

Title IV-E Research Pilot Course
SWRK 292, Fall 2012
Instructor: Dr. Sal Montana

Course Description

This course is the first of two semesters students are required to complete in fulfilling their Social Work 298/299 Project/Thesis course requirements for the MSW degree. This course will be oriented around the secondary analysis of publicly available data sources and focuses on the formulation of research problems, research design, data collection, and data analysis. The practical components of data analysis will be emphasized with students given opportunities to work hands-on with data and to explore how research informs Social Work practice and policy. Although students will have the opportunity to work with data from a number of different sources, child welfare data from the Child Welfare Performance Indicators Project, a collaboration between the California Department of Social Services and the UC Berkeley's Center for Social Services Research (CSSR), will be used to support and illustrate many of the topics covered. A research report based on numerical evidence compiled, evaluated, and interpreted by the student will serve as the final thesis/project required for the MSW degree.

Course Goals

The goal of this course is to develop a year-long MSW research project designed to prepare graduating cohorts of MSW students to be:

- experienced users of the publicly available administrative child welfare data
- well-versed in their county CWS performance goals
- consumers of research
- able to use data to track outcomes in order to improve practice
- well-prepared for leadership roles in county child welfare agencies

Course Topic Areas

- Understanding the policy context of administrative child welfare data.
- California's AB636 accountability system and the federal CFSR process.
- Sources of secondary data (state, national & global) relevant to children and families.
- The utilization of data to inform and improve child welfare services.
- Types of data, strengths and weakness of administrative data & opportunities for mining data.
- Developing research projects relevant to understanding agency performance.
- Introduction to the organization of the CSSR website & empirical questions that are answerable using CSSR data.
- Descriptive, bivariate and multivariate analysis.
- Presentation of quantitative data.

Pedagogical Approach

- A collaborative research venture between county child welfare agencies, students and the university for the purpose of better informing agency practice.
- Emphasized by asking students to align their research project with agency performance goals or mandates
- Help students connect classroom instruction to their experiences in the field by working with administrative data relevant to their agency and clients.

