

WURZWEILER SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY  
DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN SOCIAL WELFARE

SWK 8920: DISSERTATION PROPOSAL WRITING SEMINAR

Fall 2010

Dr. Karen Bonuck

I. COURSE OVERVIEW

This course focuses on the nuts and bolts of dissertation proposal development. We begin by conceptualizing an empirically testable research question relevant to Social Work, and continue through to drafting mock results tables. At the semester's end, each student is expected to have completed a draft proposal, as outlined in the Wurzweiler School of Social Work. (2006), Guide for the Writing of the Dissertation Proposal. This timeline anticipates that each student begins the seminar with a well defined dissertation topic and literature review. See Section F. Class Topics and Schedule.

The attainment of a doctoral degree is a scholarly pursuit. To develop the scientific communication skills students will utilize at the proposal (and dissertation) defense and in future scholarly forums, students may be asked to share draft chapters for discussion. Supportive and facilitative feedback from the instructor and student colleagues is intended to provide perspective and concrete help. See Section E. Giving Facilitative Feedback.

Note on Scheduling: The course is structured as follows: 8 group seminar meetings, 4 mandatory one-on-one meetings (when draft chapters will be discussed), and 2 weeks when no class will be held but optional on-on-one meetings may be scheduled. This hybrid format was developed based upon feedback from prior years as a way to maintain the utility of the seminar for group support and mutual assistance, while also allowing for individual attention. The greyed rows in Section F. Class Topics and Schedule indicate the mandatory one-on-one meetings.

## II. EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

### Knowledge objectives:

At the conclusion of this seminar, students will:

1. Understand the components of the proposal process.
2. Have the knowledge about resources needed for a dissertation proposal and study.
3. Be familiar with and able to apply ethical principles relevant to research.
4. Be familiar with the purpose of, and procedures required by, the Yeshiva University Committee on Clinical Investigations.
5. Have mastered the appropriate application of the APA reference style.
6. Be knowledgeable about expectations for a dissertation proposal defense.

### Skill objectives:

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Clearly articulate the research question of their proposed dissertation, its importance to social work, and the knowledge gap that it fills.
2. Distinguish between theory, hypotheses, variables, and research questions.
3. Conduct a targeted literature review of electronic databases for scholarly journals, government documents and statistics, and dissertation abstracts.
4. Critically evaluate and synthesize the relevant literature.
5. Understand how to apply theory, by translating its propositions into testable hypotheses.
6. Evaluate the reliability and validity of measures.
7. Evaluate and compare the strengths and limitations of their research designs
8. Complete an acceptable dissertation proposal, using the *Publication Manual for the American Psychological Association* (2001) for style

### III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

#### A. Texts and Readings:

##### Required:

American Psychological Association. (2001). Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author. <http://www.amazon.com> (\$11.95 new)

Patten, M. (2005). Proposing empirical research, 3rd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Pycszak. <http://www.textbooks.com/BooksDescription> (\$18.48, used)

Wurzweiler School of Social Work. (2006). Guide for the writing of the dissertation proposal. (Handout)

NASW Code of Ethics. (2006). Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers. (Handout)

##### Hand-Outs

Bonuck, K. (2007, funded in 2008) United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Grant # NRI/CSREES 2007-04556, *A WIC-Based Randomized Controlled Trial to Reduce the Risk of Early Childhood Overweight Through Changing Bottle-Feeding Behavior*. (Project informed consent forms will also be handed out).

Bonuck, K. (2007, funded in 2008). National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI). Grant # 1R21HL091241-01A, *Sleep Disordered Breathing and Growth in Children: A Longitudinal Cohort Study*.

Bonuck K. (2008). NIH grant application, *Development of a Telephonic Oral Health Promotion Intervention in Pregnant Women*.

##### Recommended:

Cone, J.D. & Foster, S.L. (2006). Dissertations and theses from start to finish, 2nd. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

Galvan, J. (2006). Writing literature reviews, 3rd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Pycszak.

#### B. Assignments

##### **Assignment 1: Analysis of a Dissertation**

**Due Date: Class 2**

As an exercise in “look where you want to land,” the instructor will email the class a copy of a recently defended dissertation. Note, this dissertation contained all the necessary elements,

despite being only 84 pages, excluding references and appendices. Skim the dissertation and fill out the following grid. Use 2-3 sentences per item to comment on how the dissertation addresses each item. Be prepared to present your analysis in class.

1. *Problem Definition*- Clarity and importance of study to enhancing knowledge of profession?
2. “*So What?*”- How is research question justified re: contributions to SW knowledge building?
3. *Boundaries of Study* - What is/isn’t covered? How well defined and appropriate are boundaries?
4. *Literature Review Organization*- How is it organized and how effective is this schema?
5. *Literature Review Focus*- succinctness and relatedness to study problem?
6. *Literature Review Range & Recency*- includes “classic’ and recent books, journals, government documents?
7. *Theory Choice and Explication*- appropriateness of theory and application to study problem?
8. *Research Question* - How is the research question operationalized?
9. *Hypotheses, & Variables*- How well is the rationale for these directly derived from the literature review?
10. *Methodology*- Identify the data source, and primary analytic methods

#### **Assignments #2- #7: Draft Sections**

**Due Dates: Varied, see  
“F. Class Topics and Schedule**

Follow the "Guide" prepare draft sections of your proposal. The literature and theoretical sections should include a range of historical and up-to-date sources, e.g., dissertations, books, peer-review scholarly journals, voluntary and government agency documents. Eschew lay media/internet reports. The literature review should present the scope of relevant work on this topic, but should not be exhaustive for the proposal. You will have ample opportunity to develop this section further in your dissertation. The theory section should lead the reader directly to an understanding of your research question and the place of your topic in social work knowledge development. Draft chapters are intended as such; the purpose is to get you started and to provide opportunity for feedback that you are headed in the right direction. It is essential to keep up with the steady flow of work.

Note: Students should maintain close contact with their faculty advisor , i.e., should submit copies of their assignments to the advisor. The seminar is intended to build upon and facilitate group process and accountability structures between the course and individual consultation

available in the faculty advising process.

At the semester's end, each student should have a draft proposal prepared according to guidelines. It should incorporate all suggestions made on individual chapters, an abstract, copies of questionnaires or survey instruments, informed consent letters as applicable, and completed Clinical Investigation forms. References should be extensively used and APA format is required.

**C. Class Participation and Progress/Plan Updates:**

This course will be taught in seminar style. Students are expected to attend the 8 seminar sessions and 4 mandatory one-on-one meetings. More than two absences from either will result in a grade of F.

**D. Grading Policy:**

This is a pass/fail course. Students will be evaluated on the basis of:

Assignment #1 - Analysis of Dissertation	5%
Assignment #2-#7 - Draft Proposal	75%
Class Participation and Presentation	20%

**E. Giving Facilitative Feedback**

<b>Facilitative Feedback:</b>	Help each other without making judgments about content, or editing.	
<b>Type of Language:</b>	Facilitative Language	Non-facilitative Language
<b>Definition:</b>	Describes your own reactions as you read the manuscript; Asks questions; Requests additional information	Judges, argues, persuades; Concludes; Commands, tells writer what to do

**Examples:**

“I got lost here.” “I’m confused.”	“Not clear.”
“Did you mean . . .?” “This sentence tells me . . . is that what you meant?”	“Confusing.”
“How does this sentence relate to your topic sentences?”	“Omit.”
“How does this paragraph relate to your research questions?”	“Off topic.”
“Is this a different topic?”	“Irrelevant.”
“Does this conflict with what you were saying on p. X, . . .?”	“Contradictory.”
“Is there another side of the argument. . .? Are there other possible explanation . . .?”	“Illogical.”
“Are there other studies that show . . .?” “Is this all that we know about . . .?”	“Biased.”
“Was this covered on p. X”	“I disagree.”
“Does this relate to what you were saying on p. X.”	“Develop.”
	“Seems a bit thin.”
	“Redundant.”
	“Omit.”
	“Reorganize.” “Move to p. X.”

1. Give positive and negative feedback, not just positive and not just negative.
2. Don’t be afraid to be critical of others’ writing. Be open to critical feedback.
3. Give feedback about the writing, not the person. E.g., I couldn’t follow . . . you’re not clear.

## F. Class Topics and Schedule

Class #	Topics (Assignments returned are <i>bolded</i> )	Due (page limit guide)	Reading/Assignments (due for next class; <i>italics indicate recommended reading</i> )
#1 9/15/10	<u>Dissertation Process &amp; Research Question</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time Management</li> <li>• Working with your chair and committee</li> <li>• The research question “So what?”</li> <li>• Sticking points</li> <li>• Dissertation will be emailed to class</li> </ul>		<b>Read:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wurzweiler School of Social Work. (2006). Guide for the writing of the dissertation proposal. New York: Author. Entirety.</li> <li>• Patten, M. (2005). <i>Proposing empirical research, 2nd ed.</i> Pyczak Publishing: Los Angeles, CA. Part A: Getting Started, 1-15.</li> </ul> <b>Do:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Assignment #1, Analysis of Dissertation</b></li> <li>• <b>Start Writing Study Problem Chapter</b></li> </ul>
#2 9/20/10	<u>Lit Review (Review) &amp; Research Q Update</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of dissertation discussed</li> <li>• Study problem &amp; Social Work</li> <li>• Approaches to Lit Review</li> </ul>	<b>Assignment #1 Analysis of Dissertation</b>	<b>Do:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Complete Study Problem chapter</b></li> <li>• <b>Continue literature review</b></li> </ul>
#3 9/21-10/5	<u>Individual Conferences-Literature Review &amp; Study Problem</u>	<b>Assignments #2 &amp; #3 are due 3 days prior to meeting: #2 Study Problem, (3-4 pp) #3 Lit Review (15-25pp)</b>	<b>Individual phone/in-person meetings to review Study Problem &amp; Lit Review chapters.</b>

- #4                    **Theoretical Framework**
- 10/6/10
- Purpose of theory; What is a theory?
  - Selecting a framework
  - Deducing your research from the theoretical orientation.
  - **Email:** Bonuck, K. (2008) NIH grant application, Development of a Telephonic Oral Health Promotion Intervention in Pregnant Women.

- Do:**
- Revise Study Problem & Lit Review
  - Continue writing Theoretical Framework

- #5                    **Research Question and Hypotheses**
- 10/13/10
- Finalizing the research question
  - Formulating testable hypotheses
  - Linking research questions and hypotheses to literature review and theory

- Do:**
- Complete Theoretical Framework chapter
  - Complete revisions to Study Problem & Lit Review

#6                    **Individual Conferences- Theoretical Chapter & Design Plans**

10/14-10/26

**Assignment #4 is due 3 days prior to meeting:  
#4 Theoretical Framework Chapter (10-15 pp)**

**Individual phone/in-person meetings to:**

- a) review Theoretical Framework chapter
- b) discuss & plan for design

*Optional-* review Study Problem & Lit Review

- #7                    **Research Design**
- 10/27/10
- Sample selection
  - Sample size
  - Data collection plans
  - Ethical Considerations

- Do:**
- NOTE: 2 week hiatus until Individual meeting. During this time:**
- a- Finalize feasibility of proposed design. Secure any needed linkages, consents, or access to data needed.
  - b- Begin Research Methodology chapter

- Read:**
- Patten, Part C, *Selecting an approach*, pp. 27-

#8 Continue working on Research Methodology chapter  
 11/3/2010 Continue working on prior suggested revisions

- 42.
- Patten, Part F, *Proposing a sample*, pp. 63-74; Part G, *Proposing instrumentation*, pp. 75-84; - Part H, *Proposing procedures*, pp. 87-92; Part I, *Proposing methods of analysis*, pp. 95-106.
  - Cone & Foster, Chapter 9, *Selecting the appropriate statistics*, pp.187-225

#9 11/4- 11/16	Individual Conferences- Research Methodology chapter	Assignment #5 is due 3 days prior to meeting: #5 Research Methodology chapter (5-10 pp)	Individual phone/in-person meetings to: a) Review Research methodology chapter b) discuss Research Q & Hypotheses <i>Optional-</i> review of Theoretical Framework chapter
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#10 Research Measure & Procedures  
 11/17/10  
 ● Progress Update & Plans (10-15 mins. each)  
 ● Measurement  
 ● Operational definitions  
 ● Instrumentation  
 ● Email: Bonuck, K. NHLBI, Grant # 1R21HL091241-01A, Sleep Disordered Breathing and Growth in Children: A Longitudinal Cohort Study

- Do:
- Complete Research Question + Hypotheses chapter
- Read:
- Cone & Foster, Chapter 11, *Collecting, managing and analyzing the data*, pp/ 201-215; Chapter 13, *Discussing the results*, pp. 237-254.

#11  
 11/24/10 Complete any needed revisions to Research Methodology chapter  
**\*\*In practice, the Research Question you pose is affected by available methods\*\***  
 Continue working on all prior suggested revisions  
 Individual meetings, as needed

#12 12/01/10	<b>Homestretch &amp; Study Overview</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The tough first sentence: “This study is about.....”</li> <li>• Avoiding redundancy</li> <li>• Anticipated contributions to Social Work Informed consent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human subjects review</li> <li>• <b>Hand-out:</b> Bonuck,K, Informed consent forms from USDA project</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Assignment #6 is due 3 days prior to meeting: #6 Research Question &amp; Hypotheses chapter (2-6 pages)</b>	<b>Do:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft Study Overview chapter</li> </ul>
#13 12/2-12/14	<b>Individual Conferences: Research Question &amp; Hypotheses, and; Study overview</b>		<b>Individual phone/in-person meetings to:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Review Research Q &amp; Hypotheses</li> <li>b) Review Study Overview</li> </ol>
#14 12/15/10	<b>Bringing It All Together</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present Study Overview</li> <li>• Review of any prior successes, challenges, sticking points, etc.</li> </ul> <b>Concluding Sections and Next Steps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Format and presentation</li> <li>• Funding</li> <li>• Oral Defense</li> <li>• Human Subjects Review</li> <li>• Tasks and Timetable</li> </ul>	<b>Assignment #7 is due 3 days prior to meeting: #7 Study Overview (2-3 pages)</b>	