

RESEARCH METHODS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE
POLS 3700
Fall 2016
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Objectives

This course will focus on the basic methods used in empirical social science research in criminology and criminal justice. Empirical analyses are based on observation, requiring one to study something as it is, rather than how it should be. Whereas some research focuses on discovering and reporting descriptions of phenomena, most social scientists are interested in explanatory or causal analyses. In this course, the student will learn how to conduct social science research while developing skills to evaluate existing research.

In part I of this course, students will be introduced to the scientific process used in criminological research. After considering the strengths and limits of social science in evaluating phenomena, students will learn how to formulate questions appropriate for research with special attention to ethical concerns. Students will also develop an understanding of the role of theory and the relationship between conceptualization and measurement. The first part of the course will cover the basics of sampling. And, students will also be introduced to statistical software (SPSS) and techniques for univariate and bivariate data analyses.

In part II of this course, students will develop an understanding of the principles of research design associated with the testing of causal hypotheses. This section includes learning the elements of experimental designs and how to distinguish studies that employ non-experimental or quasi-experimental designs. After developing an understanding of the various research designs, students will learn how to conduct a survey, field research, and content analysis. Students will also be introduced to evaluation research and using secondary data. In this part of the course, students will learn how to conduct data analysis to test causal hypotheses, including those that require attention to control variables. By the end of the course, students will be well-positioned to design their own study, conduct an original data analysis, and write up the results.

Required Reading

Bachmann, Ronet and Russell K. Schutt. 2016-17. *The Practice of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice*. 6th ed. (Sage Publications). There is a very helpful web site associated with this text (the web address is on the inside cover of your text)

This course will also require that you learn how to use a statistical software program, SPSS, available for free through EITS' "VLAB". (SPSS is also available for purchase or lease through various web sites; if you purchase or lease it yourself, you are able to download the software for personalized use)

Requirements and Grading

Exams (40%) You will have two exams, each worth 20%, at the conclusion of each “part” of the class (for part 2, this exam will take place during the final exam period). The exams will consist of short answer and essay questions. Students with medical emergencies may schedule a make-up exam (the questions will be different from the test given to the class); however, you will need to provide documentation that you were ill on that date. ***The first exam is tentatively scheduled for October 3rd***

Class participation and “no-notice” quizzes (25%). All students should be prepared to discuss the assigned material. In addition, students will be asked to participate in class on problems designed to apply skills. Your participation in class will count towards 10% of your course grade. Obviously, you must be in class in order to participate. One letter grade will be deducted for every three classes that you miss (not counting excused, documented absences for reasons of illness). I will also be giving four “pop” quizzes over the course of the semester. Collectively, they are worth 15%. They will be straightforward assessments of whether you have read the material for that class day. I will drop the lowest quiz grade (keeping three quiz grades, each worth 5%).

Paper Assignment 1:

Identifying and evaluating scholarly research (15% of your course grade). For this assignment, you will identify a social science research question related to criminal justice/criminology and write a literature review on that question. You should read p. 34-41 of your text closely for guidance on this assignment. The literature review does not simply chronicle/summarize what other researchers have found. It is also analytical: you will compare and contrast existing research, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of existing studies. A well-written literature review provides the reader with a collective sense of what others have found on the research question and how they have conducted that research. It is NOT an annotated bibliography—you should discuss the relevant literature in a way that relates each study cited to one another—and your own research question. Your review must cite/discuss 4-6 scholarly studies. You should follow a method of social science citation for this paper and include a reference list. **You must submit your reference list to me (in proper citation form) for feedback by September 19th. You will submit an electronic AND paper copy of your literature review on October 19th.** *In your electronic submission, you must also include pdf (or word) files of all scholarly articles.*

Paper Assignment 2: Data Analysis (20% of your course grade). For this assignment, you will formulate a hypothesis related to a research question in criminal justice (you can use the same research question as that used for your literature review, or you can pursue a different research question). You will generate your own dataset (in SPSS), using “imagined” observations (a minimum of 50 observations) that can be used to test your hypothesis (this will require that you advance measures of an independent variable, dependent variable, and control variable). You will then use these “data” in a multivariate analysis and write up the results of your analysis. You’ll find more detail on this paper assignment, including due dates, at the end of this syllabus.

Academic honesty. All students are responsible for maintaining the highest standards of honesty and integrity in every phase of their academic careers. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe and ignorance is not an acceptable defense. All academic work for this course must meet the standards contained in "A Culture of Honesty." Students are responsible for informing

themselves about those standards before performing any academic work. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe, and ignorance is not an acceptable defense. The University library has a terrific web site re: plagiarism with several resources that students should consult when writing this paper (or any paper).

The following is a TENTATIVE schedule:

Part I

August 12th and August 15th

Science, Society, and Research, Bachman and Schutt, Ch. 1

August 17th

The process of research, Bachman and Schutt, p. 41-51

August 19th

Introduction to SPSS and Datasets – Bachman and Schutt text appendix C, read through p. 1-2; 6-8

August 22nd

Introduction to data analysis, Bachman and Schutt p. 375-388;

August 24th

Data analysis, continued, Bachman and Schutt p. 388-398; appendix C, p. 3-6

August 26th

Ethics: Bachmann and Schutt, Ch. 3

August 29th

Concepts and Measures, Bachnman and Schutt p. 86-97

August 31st, September 2nd

(Depending on when the library session is scheduled, this reading assignment is subject to change)

Concepts and measures continued, p. 98-104

(September 5th – Labor Day)

September 7th

Measurement validity and reliability 104-110

September 9th /September 12th (again, depends on scheduling of library session)

Univariate data analysis (practice exercises)

September 14th

Sampling p. 115-130

Sept. 16th

Sampling p. 131-137

September 19th

Sampling, statistical inference p. 137-142

Sept. 21st

Introduction to bivariate analysis for dichotomous, categorical variables – cross tabulations: p. 398-402 ; Appendix C: p. 8-9

Sept. 23rd

out of class lab exercise: data analysis (cross tabulations)

September 26th

Introduction to bivariate analysis for continuous variables – comparing means (Appendix C: p. 10-11) and regression/correlation p. 407-409

September 28th

Lab exercise: data analysis – bivariate analysis

September 30th

Lab practice/review

October 3rd – first exam

The schedule of readings for part II of this course will be distributed via ELC at a later date.

Data analysis paper:

This paper will include a brief discussion of the research question to be addressed, the hypotheses tested, an explanation of the observation strategy, a listing and discussion of the measures used for your variables, information on the method of data analysis, and a write-up of the results (including inferential statistics). This paper is submitted in two stages. The dataset and draft tables/SPSS output are submitted electronically on **November 28th**. The data analysis paper, including your final tables, will be submitted hard copy on the last day of class, **December 5th**.

You will generate your own dataset (in SPSS), using “made up” observations to test your hypothesis. Your paper should describe the “imagined” observation strategy—including a probability sampling design (so that you can use statistical inference). This step will require that you provide operational definitions of your independent (IV) and dependent variables (DV)—in short, how are they measured? You should have a minimum of 50 observations in your SPSS dataset. The dataset should consist of the IV, DV, and any “third variables (a minimum of one 3rd/control variable should be included in your analysis). Before you do your multivariable analysis, make sure that you start with the bivariate analysis and then compare those findings with those from the multivariate analysis.

You will test your hypothesis with these data, using appropriate methods of data analysis (in SPSS). If your variables are measured categorically, you may use cross tabulations. If they are continuous, then you should use regression analysis. I have pasted below a template that I will use to evaluate your paper.

- a. How well did the paper identify and discuss the research question? Does the data analysis address this research question? Does the paper advance an empirically testable hypothesis?

- b. How well did the paper identify and discuss the observation strategy (although “imagined,” you need to describe how your observations were collected...for example,”I identified respondents through a sampling design where 100 students were randomly selected from a list provided by the University of Georgia registrar’s office that contained all undergraduates enrolled in 2012. I contacted each respondent and requested that they fill out an on-line questionnaire.....”
- c. How well did the paper identify and discuss variables and their measures? Here is where you would describe, for example, the items in the questionnaire given to the undergraduates (using the illustration above) and how these are used to construct the dependent and independent variables.
- d. Did the paper’s discussion of findings demonstrate knowledge of data analysis? Are tables and tests properly interpreted?
- e. Your output/tables should include the following:
---frequency distribution(s)
--bivariate analysis (independent variable of interest and dependent variable)
--multivariate analysis (adds a control variable)
--appropriate statistical tests
- f. Your dataset should include the following:

--clear labels for variables of interest

--minimum of 50 observations and a minimum of 3 variables
- g. How well was the paper written? (i.e. attention to grammar, clear writing style)