

S790: Special Topics in Social Work Practice, Theory and Research**Course Description:**

This “*Special Topics*” course is designed to provide students with an opportunity to engage in independent study of a wide range of topics not otherwise addressed in the core Ph.D. curriculum. It is intended to complement the required courses by enabling students to focus their research interests by means of an in-depth exploration of a substantive area of practice, theory, and research directly related to a particular area of social work practice. The independent study completed in conjunction with a Special Topics course is carried out with the approval and under the direction of a faculty member with identified expertise in the subject area selected for study.

The focus of any given *Special Topics* course will vary depending upon the student’s specific research interests. For example, the independent study might take the form of a meta-analysis of the relevant literature related to a student’s proposed dissertation topic; an in-depth exploration of different research methodologies; or an interdisciplinary review of research related to a particular topic. The study may deal with fields of practice (e.g., mental health, corrections, child welfare), public policy issues (e.g., models for the reform of the welfare system or health care), diverse populations (e.g., women’s issues, vulnerable populations such as minorities, children, older adults, gays and lesbians); specific social problems (e.g., substance abuse, AIDS, domestic violence, discrimination), or the efficacy of different methodological approaches to practice (e.g., individual, family, group).

Course Objective:

As a result of having completed the requirements for a *Special Topics* course, a student will:

- Conduct a systematic, in-depth review of the literature related to the identified topic area,
- Deepen their knowledge of a particular topic directly related to the research topic,
- Prepare a written report summarizing the results of their independent study.

The specific objectives for any given *Special Topics* course will be determined by and prepared individually by the student in conjunction with an identified faculty member who agrees to serve as the student’s mentor. It is the responsibility of the student to complete the *Special Topics Proposal Form* and secure the requisite approvals. In submitting a proposal, the student must attach a detailed written statement that addresses each of the following points:

1. The parameters of the issue/problem proposed for study.
2. The specific objectives to be pursued by means of the independent study.
3. A description of the approach or methods to be used to conduct the study.
4. A suggested outline for the expected end product of the independent study.

The student may request any member of the faculty of the School of Social Work to serve on a voluntary basis as instructor for a *Special Topics* course. Qualified faculty from others schools or departments may also serve as an instructor with the approval of the student’s academic advisor and the PhD Program Director. The primary criteria for selection of an appropriate faculty member to serve as an instructor for a *Special Topics* course is based on the individual’s interest and qualifications as an established expert in the area proposed for study.

A copy of the *Special Topics* proposal form, together with the written proposal, must be reviewed and approved by both the student’s academic advisor and the Director of the PhD Program prior to registration. A *Special Topics* course may be approved as a doctoral program elective only if it meets the following conditions:

1. The proposal clearly articulates how the suggested independent inquiry will enable the student to engage in a self-directed course of study related to a specified problem/issue of practical, theoretical, and/or research importance to the field of social work.
2. The topic and content of the independent study is not repetitive of content contained in any of the required or elective courses otherwise available to doctoral students.
3. Since the *Special Topics* course may be taken for variable credits, it is essential that the level and amount of scholarly work required be comparable to the number of graduate credits to be earned. A general guide for the determination of credits is that of approximately three clock hours for each credit hour awarded for the course.
4. The student must obtain prior agreement from a member of the faculty to serve as the course instructor before a *Special Topics* course can be approved by the academic advisor and the Director of the PhD program.

Course Evaluation

Student performance in a *Special Topics* course is evaluated and graded by the faculty member who agrees to serve as the course instructor. The criteria to be employed in the evaluation process shall be discussed with the student at the time the proposal is agreed to by the instructor. The instructor's expectations for the course, as well as the criteria to be used in evaluating the student's performance, should be included in the student's proposal before it is forwarded to the academic advisor and the PhD Program Director for final approval. All *Special Topics* courses must minimally include an acceptable written report that summarizes the nature and scope of the inquiry, the method of investigation employed, the findings and conclusions drawn, and the relevance of the findings to the student's broader research agenda. A copy of the student's written report, and any other materials produced in conjunction with the independent study, should be submitted to the PhD Program Director for the student's file.