MASTERS SYLLABUS
SW 988: MIXING METHODS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

I. PURPOSE: Each approach to conducting social science research (quantitative and qualitative) has its strengths and weaknesses in “getting to the heart of” any social phenomenon. Researchers (including beginning researchers in graduate school) often define themselves as being committed to one or the other research approach or tradition. While this commitment often influences how researchers approach questions or define studies they undertake, it is research questions that should drive the approach rather than a particular researcher’s training or preference. Since many (if not most) research questions are quite broad they are best addressed from inquiries designed from several traditions. The purpose of this course is to provide an overview of mixed methods research, consisting of the history and philosophy of mixed methods research, the emerging literature on it, purposes and characteristics of mixed methods research, types of research problems addressed, the specification of mixed methods purpose statements and research questions, types of major mixed methods designs, data collection and analysis strategies within mixed methods designs, and reporting and evaluating mixed methods studies.

II. PREREQUISITES: Students who enroll in this class must have completed AT LEAST one course in quantitative methods and in qualitative methods (or be taking qualitative methods concurrently). We expect mostly doctoral students, but masters’ students who have completed the prerequisites are welcome. We prefer students to have taken at least one additional advanced course in research methods. Thus, students will more likely be in their second or third year of their doctoral programs. Although the class is intended for students in the School of Social Welfare, and our discussions will focus on social work research, interested students from other departments and schools who have completed comparable required courses are welcome.

III. OBJECTIVES: Upon completion of this course, students will have gained knowledge and skills in the following areas:

1. Understand the philosophical assumptions underlying the use of mixed methods research.
2. Understand developments in mixed methods research.
3. Articulate the key characteristics of a mixed methods research study.
4. Understand and explain the rationale for using a mixed methods research approach in a study.
5. Understand and explain the major types of mixed methods research designs; their strengths and weaknesses.
6. Develop a purpose statement and research questions for a mixed methods research study.
7. Summarize the types of data that are often collected in mixed methods research and be able to distinguish between quantitative and qualitative types.
8. Integrate (or mix) quantitative and qualitative data within mixed methods research designs.
9. Summarize the data analysis strategies within mixed methods research designs.
10. Understand the use of quality criteria in mixed methods research.
12. Understand the steps in designing a mixed methods research study and develop a mixed methods study proposal.

IV. TOPICS
Introduction to mixed methods research
Major issues and controversies in the use of mixed methods in the social and behavioral sciences
Competing paradigms in qualitative research
When mixed methods designs are most appropriate
Mixed method research designs
Data collection and sampling strategies
Analyzing data: Integrating qualitative and quantitative methods / Computer programs for analyzing data
Data interpretation – Making inferences
Methodological triangulation in mixed method research: making sense of dissonant data
Example applications
Dissemination approaches and strategies