Research Methods, CJ 5321/7321, Spring 2012

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Office Hours: Thurs 5:00-6:00pm or by appt.

Course Description/Objectives

This course reviews/introduces methods for research design and data collection in criminology and criminal justice. Topics covered are intended to enhance student's abilities to be sound consumers of research, and to provide students with the tools needed to successfully conduct basic research in the areas of crime and justice. It introduces students to the methods used to conduct criminological and criminal justice research, exposes them to some classic research, and instructs them how to read and think critically about research monographs.

Required Texts


Highly Recommended Software

Student version of SPSS. ANY VERSION WILL DO. If you want to purchase your own version, it is available for about $200 online. Or, some online stores lease it for 6 months for about $46. For example:  

SPSS is installed on all machines in the data labs as well.

Recommended Readings


Additional readings may be required and will be available either online at Blackboard or in the library in a variety of journals. I may assign other material as the semester progresses and/or I may alter the reading schedule (presented below) so be prepared to be flexible.

**Other classic books/articles of interest**


Lab Space and Usage

Your paper will require you to use SPSS or PASW software. As mentioned above, you may wish to purchase this (or you may have access already). If you don’t wish to purchase it and do not have access at work or home, you can use computers at the university that have this software. For example, you can use the Lab machines in the SPA suite (Lawrence Street Building, suite 500). The lab is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You will need to get authorization for after hours by going to the front desk in (again, suite 500) and obtaining the form from Gabrielle Makray. Once completed, she will process the form. I’ve no idea how long it may take so do this with plenty of time before you think you’ll need it.

Your login information for the lab computers is the same as the logon to the student e-mail. PLEASE NOTE that the system sometimes does not synch right and UCD personnel have to ‘activate’ your account again. If a student does have problems they can ‘activate’ their account using this link:

https://web.cudenver.edu/prfw/chpass.cgi?mode=ACT

If you have activation issues, you may also contact Rob Drouillard, our I.T. Coordinator in The School of Public Affairs at: Rob.Drouillard@ucdenver.edu, Office- 303-315-2211 or Cell- 303-249-6816. DO NOT CALL HIM FOR ISSUES ON HOW TO USE THE SOFTWARE.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation is a must. You are expected to read the assigned readings before you come to class so you can discuss your thoughts/questions regarding them. In addition, take advantage of class time to work through issues on your class project.

Thought Papers. (together these count toward 25% of your final grade). Several “thought” papers are required in this class. These papers are to be about five to seven pages in length, typed, double-spaced, 12 point font, with standard margins. The purpose of these papers is to demonstrate your comprehension of the material and your ability to apply it at the level expected for a student in graduate school. Failing to turn in any thought paper will result in a zero for this portion of your grade. All papers must be typed and double-spaced using 12-pt font. No paper may be emailed to me. NO LATE PAPERS ARE ACCEPTED.

Paper 1 covers phase 1. (25% of your final grade) This is the first half of your final paper. This formal, graduate level paper should take the form of a detailed research proposal. The Patten book Proposing Empirical Research will be very useful for this phase of your paper. The finished paper should include the following sections at a minimum: Introduction, Literature Review, Theory (if relevant), Sample, Instrumentation, & Procedures.
Be sure to clearly identify what it is you are investigating (i.e., the research question) and why this is an important topic for study. Given you will need to complete a capstone project, you may want to focus on that topic for your paper. The paper should identify all concepts related to your specific research project. For example, if you are investigating concepts such as ‘happiness’ ‘depression’ and ‘intelligence’, your paper will need to identify these concepts clearly. Describe and illustrate the associated and/or causal processes - - that is how the concepts are related? Using an illustration is required as a portion of this section. Be sure to describe how you propose to operationalize each of these concepts. And identify how the variable used will be measured. In the case of this project, you will use survey questions to measure these variables. Thus, you must describe the questions you’ve designed for inclusion on your survey instrument. This includes clearly defining the response categories and related properties of these response categories. This includes a discussion of the levels of measurement used plus justification for them. Discuss the validity and reliability of your items. The portion of the paper should present a publishable table of all variables (with coding information) as an Appendix.

An additional portion of this paper is the requirement to attach your completed survey instrument. This instrument should be presented as Appendix B. Lecture in conjunction with the Patten book Questionnaire Research: A Practical Guide will be very useful for the creation of your instrument. The survey instrument should demonstrate that you have read and applied the materials we’ve covered in class as well as outside resources focusing on good instrument construction (e.g., surveys should have an introduction, be aesthetically pleasing, appropriate length, well-worded questions, appropriate response categories, etc.). Each instrument should include at least ten closed ended questions, four open ended questions and relevant demographic questions. Please note that these instruments will NOT be graded or corrected by me. If your instrument is fouled up, you will get fouled up data making Phase II more challenging. As in real life, one does not get a second chance to administer a survey so it is up to you to ensure your instrument is complete. The best way to do this is to use a pre-test of the instrument on some friends, classmates or family members.

**DO NOT USE THE PROGRAMS AVAILABLE ON THE WEB TO GENERATE SURVEY INSTRUMENTS. ANY COMPUTER GENERATED INSTRUMENT WILL NOT BE FIELDED MEANING YOU WILL GET A ZERO ON PHASE 2. DO YOUR OWN WORK!!!!**

Paper 2 covers phase 2. (25% of your final grade). This phase requires that the student make at least 20 copies of their instrument and administer them to appropriate respondents. In addition, you need to provide me with two copies of the survey that I will fill out and return to you. During administration, you will need to convey the directions of the survey, that it is confidential (or anonymous, whichever is the case), that it is voluntary, etc. You will need to develop a code sheet for the instrument. When you receive your 20+ completed instruments, you must code each instrument, clean the data, and enter the data into SPSS. The report for this phase begins where phase 1 ended. It is in essence the beginning of detailed “Results/Findings Section” in an empirical report. You need to discuss the findings, a discussion and your conclusions. Be sure to describe coding decisions, issues encountered with the instruments and data, and solutions you implemented to these problems. In addition, each student should discuss what they would do
differently if they could adjust the instruments. In the findings section, you will need to calculate ALL appropriate descriptive statistics for each survey item. The paper should present a publishable table of descriptives for the variables used. Findings should describe these descriptives fully. Be sure to include limitations of your study in your paper. Lecture in conjunction with the Pyrczak & Bruce text *Writing Empirical Research Reports: A Basic Guide for Students of the Social and Behavioral Sciences, 6th ed* should prove useful for this section of your paper.

The product turned in for this portion includes all completed surveys, code sheet, and Part II of the paper (including tables and references).

Exam. (25% of your final grade). The only exam which covers all material in the course will be given on the last day of class (Monday, May 7th).

**Papers/Assignments**

Your assignment(s) are due the moment you walk into class on the day they are due. If you have some sort of conflict, see me well before the assignment is due. You may turn in your papers/assignments early. I do not read papers or assignments prior to the due date in order to give you feedback. **LATE PAPERS ARE NEVER ACCEPTED.**

**Missing exams**

You will not miss the exam for any reason that you have not cleared with me at least 2 weeks prior to the scheduled exam date. Failure to do this will earn you a zero on the exam. Make up exams will be given at my convenience and will be 100% essay.

**Course Grade Scale**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>100 point scale:</th>
<th>87-89 B+</th>
<th>77-79 C+</th>
<th>67-69 D+</th>
<th>59 or less F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93-+ A</td>
<td>83-86 B</td>
<td>73-76 C</td>
<td>63-66 D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-92 A-</td>
<td>80-82 B-</td>
<td>70-72 C-</td>
<td>60-62 D-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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**MISCELLANEOUS**

**BlackBoard**

If I have information to pass on to you (i.e., location of a particular article, change in class location, cancellation of class), I will inform you via email on BlackBoard.
Attendance

I do not take attendance. If you do miss class you do not need to call me when you are not coming to class, nor do you need to bring me a doctor’s notes or other documentation to miss a regular (i.e., test day being a major exception) class. Though I don’t take role, please note that missing class is not a good idea. It is clear that students who exhibit poor attendance do poorly at best. Further, if you miss class, I cannot offer a one-on-one lecture to cover what you missed. Be sure to make a buddy who can fill you in on the missed material.

Dropping the Course

Please refer to University requirements regarding drop days and policies. IF YOU ARE ON THE CLASS ROLL AT THE END OF THE SEMESTER, YOU WILL BE GIVEN A GRADE.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Disability Access Services Office as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are arranged in a timely fashion.

Academic Honesty

Cheating/Plagiarism is simply not tolerated. If you have questions about what plagiarism does and does not constitute, please see me and we can discuss it. It is better to ask and be certain than it is to suffer the severe consequences of this activity. Should an assignment be plagiarized, you will be awarded a zero for that assignment, and you will be referred to the appropriate University authorities.

OVERALL PHILOSOPHY

"Life is like a monkey, it just keeps flinging poo at you."

The trick is to keep going even when you’ve been hit.
I am a stickler regarding personal responsibility. I will not hound you for assignments, nor will I remind you of things for which you are responsible. I do not "give out" grades - you earn them. I don’t review for exams – that is what the entire semester is all about. This means that when a grade is earned by you, I will not change it.

Course Calendar

Jan 23  Syllabus/ Assigning/selecting research topics
        Where are the readings located?
        How do I get the most out of these readings?
        What do I expect to get out of this class?
        What is a peer-reviewed academic journal article?
        What are the expectations of graduate school-level writing?
        Graduate school and expectations.

Jan 30  Best’s Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians, and Activists.


Thought Paper 1 is due

Feb 6  M&B, Ch 1, Crime, Criminal Justice, and Scientific Inquiry
        M&B, Ch 2, Theory and Criminal Justice Research

Thought Paper 2 is due

Feb 13  M&B, Ch 3, Ethics and Criminal Justice Research

Thought Paper 3 is due

Feb 20  M&B, Ch 4, General Issues in Research Design

Feb 27  No Class. In DC at the National Academies
March 5  M&B, Ch 5, Concepts, Operationalization, and Measurement

**Thought Paper 4 is due**

M&B, Ch 6, Measuring Crime


March 12  ACJS Annual Meetings – No class

March 19  Spring Break

March 26  M&B, Ch 8, Sampling

**Thought Paper 5 is due**

April 2  M&B, Ch 9, Survey Research and Other Ways of Asking Questions

**Phase 1 paper due**

April 9  Lecture on how to deal with your surveys – coding, cleaning, entering into SPSS

*2 copies of your survey instruments are due to me – I will be filling them out and returning them to you so be prepared to code and clean them.*

April 16  M&B, Ch 7, Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs


M&B, Ch 10, Field Research


M&B, Ch 11, Agency Records, Content Analysis, and Secondary Data
Cobbina (2008) “Race and Class Differences in Print Media Portrayals of Crack Cocaine and Methamphetamine”.

April 23  M&B, Ch 13, Interpreting Data

M&B, Ch 12, Evaluation Research and Policy Analysis

April 30  Phase 2 paper due

May 7  Last day of class: The Exam