

RESEARCH METHODS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE
POLS 3700
Spring 2022

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Office Hours:
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Important Dates:

MLK Day, Jan. 17 (no class)

Spring Break: Mar. 7, 9, 11

Last day to withdraw: Mar. 24

Last day of class: May 3rd

Final exam (test 4): Friday, May 6th: 12:00pm (other test dates and assignment deadlines will be announced in class)

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. By the end of this course, students will be able to conduct their own social science research and possess skills for evaluating existing scholarship.

In part I of this course, students will be introduced to the scientific process used in criminological research. After considering the strengths and limitations 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 obtaining an understanding of the various research designs, students will learn how to develop a survey and use content analysis. In this part of the course, students will also perform

data analyses and 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/bachmanprccj7e
Additional readings and materials will be 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". More information on what you need to do to download/access VLAB / SPSS: <https://eits.uga.edu/support/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

Tests (50%) You will have four tests, the first two are each worth 10%; the second two are each worth 15%. While all exams are "timed" and take place during the class period, two of the four exams will be "open-book" and taken on-line whereas two will be "closed-book" and taken in-class. All exams will consist of short answer and essay questions. Students with medical emergencies may schedule a make-up test; however, you will need to provide documentation that you were ill on that date.

Class participation (10%). Attendance and participation counts for half of your participation grade. 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. I will not grade these "exercises" but completion of them count for half of your participation grade.

Given the interactive nature of this class, students should not miss more than four class sessions—this includes those that are missed due to illness or other emergency. If you experience a severe illness or you are dealing with a chronic sickness, please contact me and/or Student Care and Outreach: <https://sco.uga.edu/> via email so that we can work out an accommodation.

Paper Assignment (1): 15% of your course grade; there are multiple parts to this assignment that are graded together. This paper assignment requires that you:

formulate a research question related to criminal justice/criminology (due Feb. 16th),
generate a list of eight peer-reviewed, original research studies on that question (due Feb. 16th)

and select one of those studies to write an article critique (due Mar. 16th).

You should follow a method of social science citation (APA or MLA) for this reference list and article critique. 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.

For guidance on identifying scholarly sources (original research), you should read our text (Bachman and Schutt), p. 32-34. Our class will also include a session with a reference librarian. In addition to being an invaluable resource, the reference librarian can provide some tips on how to locate scholarly research for your review. 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 should hang together in terms of the topic/question. You must submit your research question and reference list to me (in proper full APA or MLA citation form), noting which article you intend to critique by February 16th. Your list should include a minimum of 8 scholarly, original, peer-reviewed studies, one of which will be the article that you critique.

Article critique (due March 16th) The purpose of this paper is to summarize and evaluate a piece of published research. What was the research question addressed in the article? What theoretical perspectives were utilized? What were the authors' hypotheses? What was the observation strategy? How did the authors measure key concepts? What did they find? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these research design choices?

Paper Assignment(2): due April 22nd (dataset and draft tables) and May 3rd (final tables and write up)

Data analysis and Write up (25% of your course grade).

For this last assignment, you will test a hypothesis related to a research question in criminal justice (you can use the same research question as that used for paper assignment 1, 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/](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 paper assignments for this class.

Disability

If you plan to request accommodations for any disability, please register with the Disability Resource Center. <https://drc.uga.edu>

Health and Safety

As you learn more about the role of science from this class, you'll better understand why public health depends on our following practices based on scientific knowledge. As you'll also learn in this class-- scientific knowledge is always tentative, subject to modification as more research is conducted. The practices below are supported by current scientific evidence... although, in matters related to COVID 19 and criminal justice, predictions based on scientific knowledge will still be probabilistic.

Face coverings. I will be wearing one and I strongly, strongly encourage you to wear an appropriate face covering while inside our classroom, especially while our case rate is so high.

Vaccines for COVID-19.

The best way to avoid becoming seriously ill from COVID is to be vaccinated. UHC is scheduling appointments for students through the patient portal. You may also make arrangements at no cost to you to receive the vaccine from the Georgia Dept of Health, pharmacy chains, and local providers.

<https://georgia.gov/covid-vaccine>.

Keep it clean.

On your way into your classroom take a wipe from the sanitation bucket-on-a-stick to wipe down all high-touch surfaces, including the laptops.

Students who are demonstrating symptoms of COVID-19 should call the University Health Center. UHC is offering testing by appointment for students; appointments may be booked by calling 706-542-1162.

UGA is also conducting surveillance, asymptomatic testing; you can sign up at the UHC portal.

You are expected to report a positive COVID test on Dawg Check:

<https://dawgcheck.uga.edu/>

In the event of a positive COVID test, you should consult public health resources to find out how long to quarantine/self-isolate:

<https://coronavirus.uga.edu>

<https://healthcenter.uga.edu/healthtopics/coronavirus/>

The following is a TENTATIVE schedule through the first week of February.

January 10th – Introduction
Science, Society, and Research, Bachman and Schutt, ch. 1;

January 12th and January 14th

Learning how to navigate through VLAB and SPSS (out of class)

Unless you decided to purchase SPSS to install on your computer, you will need VLAB to get access to SPSS on your home computer/laptop. If you have not used VLAB before, you should read carefully through this web site to familiarize yourself with what VLAB does/provides. In order to use VLAB, you'll need to install some software (citrix) as part of the setup. Leave yourself some time to sort out any technical glitches...I can help with some issues, but you'll find EITS to be extremely helpful if you run into problems getting VLAB to work on your machine.

Once you are "in" VLAB, it will appear to look like a desktop (remember it is not really your desktop; it is simulating one). You should click on the windows in the left corner to pull up everything that is available to you. Click on IBM SPSS...a folder will open and then you should click on IBM SPSS 27

At that point, you'll be able to follow along with the youtube tutorials (links below) that will introduce you to the SPSS workspace. For this session, you should watch the first

two youtube videos...the second one is longer with more specific content that you will need.

Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PN-H8GikRQo&t=os>

Video 2: Follow along the 23 minute video below; you can stop watching at 20 minutes...as you follow along, you should produce the same SPSS dataset as instructed in video 2, including the instructions for how to save your dataset.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PN-H8GikRQo&t=os>

While you are in VLAB, you should open your email and email the dataset to me (cmshaire@uga.edu) as an attachment.

January 19th

-SPSS review of out of class work

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

January 21st

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

January 24th

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

We will be using the SPSS datasets at the text web site (see web address above under required reading).

One of the SPSS datasets used for this class is a subset of the General Social Survey. You may want to become more familiar with the GSS at <https://gss.norc.org/>

January 26th

January 28th

Session with reference librarian

Bachman and Schutt, p. 32-34

February 2nd

Watch-listen to learn about the Stanford Prison experiment.

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

Reading: Bachman and Schutt p. 59-74

February 4th

Ethics, Bachman and Schutt, Ch. 3, remainder
Review for test

February 7th

Test 1 – open book, on-line

Paper Assignment: data analysis and writing up results.

For this assignment, you will:

- a) -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).
- b) -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 at least one control variable).
- c) -use these “imagined data” in a multivariate analysis (also include univariate, bivariate analyses)
- d) -write up the results, including a conclusion discussing whether the hypothesis is supported and any limitations
- e) This paper is submitted in two stages.
- f) The dataset and draft tables/SPSS output are submitted electronically on April 22nd. On this date, you submit your SPSS dataset, output (generated in SPSS but saved as a word doc or PDF document), and draft tables.
- g) For your SPSS dataset submitted on April 22nd, 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).
- h) You will also be submitting your SPSS output/draft tables on April 22nd. Before you do your multivariable analysis, make sure that you start with the univariate analysis, then move to the bivariate analysis. (For the final paper, this will be

important because you will be comparing findings from the bivariate analysis with those from the multivariate analysis.)

- i) For your final paper, you will test your hypothesis with these data, using appropriate methods of data analysis (in SPSS). The level of measurement associated with your dependent variable, and independent variable(s) affect the choice of data analysis, including univariate analysis. Please refer back to those sections of the course where we talked about data analysis..and, follow up with me if you have any questions about whether to use a bar chart or histogram for the univariate analysis.
- j) In terms of the bivariate/multivariate analysis, if your variables are measured categorically (nominal or ordinal), you may use cross tabulations. If they are continuous (interval or ratio...although some ordinal variables that have many categories can be used), then you should use regression analysis.
- k) The data analysis paper, including your final tables, will be submitted on the last day of class, May 3rd. This paper will include a brief discussion of the research question and the hypotheses tested. It will also provide an explanation of the (imagined) observation strategy, including the sampling design, the way in which the observations were gathered (e.g. survey or content analysis). You will include a listing and discussion of the measures used for the independent variable(s), dependent variable (codebooks can be helpful here). The paper will also include information on the method of data analysis and then a write-up of the results.
- l) Below is a template used to evaluate your paper. All work submitted for this assignment must be your own. I am available to provide guidance to you; we will also set aside time in class for you to work on this. If you receive any outside assistance on this assignment, it is a violation of the

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?

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.....”

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.

Did the paper’s discussion of the tests of the hypotheses demonstrate knowledge of data analysis? Are tables and tests properly interpreted?

Did the analysis include?

---Univariate analysis: this may be a frequency distribution(s), appropriate measures of central tendency and variability; suggest using graphs where possible
--bivariate analysis (independent variable of interest and dependent variable)
--multivariate analysis (adds a control variable)
--appropriate statistical tests

Did the dataset (min of 50 observations and min of 3 variables) include clear labels?

Overall, how well was the paper written? (attention to grammar, clear writing style)