SW 440 – *Introduction to Social Work Research*  
*Online Course*

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**
SW 440 examines concepts, principles, and methods of scientific inquiry, emphasizing qualitative and quantitative designs, assessment of practice and program effectiveness, and critical use of existing research in social work practice. This course acquaints students with the scientific methods used in social work research used to build knowledge and evaluate the impact of social work practice and policy. Goals of the course include: 1) helping students explore how science relates to current social problems, 2) inspiring students to value research as an integral part of social work practice; 2) fostering an understanding of evidence-based practice as a “process of inquiry;” and 3) encouraging students to question the empirical foundations of “best practices” in relation to client intervention strategies and social services programs. Additionally, the course introduces cultural and ethical issues that are present in all research endeavors and the unique issues involved in studying special populations and populations at risk.

**Pre-requisite:** Admission to the Social Work major

**LINKAGES WITH OTHER COURSES**
This is the first course in a two-course sequence covering research methods in social work: SW 440 and SW 441. It is designed to introduce students to basic concepts and procedures involved in conducting and evaluating research. It provides students with an understanding of the integral role that research plays in social work practice.

**LINKAGE WITH SILVER CORE OBJECTIVES (CO9)**
SW 440 fulfills the requirements of CO9 in Silver Vein III: Advanced Areas of Focused Inquiry:

**CO9: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**
Students will be able to connect science and technology to real-world problems by explaining how science relates to problems of societal concern; be able to distinguish between sound and unsound interpretations of scientific information; employ cogent reasoning methods in their own examinations of problems and issues; and understand the applications of science and technology in societal context.
KEY BSW (Foundation) PROGRAM COMPETENCIES

2.1.1 Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly
2.1.2 Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice
2.1.3 Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgment
2.1.4 Engage diversity and difference in practice
2.1.5 Advance human rights and social and economic justice
2.1.6 Engage in research informed practice and practice informed research

COURSE OBJECTIVES
By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Analyze the strengths and limitations of empirical studies and reports
2. Use the scientific literature to analyze how social, political, legal, economic and technological factors contribute to societal problems and their solutions
3. Analyze the role of research in eradicating, maintaining and/or establishing structural oppression and inequality
4. Conduct an in-depth analysis of a pressing social issue, in the context of an identified client base, in a specific practice setting
5. Compare how the latest scientific and technological innovations related to the issue are being reported in the mass media versus the empirical literature
6. Examine current responses to the issue at the local, state, national and International levels
7. Use the focused literature review to identify implications for practice and create practice-related recommendations that are evidence-based
8. Compare the purposes, methodologies and strengths/limitations of qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method approaches
9. Assess and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions used in practice
10. Identify key ethical principles that guide research studies
11. Identify the role of theory in shaping research questions and designs
12. Differentiate between evidence-based practice and evidence-based practices
13. Identify and distinguish between major research designs and their applications
14. Identify the purpose and potential uses of logic models
15. Use empirically valid data (including practice experiences) to identify research and evaluation questions relevant to practice
16. Use research skills to enhance lifelong learning

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS
This course is taught online. A variety of online instructional methods will be employed including: narrated lecture, lecture transcripts, readings, videos, class discussion, small group activities, live chat and exams. All of the materials and instructions that you need for this course are found in the Weekly Modules in WebCampus: http://wcl.unr.edu.

COURSE POLICIES

Participation. Learning does not take place in isolation. Every time something is learned, there is an exchange between the person who is learning and the person who is teaching. This means that both parties must take responsibility for their contribution to the process.

As your teacher, I am committed to doing my part by being responsive and fair. I have structured this class to be sensitive to different learning styles and individual needs. I try to give students maximum flexibility, within limits, and I am responsive. I check for messages from students every day and respond to every message I get. I grade all assignments within a day or two of the submission date.

Students who share my commitment to learning will visit the class each week prepared to learn, complete the Assignments in each Weekly Module on time and take part in the group assignments and discussions. Fully engaging in class is necessary, not only for your own learning, but for your classmates as well.

Late Assignments and Make-Up. Students are responsible for submitting assignments on time, and need to plan accordingly. Technical problems with your computer and WebCampus Learn may occur from time to time. Therefore, it is important to allow enough time so that you can contact campus to get help and/or submit your assignment on another computer if you are having problems. Technical issues will not be accepted as an excuse for turning in late assignments.

Remember, late assignments will not be accepted and make-up exams will not be given. You will lose all of the points on the assignment/exam if it is not completed on time. Exceptions to these policies will be made only for students who experience an extreme personal or family emergency, such as a medical condition or the death of a close family member or friend. Students who need to ask for an exception must present documentation supporting the severity of their situation at the time the request is made. Requests must be made in writing.

Civility. We all have a duty to maintain a learning environment that fosters intellectual curiosity, personal growth and diversity. We all need to conduct ourselves with honor and dignity. Mutual respect is the foundation of any successful relationship. Harassment of one individual by another—in person, through e-mail or in electronic discussions—is considered uncivil behavior that inhibits learning and discourages the open expression of ideas related to academic subjects. The university is committed to an orderly learning environment that protects the right of free speech. Personal intimidations of any kind are not tolerated on the UNR campus.
**Class Conduct.** Misconduct and non-attendance are disruptive to the learning process. Therefore, the instructor of a course can drop a student from class at any time for misconduct or non-attendance, with approval of the Dean of the college. Non-attendance in an online course consists of one or more of the following: failing to log into the WebCampus course every week, not working on and submitting assignments on a weekly basis and not participating in discussion questions by the dates assigned.

**Students must demonstrate that they are able to write clearly and concisely.** The assignments will be partially graded on your ability to communicate clearly and concisely with no grammatical, spelling, or typographical errors. If you have trouble with writing, please ask someone who writes well to help you proofread your assignment and/or use Academic Resource Services.

**Make use of Academic Success Services.** Your student fees cover usage of the Math Center (784-4433 or [www.unr.edu/mathcenter/](http://www.unr.edu/mathcenter/)), Tutoring Center (784-6801 or [www.unr.edu/tutoring/](http://www.unr.edu/tutoring/)), and University Writing Center (784-6030 or [www.unr.edu/writing_center](http://www.unr.edu/writing_center)). These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student.

**Academic dishonesty violates university policy.** According to the UNR Student Handbook, academic dishonesty is defined as cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses. Plagiarism is defined as submitting the language, ideas, thoughts or work of another as your own, or by allowing your work to be used by someone else in this same fashion.

**Disability accommodations will be made.** If you have a disability and need to request accommodations, please let me know and contact the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building, Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

University of Nevada, Reno  
Thompson Bldg. Suite 101, MS/079  
Contact: Mary Zabel, Director  
Phone: (775) 784-6000 | Fax: (775) 784-6955 | TTY: (775) 327-5131  
E-mail:drc@scs.unr.edu Website: [http://www.unr.edu/drc/contact-us](http://www.unr.edu/drc/contact-us)

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Required Readings.** You will be expected to have completed all readings during the class session to which they are assigned. Due dates for the assigned readings are posted in the syllabus and the WebCampus Weekly Modules for the course. You will have reading assignments from the following sources:
Exams. You will take two exams in this course: an online midterm and an online final.

Assignments. Weekly assignments will be scheduled throughout the semester. The Assignments link in the Weekly Modules provides you with written instructions, submission forms and due dates for each of the online and in-class assignments. Always submit your Assignments through the Weekly Modules. Do not send them to me through email!

1. IRB Online CITI Training. You will complete the free online IRB Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training as part of your course requirements. UNR requires CITI training before any faculty member or student is allowed to engage in the research process. The training ensures that you understand the ethics of research. Go to https://www.citiprogram.org and register as a new user. Select the Basic Course, and when you have completed all of the modules you will get an Acknowledgment of Completion. Save the form to your computer and attach the file to the Assignment link found in Weekly Module 2.

2. Annotated Bibliography. The annotated bibliography is the first step that you will take in preparing a professional quality focused literature review. You will select a topic and then search the literature to find out as much as you can about your issue. Your annotated bibliography will include key articles that document the need for further research on your selected topic. Instructions for writing an annotated bibliography will be provided online in the Assignment link found in Weekly Module 5.

3. Focused Literature Review. The literature review will build on the annotated bibliography, with additional resources and a critical analysis of the literature that is available on the topic. You will develop your literature review with a lot of guidance from your instructor and feedback from peers. The literature review will be submitted in drafts for feedback and then revised and resubmitted for a final grade. Instructions for the focused literature review are appended to this syllabus. Additional detailed instructions for writing the literature review will be provided in lecture, handouts and in the weekly Assignment links.

4. Journal Article Exercises. One of the most important skills that you will learn in this course is how to critique published journal articles. You may want to work
together to do these critiques (recommended but not required) using lists of criteria, worksheets and discussion. I will give you three journal articles, and you will evaluate and compare different sections of the articles (6 worksheets @ 10 points each) and then, later on, I will give you a different article and you will put it all together and evaluate the entire article using criteria provided (20 points). It is very important that you read the articles completely before starting the exercises, and that you re-read the articles as we move through the exercises.

5. ** Discussions.** Five online discussions are scheduled throughout the semester. Each discussion link is accessed through the Weekly Module during the week that it is due. The discussions are available from 6 a.m. on Monday until 11:30 p.m. on Sunday. To earn the full 15 points for each discussion, you must submit one original post by 11:30 p.m. on Wednesday and post responses to at least two other posts by 11:30 p.m. on Sunday.

### COURSE EVALUATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Course Objectives</th>
<th>400 points</th>
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<tr>
<td>CITI Training</td>
<td>440.2</td>
<td>(25)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>440.5; 440.6</td>
<td>(50)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literature Review Drafts (2 @ 10 pts.)</td>
<td>440.5; 440.6; 440.7; 440.13; 440.14</td>
<td>(20)</td>
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<td>Literature Review Final Paper</td>
<td>440.5; 440.6; 440.7; 440.13; 440.14</td>
<td>(150)</td>
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<td>Journal Article Exercises</td>
<td>440.2; 440.3; 440.7; 440.8; 440.9</td>
<td>(80)</td>
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<td>Discussions (5 @ 15 pts.)</td>
<td>440.1; 440.3; 440.4; 440.12</td>
<td>(75)</td>
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<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
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### COURSE GRADE

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<td>A-</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>480-503</td>
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<td>462-479</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<td>D-</td>
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# COURSE SCHEDULE

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 24-30</td>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
<td>“Start Here” link on the website</td>
<td>Set up computer for course structure</td>
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<td>Add avatar to your profile in WebCampus (extra credit)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 31-Sep 6</td>
<td>Course Introduction and Overview</td>
<td>Dudley, Ch. 1 and 2</td>
<td>Submit topic for paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 7-13</td>
<td>Ethics, IRB and Using Research for Evidence-Based Practice</td>
<td>Dudley, Ch. 3</td>
<td>Complete CITI training and turn in form</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Online reading: How well does technology solve social problems?</td>
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<td>Discussion 1: Responses to CITI training</td>
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<td>Sep 14-20</td>
<td>Writing a Focused Literature Review</td>
<td>Dudley, Ch. 4 and 15</td>
<td>Journal Article Exercise 1</td>
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<td>Discussion 2: Issues and questions related to the literature review</td>
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<td>Sep 21-27</td>
<td>Logic of the Research Process</td>
<td>Dudley, Ch. 6</td>
<td>Journal Article Exercise 2</td>
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<td>Online reading: Fostering innovation to address social challenges</td>
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<td>Discussion 3: Role of science in addressing social problems</td>
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<td>Sep 28-Oct 4</td>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>Dudley, Ch. 7</td>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
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<td>Oct 5-11</td>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>Dudley, Ch. 8</td>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>Journal Article Exercise 3</td>
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<td>Oct 12-18</td>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td>Dudley, Ch. 5</td>
<td>Literature Review draft 1</td>
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<td>Journal Article Exercise 4</td>
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<td>Oct 19-25</td>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Dudley, Ch. 12</td>
<td>Journal Article Exercise 5</td>
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<td>Discussion 4: Issues related to offering incentives to participate in research</td>
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<td>Oct 26-Nov 1</td>
<td>Research Design: Correlational Research</td>
<td>Dudley, Ch. 9</td>
<td>Literature Review draft 2</td>
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<td>Journal Article Exercise 6</td>
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<td>Nov 2-8</td>
<td>Research Design: Experimental Research</td>
<td>Dudley, Ch. 11 and 13</td>
<td>Journal Article Exercise 7</td>
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<td>Discussion 5: Misleading media reports of scientific discoveries</td>
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<td>Nov 9-15</td>
<td>Research Design: Qualitative Research</td>
<td>Dudley, Ch. 10 and 14</td>
<td>Administrative Data Assignment (extra-credit)</td>
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<td>Nov 16-22</td>
<td>Research Design: Evaluation Research</td>
<td>Dudley, Ch. 16</td>
<td>Completed Literature Review</td>
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<td>Week</td>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Nov 23-29</td>
<td>Happy Thanksgiving</td>
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<td>Nov 30-Dec 6</td>
<td>Wrap-up</td>
<td>Revision of papers</td>
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<td>Complete course evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Dec 7-13</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td>Final Exam</td>
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Focused Literature Review
Assignment Instructions

This semester you will develop Part I of a two-part assignment that you will complete next semester in SW 641.

- This semester you will draft a focused literature review of a current issue that applies to an identified client base in a specific practice setting. For example, you might do a literature search on elder suicide (issue), in the context of finding information to use with older adults (client base), who are served by Washoe County Senior Services (practice setting).

- Next semester you will use the focused literature review that you completed this semester to create a problem statement, hypotheses and research questions and plan for data collection and analysis.

Purpose of the assignment: After you graduate, you will most likely work with clients in your role as a social worker. As a professional working with clients, you will face emerging and controversial issues that were not addressed in your educational training. As part of your work role, you will be expected to have the skills to find and analyze the information you need to address new issues and concerns, as they arise. You will use the information to: 1) develop strategies to deal with the issue, 2) apply for funding to support issue-based programs, 3) present information to your professional colleagues that will convince them that your approach is legitimate and effective, 4) influence policy makers. As a professional, you also will work collectively with your colleagues to investigate and address emerging issues at the community, state, national, and global levels of practice. This assignment is designed to give you practice in developing some of the skills that you will need in these future professional roles.

Process for the assignment: The focused literature review will be completed in a series of steps over the course of the semester.

- First you will select a focused and researchable topic that has implications for practice. You will research a particular issue in the context of an identified client base and practice setting.
- Next, you will learn how to search the literature for key information and then prepare an annotated bibliography related to your topic.
- In the third step, you will learn how to retrieve and organize all of the literature that you plan to use for your paper.
- In the fourth step, you will learn how to create a structure and framework for analyzing what you have found and reporting your findings.
- In the fifth step, you will draft your paper.
- In the sixth step, you will learn how to use a quality circle to exchange feedback that will help all students in the class refine and revise their papers.
- The final step will be to use your analysis to identify implications for practice and create practice-related recommendations that are evidence-based.

Content of the paper: The following elements of the paper will help you to analyze your issue in depth. Use the following outline as a general guideline to help you identify and think through the information that you need to really understand the issue. Depending on the nature of your issue, you will need to spend more time on some aspects of the content and less on others. However, each of these sections must be addressed.
1. **Brief summary of the issue and its historical context; including trends and statistics**

2. **Comparison of media coverage of the issue with the empirical literature**
   Who is doing research and where is most of it being done? What are the latest scientific and technological innovations related to the issue and how are they being reported in the mass media vs. the literature? What aspects of the issue are the current ‘hot topics’ in the press and in the literature? What is the latest “best evidence” related to your issue?

3. **Analysis of the most pressing social, political, legal, economic, ethical and technological implications for practice:**
   - **Social**…examine the social, emotional, psychological implications of the issue for clients; adequacy of professional training to address the issue; existing social policy and the need for change
   - **Political**…explain where the parties stand on the issue, the (in)accuracy of political claims, lobbying efforts, use of scare tactics in the media to promote a political agenda, and examine who stands to gain/lose from a particular political agenda
   - **Legal**…assess the clients’ legal status and identify any protections are in place, as well as those that still need to be addressed
   - **Economic**…examine the financial costs of the issue to society, including the cost to taxpayers, the impact on worker productivity and implications for individual and family financial well-being
   - **Ethical**…identify any injustices or intentional and unintentional harm to others, including favoritism, criminal and unethical behavior and/or oppression of vulnerable populations
   - **Technological**… Science and technology drastically change our means of communication, the way we work, our housing, clothes, and food, our methods of transportation, and even the length and quality of our lives. The influence of science and technology is so all-encompassing that it ultimately changes our culture…how we live and what we believe. Rapid innovations in science and technology are exciting because they help improve human conditions and make life better, but they also can have unintended and unforeseen consequences that create new societal problems (e.g., issues related to genetic engineering). Consequently, there is a great deal of public mistrust and fear of science and technology that is due, in part, to misinformation and lack of understanding, inaccurate or biased media coverage, uneven distribution of the costs and benefits of science among different sub-groups in society, lack of public control over the application of science and technology, and the inability of some scientists to explain their innovations in plain language that the average person can understand.

   In addressing the technological perspective, please assess how advances in science and technology may have contributed to: 1) the emergence of the issue, 2) how the issue is identified, defined and treated, 3) how resources are allocated within systems and 4) any ethical issues associated with serving your client population.
4. **Summary of federal and state responses to the issue:**
   - What are other International industrialized countries doing/not doing about the issue (is the issue more/less prevalent or given the same attention in the U.S. compared to other countries?).
   - **Federal** response to the issue (what legislation/policy/programming is in place? What is being proposed? By whom?)
   - Where the states stand on the issue (which states stand out in terms of this issue? what legislation/policy/programming already is in place in Nevada? What is being proposed? By whom?)
   - Any **local** grassroots efforts? (who is getting involved? Why? What is going on at the local level?)

5. **Implications for practice with your targeted clients**
   This is where you analyze how you could use the research-based evidence that you have gathered to benefit clients in the practice setting. For example:
   - What did you learn from your review that would influence what you choose to do in practice?
   - How might you use the information to directly help clients?
   - How might you use the information to advocate for clients?
   - How might you use the information to gain peer and community support for a program or project?
   - How might you use the information to influence policy?

6. **Conclusions and recommendations**
   This is where you bring it all together with final statements that capture the core message that you want the reader to take away after reading the paper. Where are we on the issue? Where do you suggest we go next?

7. **Reference List**
   The reference list includes only the sources that are cited in the paper. It is not a bibliography (which is everything that you read on the topic).

8. **Appendix**
   Provide a list of reliable sources of information on the issue (e.g., government websites; organizations; etc.). These are places that the reader could go to get updated information on the issue in the future.

*Format of the Paper.* You will follow the guidelines from APA 6th edition to format your paper. Handouts, examples and exercises will be given in class to help you learn how to use APA. Make sure that you use headings and subheadings that follow the structure outlined above under "Content of the paper."
BIBLIOGRAPHY


