

EVALUATION OF INTERPERSONAL PRACTICE

SEMINAR OUTLINE

Spring 1991

POWERS

The content to be covered throughout this semester is organized into eight general components which are designed to correspond roughly with the eight biweekly sessions which comprise the seminar. Each session is phased so as to provide the kinds of information and classroom experiences necessary to carry out the accompanying sequenced seminar assignment which is directly related to the practicum experience. It is recognized that because of the seminar nature of this education experience certain topics may surface in discussion out of the suggested order. An effort will be made to be as flexible as possible while maintaining sufficient structure to realize our objectives.

PHASE I: INTRODUCTION TO PRACTICE-RELATED RESEARCH:

This first phase of the seminar provides an overview of the purposes, rationale and content areas to be addressed throughout the seminar. It is based on a commitment to the belief that the evaluation of intervention strategies, the effects of which can be empirically demonstrated, serve in the best interests of the client, promote the growth and development of the individual practitioner and contribute to the overall credibility of the profession. During this session, discussion will focus on the following topics:

- a) The development of a rationale for incorporating research into practice.
- b) Recognizing the methodological similarities and differences between practice and research.
- c) Understanding the meaning of practice efforts, effects, effectiveness and efficiency.
- d) Defining problems, intervention strategies and outcomes in operational terms and relating them to the concepts of independent and dependent variables.
- e) Participation in a self-awareness exercise using a self-anchored attitude scale.

PHASE II: INTEGRATING PRACTICE AND RESEARCH AS A PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS:

This phase of the seminar is based on the assumption that the fundamental structure of problem-solving as it occurs in practice is essentially the same as the problem-solving process as it occurs in research. An effort is made to help students recognize the similarities and differences between the two processes and thus lay the foundation for the transfer of knowledge from one

area already understood by the student (i.e. practice) to an area yet to be mastered (i.e. research). Discussion will emphasize the basic elements essential to building research into practice, and as such, will focus on the following set of questions:

- a) What questions will need to be answered in order to solve the problem(s) posed by the client system?
- b) What will be accepted as evidence that the problem(s) is being accurately defined and that the changes you expect have occurred?
- c) What theory(s) inform your intervention strategy?
- d) What is the implied hypothesis regarding the causal connection between intervention and outcome and how does this effect your evaluation and outcome measures?
- e) What triangulation strategies might be employed in an effort to address threats to internal validity?

PHASE III: SELECTING AND ADMINISTERING THE APPROPRIATE TOOLS TO MEASURE CHANGE:

During this phase, the primary emphasis shifts to a consideration of design issues. The challenge is one of fitting the method to the practice problem-to-be-solved, and doing so in a way that provides the desired information while complementing the intervention process. A variety of single system strategies will be discussed as means of evaluating the effects and the effectiveness of interpersonal practice intervention. An important component of this discussion will include a consideration of Rapid Assessment Instruments (RAI's) and how they are used to measure change in the dependent variable. Accordingly, the topics for discussion will include:

- a) A consideration of alternative methods for evaluating practice.
- b) A review of single-system designs including their relative strengths and limitations.
- c) The selection and administration of Rapid Assessment Instruments (RAI's).

PHASE IV: CRITICAL ISSUES IN PRACTICE RELATED RESEARCH:

Phases I, II & III have laid the foundation for incorporating research into interpersonal practice routines. This phase will focus on a consideration of issues which effect that marriage of problem-solving strategies. As such, a good deal of time will be spent during this session discussing the practical and theoretical issues that students are encountering in their efforts to operationalize their evaluation strategies. Discussion will include a consideration of the following topics and will be tied directly to the case

illustrations provided by students from their practicum experience:

- a) Theoretical issues.
- b) Practical issues.
- c) Logistical issues.
- d) Political issues.
- e) Methodological issues.
- f) Ethical issues.

PHASE V: THE SOCIAL WORK PRACTITIONER AS A QUALITATIVE RESEARCHER:

The qualitative research emphasis on fully describing and comprehending the meaning of events to those involved in them as well as seeking the essential character of social and psychological phenomena is compatible with the purposes of social work practitioners involved in evaluating their practice. Qualitative approaches assume that the behaviors and outcomes to be studied are produced by complex interacting rather than by a linear cause-effect set of variables and can best be understood in that context. As a qualitative researcher, the social work practitioner must identify and systematically address issues of reliability and validity. Triangulation will be examined as one approach useful in addressing these issues.

PHASE VI: THE ROLE OF MEASUREMENT AND STATISTICS IN SINGLE-SYSTEM RESEARCH:

During this phase, consideration will be given to the role that measurement and statistics play in the analysis of data as it relates to single-system research. The emphasis is placed on the interpretation of the statistical significance of change following intervention. Issues related to the analysis of data over time will be considered especially with respect to the problem of determining statistical independence. The following topics will be considered:

- a) Calculating the mean and standard deviation.
- b) Using the two-standard deviation band.
- c) Calculating Autocorrelation and its interpretation.
- d) Using the t -test as a measure of difference.
- e) Interpreting probability tables.
- f) Recognizing the difference between clinical and statistical significance.

PHASE VII: USING THE COMPUTER AS AN ADJUNCT TO PRACTICE-RELATED RESEARCH - THE CLINICAL ASSESSMENT PACKAGE:

The trend toward the use of computers in clinical practice will be the topic of this phase of the course. As an exemplar of this trend, the Clinical Assessment Package (CAP), developed by Walter Hudson, will be demonstrated in the computer lab where students will have an opportunity for hands-on experience with the various scales that comprise the system.

PHASE VIII: REVIEWING THE PRACTICE-RESEARCH EXPERIENCE - GENERALIZING THE PRINCIPLES:

The purpose of this phase of the seminar is to provide an opportunity for a coherent discussion of the many considerations and constraints that influence the practitioner/researcher's choices while carrying out practice-related research. It is important to consider the experiential aspects of the evaluation process, that is, how the abstract principles discussed in class and in textbooks ultimately translate into actual research activities. Discussion will focus on the experiences students have had attempting to deal with the sometimes confusing and conflicting issues that were encountered in their efforts to apply their intervention/research strategies to clients and themselves. We will explore the many compromises and modifications that inevitably have to be made as a result of circumstances encountered along the way as well as the implications that such compromises and modifications have with respect to both practice and research.