

**PROTOCOL FOR DEVELOPING AND REVIEWING  
FACULTY-INITIATED INDEPENDENT RESEARCH COURSES (SOWK 789's)**

**Description and Purpose of Faculty-Initiated Independent Research (SOWK 789)**

**Courses:**

SOWK 789 courses are instructor-initiated advanced research classes that involve student participation in research activities under the instructor's direction and supervision. They provide opportunities for students to engage in hands-on research activities that are *not otherwise available in the SSW curriculum* (i.e., they should not duplicate existing content).

All 789 courses must be approved by the research sequence. If the proposed course is being used to satisfy students' advanced research requirement, it must also be approved by least one concentration (clinical or macro) and specialization (aging, behavioral health, community & social policy, family and children, or health). The purposes of the 789 course are:

1. To improve student knowledge and skills related to research on a specialized subject
2. To foster student critical thinking about ethical concerns or complex decision making related to conducting research
3. To promote the production and dissemination of scholarly research

The description of a given 789 course in the syllabus and course schedule should provide a brief rationale for the project focus, and an overview of class content and research activities. If the students' work that will be completed for the 789 course is part of a larger multi-stage study, the course description should explain how the course activities will contribute to the larger study. This description is needed to provide interested students with context about the project. Any course prerequisites should also be included in the course description.

**Instructor Responsibilities:**

Instructors interested in developing a 789 course are responsible for: (1) developing a course proposal; (2) obtaining approval from the requisite committees, specifically the research sequence committee and at least one concentration, either clinical or macro, and at least one specialization; (3) submitting project protocols for IRB review and keeping relevant approvals current throughout the duration of the project; (4) an end-of-semester brief report for a completed course. Once a 789 has been offered twice, the course must be re-submitted to the research sequence for review and re-approval.

**Research Sequence Review Timetable:**

1. *Course Proposals.* 789 proposals consist of a fully developed course syllabus, complete with a course description, class objectives, required readings, class activities (including a timetable for proposed activities), and assignments. For the fall semester, the course proposal must be reviewed by research sequence representatives and given a determination (approved or otherwise) by March 1. For the spring semester, the course proposal must be reviewed and approved by October 1. It is strongly recommended that proposals be submitted to the research sequence chair(s) at least 4

weeks before these deadlines to allow at least 2 weeks for peer review and another 2 weeks for completing possible revisions.

2. *Proposal Review Criteria.* The review criteria for course approval by the research sequence are described in detail in the Appendix (below).

3. *End-of-Semester Brief Report.* At the end of each semester, 789 instructors are required to submit a brief report to the research sequence. More specifically, instructors are expected to submit a brief 1-3 page report summarizing course processes and outcomes. Reports should include:

1. Number of times this course has been offered since it was last reviewed/approved by the research sequence
2. Number of enrolled students
3. Any deviations from the syllabus
4. A brief summary of final products (completed by students)
5. Contributions to student and faculty development
6. Instructor impressions about challenges/successes, including extent to which there was enough time to cover all of the assigned course materials as planned, and thoughts about revisions to the course for its next offering
7. IRB reportable events or significant student problems
8. Course evaluation data
9. A description of any products (e.g., scholarly papers, presentations, agency reports) emanating from the course.

All items should be submitted to the co-chairs of the research sequence *within one week of receiving course evaluation data.*

### **Appendix: Research Sequence Review Criteria for Faculty-Initiated Independent Research Courses**

#### **Reviewer Instructions:**

The following are questions to be considered when reviewing a proposed 789. Each proposed 789 will be reviewed by at least three representatives of the research sequence committee selected by the chair/co-chairs of the research sequence for their content and/or methodological expertise. If the course focus or methods are unfamiliar to members of the research sequence committee, an external reviewer with such expertise may be consulted to complete a review. Reviewers will vote on whether the proposed course is “approved,” “approved pending revision,” or “requires significant revision and resubmission.” *Any response of “no” to any of the following questions likely indicates a need for significant course revision prior to approval.*

1. Will the proposed class **improve student knowledge and skills** related to research on a specialized subject? YES / NO (if “no” please explain)
2. Will the proposed class **foster critical thinking about ethical concerns or complex decision making** related to conducting research? YES / NO (if “no” please explain)
4. Does the course engage students in at least 5 of the following activities? (Asterisked activities are required): YES / NO (if “no” please explain)
  - a. IRB/CITI training\*
  - b. Consideration of issues pertaining to diversity/inclusion\*

- c. Literature review
- d. Measurement development (e.g., questionnaire construction)
- e. Intervention implementation
- f. Data collection
- g. Data cleaning/data management
- h. Assist with data analysis (either qualitative or quantitative)\*
- i. Interpretation of findings
- j. Help with product development/dissemination of results
- k. Assistance with proposal development

5. Are course materials/readings **relevant** to the topic and objectives of the course?

YES / NO (if “no” please explain)

5. Are the course materials/readings **current** (generally within 10 years of the publication date, unless seminal)? YES / NO (if “no” please explain)

6. Are the course materials/readings **appropriately comprehensive** for advanced MSW students? YES / NO (if “no” please explain)

7. Does graded work correspond with course objectives and include two graded mechanisms/assignments? YES / NO (if “no” please explain)

8. Does graded work evaluate requisite course knowledge/skills/behaviors? YES / NO (if “no” please explain)

9. Are class activities befitting of an advanced graduate-level research class in terms of rigor and sophistication? YES / NO (if “no” please explain)

10. Can course assignments and activities be completed within the time allotted? YES / NO (if “no” please explain)

### **Additional Questions for Re-Approval:**

SOWK 789 courses up for re-review and re-approval will also take into account the following two questions:

1. Based on end-of-the-semester brief reports, does the course appear to meet course objectives?

YES / NO (if “no” please explain)

2. Based on student evaluations of the class, does the course appear to meet course objectives? (e.g., are the course evaluations predominantly negative, or do they reflect a disconnect between stated objectives and actual class activities?) YES / NO (if “no” please explain)

*Any response of “no” to the above questions likely indicates a need for further course revision prior to approval.*