**DSW Doctoral Research Project Instructions**

As a culminating experience of your Doctor of Social Work (DSW) program, you will complete a **qualitative research project** that addresses a significant gap or unmet need in your chosen area of social work practice, policy, education, or leadership. This project is intended to demonstrate your ability to lead change, engage in critical inquiry, and contribute meaningful insights to the profession, particularly through interprofessional collaboration. As a part of this project you must complete CITI research training in your DSW 810 course.

You will work with your senior advisor which will be assigned to you at the end of your second semester or when you complete both DSW 802 and DSW 805

**Project Design and Methodology**

* Your project must utilize a **qualitative research approach**.
* You will choose **one of the following primary data collection methods**:  
  + **Interviews**
  + **Focus Groups**
  + **Document Analysis** (pending final approval; confirm with faculty advisor)
* You are expected to select an appropriate qualitative research approach and clearly explain why it is well-suited to address your research question and project goals.

**Focus and Scope**

* Your project should address a clearly defined **problem, gap, or need** within social work practice, policy, education, or leadership.
* It must include an **interprofessional component**, demonstrating how collaboration with other professions or disciplines enhances the understanding or resolution of the issue.
* Your project may be practice-based, program-focused, policy-informed, or education-related, but it must show **leadership potential and systems-level relevance**.

**Final Deliverable**

* Your completed project will include a written research report structured in chapters:  
  Chapter 1: Problem Statement and Literature Review, Chapter 2: Qualitative Design and Data Collection, Chapter 3: Presentation of Findings and Implications for Social Work. Each chapter is described in more detail below.
* You will participate in a **public defense and presentation**, sharing your findings, conclusions, and implications with an audience that will include your committee and may include faculty, peers, and interprofessional stakeholders.

**Chapter 1: Problem Statement and Literature Review**

In this chapter, you will introduce the central problem, gap, or unmet need in the field of social work that your doctoral research project seeks to address. This section is the foundation for your entire project, clearly articulating *what* issue you are addressing, *why* it matters, and *who* is impacted. The problem may stem from a persistent challenge in practice, an area where current efforts have proven insufficient, or a newly emerging issue that has not yet been fully explored or addressed.

You will ground the problem in relevant literature,which will help you critically engage with existing scholarship related to your identified problem, gap, or area of inquiry in the field of social work. This review will provide the foundation for your doctoral research project by situating your work within the context of current evidence, discourse, and best practices.

This chapter also positions social work leadership—and specifically *interprofessional leadership*—as uniquely suited to address the gap or unmet need in your chosen area. Drawing on the values, ethics, and systems-level perspective of the profession, you will explain why social work is a natural driver of change in this area. You will describe how interprofessional leadership can facilitate shared goals, integrated solutions, and improved outcomes by bringing together expertise across disciplines.

In alignment with interprofessional education and collaborative practice, you will identify additional professions or stakeholder groups whose collaboration is essential for a meaningful solution. Describe how you envision interprofessional engagement and leadership occurring, and how these relationships will enhance the design, implementation, and sustainability of your work. You will consider how you, as a social work leader, will model interprofessional competencies and guide a collaborative approach to problem-solving.

Possible project types include—but are not limited to—curriculum development, program design or evaluation, strategy implementation, or the creation of a framework to address a common concern. The interprofessional competencies relevant to your work should be introduced and linked to your proposed project.

By the end of this chapter, readers should have a clear understanding of the issue at hand, the rationale for addressing it, and the potential for impact through interprofessional and social work-led initiatives.

**Chapter 2: Qualitative Design and Data Collection**

In this chapter, you will describe the qualitative research design that guides your doctoral project, providing a clear rationale for why this approach is best suited to explore your research question or address the identified problem. You will also explain how this approach aligns with the goals of your project and the values of the social work profession.

You will provide a detailed description of your research setting, population of interest, and sampling strategy. You will discuss ethical considerations related to working with study participants, including informed consent, confidentiality, power dynamics, and how you will ensure cultural humility and trauma-informed practices throughout the research process.

Chapter 2 will outline your data collection methods, such as interviews, focus groups, or document analysis. You will describe the development of your data collection instruments (e.g., interview guides or protocols), including how they reflect your research aims, support rich data generation, and align with interprofessional collaboration or leadership themes as applicable.

You should also describe how data will be recorded, managed, and securely stored, ensuring compliance with IRB and institutional research policies. Attention should be given to the role of the researcher, including your positionality, potential biases, and strategies for ensuring trustworthiness, credibility, and reflexivity in the research process.

By the end of this chapter, readers should have a clear understanding of how your study is designed, how your data will be collected, and why these methods are appropriate to produce meaningful and actionable findings in the context of social work leadership and interprofessional practice.

**Chapter 3: Presentation of Findings and Implications for Social Work**

In this chapter, you will present the findings of your qualitative research in a clear, organized, and meaningful way. This chapter serves as the culmination of your data collection and analysis, where you convey the voices of participants, patterns that emerged, and the significance of what you learned. Begin by briefly restating your research purpose and methodology to reorient the reader, then proceed to present the themes or categories that resulted from your analysis.

Use rich descriptions, direct quotations, and narrative summaries to illustrate key findings. Themes should be presented in a logical order, supported by relevant excerpts from your data, and interpreted within the context of your research questions. You must maintain confidentiality and ethical integrity throughout the presentation of your findings.

Following the presentation of data, you will explore the implications of your findings for social work practice, leadership, policy, education, and/or future research. Emphasize how your findings address the original problem or gap identified in Chapter 1 and contribute to the advancement of the profession. Discuss how your work aligns with core social work values such as social justice, equity, person-in-environment perspective, and ethical practice.

You will also consider the implications for interprofessional collaboration and leadership, including how your findings can inform cross-disciplinary partnerships, improve systems-level interventions, or enhance team-based practice. Where applicable, propose strategies, frameworks, or recommendations that can be applied to real-world settings.

Conclude the chapter with a thoughtful reflection on the strengths and limitations of your study and suggest directions for future research or action.

By the end of this project, readers should have a deep understanding of what your study revealed, why it matters, and how it can inform and inspire leadership and innovation in social work and beyond.