

RESEARCH METHODS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE
POLS 3700
Fall 2019
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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 and content analysis. 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. 2020. *The Practice of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice*. 7th ed. (Sage Publications). There is a very helpful web site associated with this text: edge.sagepub.com/bachmanprccj73

Additional readings uploaded to ELC.

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. 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 September 30th. The second exam (that covers part II of this course) will be on Monday, December 9th at 9-11am (during the final exam period).***

Class participation (10%). Attendance counts for half of your participation grade. All students should be prepared to discuss the assigned material. You may miss one class before I start “the clock.” Ten points will be deducted from your attendance grade for every additional two classes that you miss (not counting excused, documented absences for reasons of illness). In addition, students will be asked to participate in class and out of class on problems designed to apply skills. I will not grade these “exercises” but completion of them count for half of your participation grade.

Quizzes (10%) I will also be giving three “no-notice” quizzes over the course of the semester. Collectively, they are worth 10%. They will be straightforward assessments of whether you have read the material for that class day and/or the previous class meeting. I will drop the lowest quiz grade (keeping two quiz grades, each worth 5%). If you miss a quiz for nonattendance (no makeups), you will be given a “0” so that will be the quiz grade that you drop.

Paper Assignment (1): writing a lit review (20%): There are two steps to this assignment. The first step (see below) is due **September 16th**; the second step must be completed by **October 21st**.

For this assignment, you will identify a social science research question related to criminal justice/criminology and write a literature review on that question. 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 that have been published in peer-reviewed journals with at least three that represent “original” social science research. Original studies are those where the author(s) have conducted their own data analysis. You should follow a method of social science citation (APA or MLA) for this paper and include a reference list. It is appropriate to quote and cite; it is considered to be plagiarism and a violation of UGA’s academic honesty policy if you “borrow” text without attributing the writer/scholar. For more information on plagiarism and other prohibited conduct, <https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/>

Reading a research study is not easy. Our class is designed to give you the tools for reading through these; nevertheless, it often takes patience and practice. For more guidance on how to read a research article, go the text web site, under student resources, scroll down to “appendices” and open the pdf file. These are also published in the back of your text.

Step (a): Formulating a research question and putting together a reference list of scholarly social science research that relates to that question. *For guidance on identifying scholarly sources, read our text (Bachman and Schutt), p. 32-34.* Our class will have a session with a reference librarian on August 28th. In addition to being an invaluable resource, Ms. White can provide some tips on how to locate scholarly research for your review. She can also help you sort out whether a study is scholarly within the meaning of social science research. Once you have identified a possible scholarly source to include, you should read through it to make sure that it is one that will be appropriate to review (sometimes titles and abstracts are misleading). Your references hang together in terms of the topic/question. You must submit your reference list to me (in proper full APA or MLA citation form) for feedback by **September 16th**.

The list submitted on September 16th is binding. Your list should include a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 8 scholarly, peer-reviewed studies (you may end up only discussing four but this list must have at least six). You can take studies off of that list, but you cannot add to that list. If you fail to submit a reference list on September 16th, I will automatically deduct 10 points off of this assignment grade.

Step (b): You will submit an electronic AND paper copy of your literature review on **October 21st**

The purpose of this paper is to summarize, synthesize, and integrate the scholarship on a research question. *You should read closely your text (Bachman and Schutt), p. 34-40*

When you write an original research paper (including those that are published in peer reviewed journals), the first few pages consist of the lit review. For an illustration, look at p. 502-506 of an article by Lu, Yu, Ren, and Marshall.

Remember, your review should discuss between 4-6 peer-reviewed scholarly studies. These are not annotated bibliographies; instead, your review should give the reader a collective sense of the scholarly literature.

Paper Assignment(2): data analysis and writing up results (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 second 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." <https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/> 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 14th and August 16th

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

August 19th

The process of research, Bachman and Schutt, p. 26-42

August 21st

The process of research continued, Bachman and Schutt, chapter 2, remainder

August 23rd

SPSS – introduction

Appendix C at the text web site – “How to use a statistical package” read the first five pages and the last four pages.

(We will be using the SPSS datasets at the text web site, including a subset of the General Social Survey (GSS). You may want to become more familiar with the GSS at <https://gss.norc.org/>)

August 26th

SPSS – frequency distributions and recoding: appendix C – the first eight pages

August 28th

Session with reference librarian, Ms. Elizabeth White (in our classroom)

Bachman and Schutt, p. 32-34

August 30th

Out of class assignment (be prepared to briefly discuss this at the start of class on Wednesday, September 4th):

Watch-listen to learn about the Stanford Prison experiment.

<https://www.prisonexp.org/the-story>

Did Dr. Zimbardo's study harm the participants? (explain) What did he do to minimize harm to the subjects? What more could he have done to protect them?

Reading: Bachman and Schutt p. 59-74

September 2nd

No class – Labor Day

September 4th

Review Stanford Prison Experiment

Ethics, Bachman and Schutt, Ch. 3, remainder

September 6th

Concepts and Measures, Bachman and Schutt, p. 85-104

September 9th

Measurement validity and reliability, Bachman and Schutt, chapter 4, remainder

September 11th

SPSS measurement exercise

September 13th

Sampling, Bachman and Schutt, p. 117-130

September 16th

Sampling, Bachman and Schutt, chapter 5, remainder

List of references for lit review paper assignment is due (see syllabus for details)

September 18th and 20th

Cross tabulations in SPSS, review appendix C; additional materials/readings will be available on ELC

Sept. 23rd

Causation p. 150-158

September 25th & 27th

Multivariate Cross tabulations and causation

September 30th – first exam

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

Data analysis and writing up results:

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 25th.** The data analysis paper, including your final tables, **will be submitted hard copy on the last day of class, December 4th**

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. All work submitted for this assignment must be your own. I am available via email to answer any questions that you may have. If you receive any outside assistance on this assignment, it is considered to be a violation of

<https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/>

- 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 (*submitted as a PDF file*) 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 (*submitted as an SPSS data file: sav extension*) 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)