

RESEARCH METHODS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE
POLS 3700
Fall 2023

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Baldwin 272 and 180

Office Hours:
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Important Dates:

Labor Day holiday: Sept. 4th
Thanksgiving holiday: Nov. 22nd – 24th
Fall break: Oct. 27th
Last day to withdraw: Oct. 23rd
Last day of class: Dec. 5th (a Tuesday, but a “Friday” class)
Final exam (test 4): Wednesday, Dec. 13th: 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 the first part 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. In addition to a session with a reference librarian designed to facilitate student understanding of strategies for identifying scholarly research, students will also be introduced to statistical software (SPSS). The first test is tentatively scheduled for September 8th (closed book, in class)

In the second part of this course, students will learn how to develop concepts and valid, reliable measures. Our class will cover the basics of sampling. And, we will cover techniques for univariate and bivariate data analyses in SPSS. This part of the course will also introduce students to causation and how to use “third variables” in data analysis. The second test is tentatively scheduled for October 9th (open note, in class).

In the third part 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. Students will learn how to develop a survey and extend their understanding of data analyses with continuous variables. The third test is tentatively scheduled for November 6th (closed book, in class).

The final part of this course will introduce students to content analysis, comparative methods, and field research. In this part of the course, students will also perform multivariate data analyses, using linear regression. 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. The fourth test is scheduled on zoom during the final exam period (December 13th).

Required Reading

Bachmann, Ronet and Russell K. Schutt. 2024. *The Practice of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice*. 8th ed. (Sage Publications). There is a very helpful web site associated with this text: edge.sagepub.com/bachmanprccj8e
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 and access VLAB and SPSS can be found here:
<https://eits.uga.edu/support/vlab/>

At the time of this writing, VLAB was showing SPSS version 28 (although there is a newer version); we will use that version in class (on VLAB) unless/until EITS decides to move to another version.

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. Some students may find the convenience worth the additional cost--you can get a rental from OntheHub or another IBM vendor for about \$45...12-month rentals are also available...just make sure that it is an IBM-approved vendor or you may end up with some malware.

Requirements and Grading

Tests (50%) You will have four tests, the first two are each worth 10%; the second two are each worth 15%. The last test will be on zoom with the others in class. All exams are "timed" and take place during the class period; test1 is closed book, tests 2 and 3 are open-note....which means that you can bring your hard copy notes (not your laptop nor your text). 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 in-class 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 the other half of your participation grade.

Our classroom is a place of learning where all are welcome. Innovation and creativity are much more likely in an inclusive environment where we each bring a different identity to class—and this relies on the participation of all of you. I encourage you to ask questions and respond to class discussion, but also understand that you are doing so in a learning environment in which we all are expected to treat one another with respect. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student’s legal name. I am eager to address you by your preferred name and/or gender pronoun. I may also need guidance on pronunciation of your name. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. You should also let me know if you will need to miss class due to religious observance. 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, religious accommodations, or other emergency*. Having said that, if you experience a severe illness or you are dealing with a chronic sickness or other extenuating circumstance that is affecting your academic attendance, please contact me and/or Student Care and Outreach: <https://sco.uga.edu/> via email so that we can work out an accommodation.

Article critique and reference list paper assignment (5% annotated reference list; 10% single article review-critique). This paper assignment requires that you formulate a research question related to criminal justice/criminology and generate a list of six peer-reviewed, original research studies on that question (due Sept. 18th). For each of the six studies on your list, you should have 2-3 lines that describe the study, noting what the author(s) test and what they found. When you submit the list, you will note which of the studies on that list will be the one for which you will write a 4-5 page article critique (critique is due Oct. 25th).

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/>

For guidance on identifying scholarly sources (original social science research) for your reference list due on September 18th, you should read our text (Bachman and Schutt), p. 31-34. Our class will also include a session with a reference librarian, Ms. Elizabeth White on August 30th. 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. Remember, when you submit your list, you will provide a few lines for each reference.

For your article critique (due Oct. 25th), you will find that reading closely an original 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. On p. 34-38 of your text, the authors provide some clear guidance on the single article review assignment like this one. The purpose of the article critique is to summarize and evaluate a piece of published, original, social science (empirical) 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? You will be expected to apply (cite and explicitly draw on your text) what you have learned about research design to this critique.

Data analysis paper assignment (25%): Dataset and draft tables are due on Nov. 22nd. I will have an assignment folder set up in ELC for this purpose. Final tables and paper (write up) are due December 6th.

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 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.

Use of artificial intelligence or word mixing software to write your paper or disguise plagiarized work is considered unauthorized assistance in this course. Suspected

unauthorized assistance, or other violations of UGA's "A Culture of Honesty," will be reported to the Office of Academic Honesty.

The bottom line is that all work submitted to me by you for an individual assessment must be your work (and not the work of someone else).

Disability. If you plan to request accommodations for a disability, please register with the Disability Resource Center. They can be reached by visiting Clark Howell Hall, calling 706-542-8719 (voice) or 706-542-8778 (TTY), or by visiting <http://drc.uga.edu>.

Class recordings. In the absence of written authorization from the UGA Disability Resource Center, students may not make a visual or audio recording of any aspect of this course. Students who have a recording accommodation agree in writing that they:

- Will use the records only for personal academic use during the specific course.
- Understand that faculty members have copyright interest in their class lectures and that they agree not to infringe on this right in any way.
- Understand that the faculty member and students in the class have privacy rights and agree not to violate those rights by using recordings for any reason other than their own personal study.
- Will not release, digitally upload, broadcast, transcribe, or otherwise share all or any part of the recordings. They also agree that they will not profit financially and will not allow others to benefit personally or financially from lecture recordings or other course materials.
- Will erase/delete all recordings at the end of the semester.
- Understand that violation of these terms may subject them to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct or subject them to liability under copyright laws."

Mental Health and Wellness Resources. If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit <https://sco.uga.edu/>. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.

- UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services (<https://caps.uga.edu/well-being-prevention-programs-mental-health/>) or crisis support (<https://healthcenter.uga.edu/emergencies/>).
- If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA (<https://caps.uga.edu/well-being-prevention-programs-mental-health/>) for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center.
- Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.

Classroom safety. If the fire alarm sounds, please exit the building and reassemble on Herty Field near the fountain. If there is a tornado warning, we will move to the ground floor (basement) of this building. If you have concerns about other emergencies or have special circumstances that I need to know about, please speak with me after class.

The following is a TENTATIVE schedule through part I of the semester.

August 16th
Introduction

August 18th and August 21st,
Science, Society, and Research, Bachman and Schutt, ch. 1;

August 23rd

Learning how to navigate through VLAB and SPSS

Prior to 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. You may need to search for SPSS. Click on IBM SPSS...a folder will open and then you should click on IBM SPSS.

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 class, 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>

In class, we will be using the laptops; you are also free to bring your own laptop for this use (either with VLAB or if you have rented a version of SPSS yourself)

Aug. 25th

SPSS – in class exercise on frequency distributions and recoding: appendix C (selections)

We will be using the 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/>

Aug. 28th

The process of research Bachman and Schutt, chapter 2

Aug. 30th

Session (zoom) with reference librarian, Ms. Elizabeth White
Bachman and Schutt, p. 32-34

September 1st

In lieu of class, watch-listen to learn about the Stanford Prison experiment.

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

Reading: Bachman and Schutt p. 59-74

Sept. 6th

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

Sept. 8th Test 1 – in class

Appendix below (with more information about the second 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 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, 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 Nov. 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 the last week of class. 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 academic honesty policy at UGA.

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)