of a thesis. While there is no assessment for students taking this subject, preparation of a thesis proposal by the end of the subject is considered the primary aim. This subject is designed for students undertaking the MSW by research, and PhD students.

In 2007, this subject will be offered through a number of different modules, primarily as three-hour workshops on Wednesdays from 4.30 – 7.30 pm. Being workshops, they will include time for students to present their work-in-progress.

A reading pack is available for purchase and those items indicated with * are in the reading pack.

Semester 1

28/2/07 **Doing research in Social Work**

This workshop examines:

- research purposes, topics, values, approaches
- the process of choosing and using supervision
- the research experience
- arriving at a research question

Reading:

*Fook, J. 2003 'Social work research in Australia', *Social Work Education*, Vol.22, No.1, pp.45-57

*Potter, S. ed 2002 *Doing postgraduate research*, Sage, London

*Lazarow, M. 2002 *Recent Guides to Writing Theses*

28/3/07 Library resources and searching

This workshop examines the library resources (such as databases) and how to access them effectively. This session will be held in the Percy Baxter Learning Centre, 1st Floor of the Baillieu Library.

02/05/07 Research epistemologies

This workshop examines:

- traditional, critical, interpretivist-postmodern approaches
- what is 'good research' in each of these paradigms

Reading:

*Neumann, W. 1999, 'The meanings of methodology' in Neumann, W. *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*, Needham Heights: Pearson Education Co.

*Morris, T. 2006 Social work research methods, Sage, Thousand Oaks, California USA: Introduction

*Rubin, A. and Babbie, E. 1997 3rd ed. *Research methods for social work*, Brooks/Cole Publishing Co, Pacific Grove, California, USA: Appendix C: "A consumer's guide to social work research".

23/5/07 Ethical issues in research

This workshop examines the many ethical issues arising in research. Special attention will be given to:

- the consideration of vulnerable groups
- the ethics application process
- ownership of research

Reading:

*McDermott, F. 2000, 'Researching vulnerable groups: Ethics and epistemology', (unpublished) Melbourne.

Copy of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans available at: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/_files/e35.pdf

Semester 2

25/7/07 Doing a literature review

This workshop examines the processes involved in constructing a critical literature review.

Reading:

*McLean, P. (undated) 'Towards a critical review of the literature', Learning Skills Unit, the University of Melbourne

15/8/07 Research designs using qualitative methods

This workshop examines:

- grounded theory
- ethnographic studies
- data interpretation
- using computers in qualitative research

Reading:

*Morse, J.M. and Field, P.A. 1995 2nd ed. *Qualitative research methods for health professionals*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, California: chapter 2 'An overview of qualitative methods'

*Fossey, E., Harvey, F., McDermott, F. and Davidson, L. 2002, 'Understanding and evaluating qualitative research', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 36, pp. 717-732.

*Flyvberg, B. 2002 *Making social science matter*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK. Chapter 6 'The power of example'

*Strauss, A and Corbin, J. 1990 *Basics of qualitative research*, Sage, Newbury Park, California. Chapter 11 'Theoretical sampling'

* Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., O'Connor, W. 'Analysis, principles and processes' in Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (eds) 2005 Qualitative research practice, Sage Publications, London

*Kurznel, A.J. 'Sampling in qualitative inquiry' in Crabtree, B.F. and Miller, W.L. 1992 *Doing qualitative research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, California

29/8/07

Research designs using quantitative methods

This workshop examines:

- controlled studies; comparative designs
- surveys and SPSSx
- data interpretation

Reading:

Rubin, A. and Babbie, E. 1997, *Research methods for social work*, Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co.

*Williams, M., Tutty, L.M., Grinnell, R.M. 1995 *Research in social work*, Peacock, Itasca, Illinois: chapter 12 'Sampling'

26/9/07

Research designs using combined quantitative & qualitative methods

This workshop examines:

- multi-method designs
- participatory action research

Reading:

*Padgett, D. 1998 'Multimethod research: The synergy of combining qualitative and quantitative methods', *Qualitative methods in social work research*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE, pp. 126-140.

17/10/07

Asking questions

This workshop examines:

- in-depth interviewing
- focus groups
- surveys
- standardized scales/measures

Reading:

*Fontana, A. and Frey, J. 1994, 'Interviewing: The art of science', *Handbook of qualitative research*, Newbury Park: SAGE, pp. 361-376.

*Alston, M and Bowles, W. 1998 *Research for social workers*, Allen & Unwin, St.Leonards, NSW: chapter 6 'Surveys and interviews'

31/10/07 Research writing

This workshop examines:

- keeping to time lines
- the style and tone of writing in a thesis
- organizing the thesis

Reading:

*Learning Skills Unit 2003, *Research Writing Skills: the research report*, LSU: University of Melbourne.

Postgraduate Research Seminars

As the ten RPTD workshops amount to thirty hours of the subject, in order for MSW research students and PhD students to fulfill the forty eight hour subject requirement, they are expected to attend a further eighteen hours at the postgraduate research seminars. These research seminars are held on Friday afternoons (1-5 pm) and enable the presentation of work-in-progress by all Masters and Doctoral students of the School. The dates for these seminars are:

2nd March
20th April
18th May
10th August
7th September
5th October
9th November
14th December

Ethics approval

All research that involves the participation of human subjects or acquisition of data of a sensitive nature requires approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Melbourne. In addition, ethics approval may be required from the agency or service where the research is to be conducted.

Information about the process for applying for ethics approval is available at:

<http://www.research.unimelb.edu.au/humanethics/news/IndexThemisHumanEthics.html>

All ethics proposals are now submitted on-line via Themis. Researchers submit, register and track their ethics applications from the initial stages to completion.

Guidelines for the preparation & submission of a thesis proposal

If your research does not require an application to the Human Research Ethics Committee, you are required to complete a thesis proposal. This proposal will be submitted to three members of staff of the School of Social Work for critique. Your thesis proposal should include the following information:

1. Researcher's name

2. Preliminary title of proposed research

3. The research problem

- a. State briefly what stimulated the study and why it is important. State in what way it will advance knowledge in the field of Social Work.
- b. What is/are the major questions to which answers are sought, what hypotheses are to be tested or what situation is to be analysed?
- c. What subsidiary questions, if any, are involved in the larger problem?

4. Related literature and theoretical considerations

An initial review of the literature for salient studies, for prior work on the subject and for explication of the major theoretical concerns should be presented. Definitions of key terms within the context of your enquiry may be included here.

5. Logic of approach

State the basic plan of approach to the problem and design of the study, and demonstrate how your approach will provide the information needed. This might include a discussion of your epistemological and methodological position.

6. Method

- a. If the study is essentially experimental, what procedures will be used to extract and organize the data? What are the tentative notions about sampling, controls, reliability tests or other aspects of method pertinent to the study?
- b. If the study is essentially qualitative or interpretive, include a discussion of the methods to be used – for example, thematic analysis, computer-assisted analysis etc. How will trustworthiness of your interpretations be achieved? What role, if any, will the researched play in the data analysis?

7. Ethical issues

Indicate the nature of any ethical problems or dilemmas that you anticipate. What plans do you have for exploring and resolving these? Please note that it is required procedure that all research receives approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Melbourne. The Ethics Proposal application should therefore be completed and submitted simultaneously with the Thesis Proposal.

8. Outline of the data to be collected

Present an outline of the data to be sought, indicating the kinds of methods to be utilized – for example, questionnaire, direct observation, participant observation, interviews etc.

9. Availability of resources

Indicate sources of data, agency co-operation, and the possibility of client participation.

10. Relation to a larger project (if appropriate)

If the project is part of a larger piece of research, or done under the employment of others, specify the extent to which the design methodology, collection of data and interpretation of findings will be your own responsibility. Indicate also your obligations to the larger project to make data available, and restrictions, if any, on publication. What agreements have been made about manuscript or material review?

11. Summary of pilot efforts

Indicate any plans for a pilot study

12. Tentative table of contents for the completed thesis

13. Tentative timetable for your work

Presentation of the thesis proposal

The proposal should be typed on A4 paper, 1.5 spacing and not more than 2,000 words. A brief reference list is required.

Useful references

As you undertake your research, you may find the following reference list useful:

- Alston, M. & W. Bowles (1998). *Research for social workers : an introduction to methods*. St. Leonards, Allen & Unwin.
- Australian Government Publishing Service (1990). *Style manual for authors, editors and printers*. Canberra, Australian Govt. Pub. Service.
- Becker, H. (1986). *Writing for social scientists : how to start and finish your thesis, book, or article*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Bell, C. & H. Roberts, Eds. (1984.). *Social researching : politics, problems, practice*. London, Routledge & K. Paul.
- Berg, B. (2001). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Boston, Allyn and Bacon.
- Bouma, G. D. (2000). *The research process*. South Melbourne, Oxford University Press.
- Burrell, G. (1985). *Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis : elements of the sociology of corporate life*. Aldershot, Hants, Gower.
- Colquhoun, D. & A. Kellehear, Eds. (1993). *Health research in practice : political, ethical, and methodological issues*. London, Chapman & Hall.
- Crabtree, B. & W. Miller, Eds. (1999). *Doing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research : meaning and perspective in the research process*. St Leonards, Allen & Unwin.
- Darlington, Y. & D. Scott (2002). *Qualitative research in practice : stories from the field*. St Leonards, Allen & Unwin.
- De Koning, K. & L. Martin (1996). *Participatory research in health*. London, Zed Books.
- De Vaus, D. (1995). *Surveys in social research*. St Leonards, Allen & Unwin.
- Denzin, N. & Y. Lincoln, Eds. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, California, Sage.
- Dickens, D. & A. Fontana, Eds. (1994). *Postmodernism and social enquiry*. London, UCL Press.
- Eichler, M. (1988). *Non-sexist research methods: A practical guide*. Boston, Allen & Unwin.
- Ely, M. (1991). *Doing qualitative research: Circles within circles*. London, The Falmer Press.
- Evans, D. & P. Gruba (2002). *How to write a better thesis*. Melbourne, Melbourne University Press.
- Fielding, N. & R. Lee, Eds. (1993). *Using computers in qualitative research*. London, Newbury Park, SAGE.
- Fonow, M. & J. Cook, Eds. (1991). *Beyond methodology: Feminist scholarship as lived research*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Fortune, A. & W. Reid (1999). *Research in social work*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Fossey, E., C. Harvey, F. McDermott & L. Davidson (2002). "Understanding and evaluating qualitative research." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 36: 717-732.

- Gibbs, G. (2002). *Qualitative data analysis : explorations with NVivo*. Buckingham, Open University.
- Gilgun, J., K. Daly & G. Handel, Eds. (1992). *Qualitative methods in family research*. Newbury Park, California, Sage Publications.
- Glaser, B. G. & A. Strauss (1973). *The discovery of grounded theory : strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, Aldine.
- Glassner, B. & R. Hertz, Eds. (1999). *Qualitative sociology as everyday life*. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.
- Guba, E., Ed. (1990). *The Paradigm dialog*. Newbury Park, California, Sage Publications.
- Hawe, P., D. Degeling & J. Hall (1990). *Evaluating health promotion : a health worker's guide*. Sydney, MacLennan & Petty.
- Hertz, R., Ed. (1997). *Reflexivity and voice*. Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- Kellehear, A. (1993). *The unobtrusive researcher : a guide to methods*. St. Leonards, Allen & Unwin.
- Marshall, C. & G. Rossman (1999). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.
- Miles, M. B. & A. Huberman (1994). *Qualitative data analysis : an expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.
- Minichiello, V., R. Aroni, E. Timewell & L. Alexander, Eds. (1995). *In-depth interviewing : principles, techniques, analysis*. Melbourne, Longman.
- Morris, T 2006 Social work research methods, Sage, Thousand Oaks, California USA
- Morse, J. M. & P. Field (1995). *Qualitative research methods for health professionals*. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.
- Neumann, W. (1999). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Needham Heights, Pearson Education Co.
- Nielsen, J., Ed. (1990). *Feminist research methods : exemplary readings in the social sciences*. Boulder, Westview Press.
- Patton, M. (1986). *How to use qualitative methods in evaluation*. Newbury Park, Sage.
- Punch, K. (1998). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. London, Sage.
- Reason, P. & H. Bradbury, Eds. (2000). *Handbook of action research*. London, Sage.
- Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminist methods in social research*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- Reissman, C., Ed. (1994). *Qualitative studies in social work research*. Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (eds) 2005 Qualitative research practice, Sage Publications, London
- Rubin, A. & E. Babbie (1997). *Research methods for social work*. Pacific Grove, Brooks/Cole Publishing Co.
- Sherman, E. & W. Reid, Eds. (1994). *Qualitative research in social work*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Silverman, D. (2001). *Interpreting qualitative data*. London, Sage.
- Stanley, L., Ed. (1990). *Feminist praxis: Research, theory and epistemology in feminist sociology*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Steier, F., Ed. (1991). *Research and reflexivity*. London, Sage.

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- Strauss, A. & J. Corbin (1998). *Basics of qualitative research : techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.
- Stuart, C.A. 1998 'Care and concern: an ethical journey in participatory action research', Canadian Journal of Counseling, Vol. 32:4, pp.298-314
- Tutty, L., M. Rothery & R. Grinnell, Eds. (1996). *Qualitative research for social workers: Phases, steps, & tasks*. Boston, Allyn and Bacon.
- Wadsworth, Y. (1999). *Everyday evaluation on the run*. Melbourne, Action Research Issues Association.
- Weinberg, D., Ed. (2001). *Qualitative research methods*. Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishers.

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