Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1
The Context of Social Work Research  This chapter sets the context for social work research and discusses the empowering role of research in the social work profession. The chapter presents social work research in its historical context; examining the challenges the profession has overcome and those it continues to face including Evidence-based practice. As you prepare yourself for the job market, Chapter 1 introduces you to a world of opportunities to engage in social work research and evaluation, both as a complement to practice and as a profession in itself.

Chapter 2
The Politics and Ethics of Social Work Research  This chapter reflects on the way politics shapes research agendas and the choice of research methods. It emphasizes the need for social workers to commit themselves to ethics in conducting and using research. Similar to the first chapter, Chapter 2 uses a historical approach, reflecting the belief that we should learn from the mistakes of our past. Sample consent, assent, and other forms are provided that can be used as templates for developing your own forms. The NASW Ethical Guidelines for Research and Evaluation are also presented.

Chapter 3
The Research Process: From Problems to Research Questions  This chapter presents social work research and practice as complimentary activities, in terms of both the identification of problems for research and the creation of knowledge to improve practice. A step-by-step approach to framing research problems and developing research questions and hypotheses is presented. Guidelines are offered for the generation of culturally proficient practice at each stage of the research process.
Chapter 4

**Single Subject Research**  Many social work practitioners will be involved in evaluating their own, or other’s work with a single case. This chapter presents the advantages and limitations of single subject research, and provides the guidance necessary to clearly define an outcome, develop a data collection plan, and then analyze and graph single subject data using Excel. Practice data are available for use with the interactive cases on the book’s website. Students will learn how to differentiate experimental and statistical success.

Chapter 5

**Qualitative Research**  describes a variety of qualitative research methods that are commonly used in social work to answer research questions that focus on gaining an in-depth understanding of an area of inquiry. Techniques of collecting qualitative data are presented as well as a range of sampling methods that fit with a qualitative approach. Skill building is addressed in terms of coding, analyzing, and presenting qualitative data. The chapter also discusses the use of qualitative data analysis software.

Chapter 6

**Group Research Design**  The emphasis in this chapter is on the purposive selection of research methods. The right research design is that which will do the best job of answering the research question, while dealing with the contextual complexities of the environment. Standard research design notation is viewed as building blocks that can be combined in different ways to facilitate the purpose of the research. The strengths and limitations of group research design are addressed, along with strategies to control for threats to validity and strengthen designs. Students are presented with a number of counterarguments for overcoming objections to experimental research.

Chapter 7

**Sampling**  Who to include, how many, and the method of sample selection are the focus of this chapter. In particular this chapter addresses how sampling choices impact the ability to generalize, making students more conscious consumers of research. Step-by-step tutorials are provided to facilitate practice with various probability sampling techniques using a sampling frame that is included with one of the three interactive cases on the website.
Chapter 8

Measurement  This chapter covers not only the basics of measurement including validity and reliability, but it also covers the practical aspects of measurement including where to search for existing instruments, how to judge the utility of a measure, how to avoid error in measurement, and, when necessary, how to design your own measures.

Chapter 9

Implementation: From Data Collection to Data Entry  This chapter is unique in that it deals with the mechanics of implementation: from planning for data collection, collecting and safely storing data, through to preparing the data for analysis. The book’s website provides step-by-step tutorials in SPSS and Excel to help you develop your own database and gain practice with data entry. Specific researcher-tested strategies are offered for success in participant recruitment and retention.

Chapter 10

Describing Quantitative Data  This chapter provides a guide for how to move from raw data in the form of numbers to processed data that will provide information. As with the previous chapter, the book’s website provides SPSS and Excel tutorials that you can complete using data from one of the interactive cases. Based on the distribution of the data, you will learn how to differentiate the best measures of central tendency and variability to allow you to describe the data in a way that will paint the most accurate picture and maintain the nuances of the findings.

Chapter 11

Bivariate Statistics and Statistical Inference  This chapter presents guidelines for selecting statistical tests to analyze data. The chapter covers correlation, chi-square, three forms of t-tests, and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Emphasis is on accurate interpretation and reporting, learning to report statistically significant results, and differentiating statistical significance from clinically meaningful findings.

Chapter 12

Evaluation of Social Work Services  Many social workers will be involved at some point in their career with program evaluation, either as a provider of evaluative services or a consumer of evaluation. This chapter focuses on the different purposes of evaluation as well as limitations and political context of program evaluation. The
knowledge that students will have acquired in terms of research design, sampling, implementation, and data analysis are brought together in the context of evaluation. Types of evaluation addressed include evaluability assessment, needs assessment, process, outcome, and cost evaluation.

Chapter 13

Writing and Presenting Research  The final chapter provides valuable tips on presenting a research study for publication, conference presentation, workshops, and grant writing. Handy checklists are provided to evaluate the different sections of a research report and presentation. An exercise on plagiarism addresses what it is and how to avoid it.