

SOCIOLOGY 3700

RESEARCH METHODS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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Office Hours:

Wednesday, 1:45-3:15, Friday, 1:20-2:20 (and by appointment)

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## COURSE OBJECTIVES

Social science research occupies an increasingly central place in our world. A knowledge of the principles of social research is useful for everybody but is essential for students of the social sciences. This course introduces you to the three fundamentals of social research: planning a study, acquiring data, and analyzing the results. At the end of the course, you will be able to design a research project of your own, conduct elementary analyses of data, and critique research articles.

## COURSE CONTENT

We cover four major topics in class:

- (1) Introduction to Research
- (2) Planning Research
- (3) Research Methods
- (4) Analyzing Data

## COURSE PHILOSOPHY

This course introduces you to social science research, with particular emphasis on criminal justice. Since research is, to a significant degree, a practical art, the best way to learn it is to do it. Accordingly, the class will conduct a research project, from beginning to completion, over the course of the semester. In addition, each of you will be required to write an individual research proposal in which you describe in detail research that you would conduct on a topic of your own choosing. You do not have to do this research, but you must design it carefully and comprehensively. (However, some of you may later implement your individual research design proposal research during your Internship.)

## CLASS RESEARCH PROJECT

The class will collectively work on a research topic. The topic must be within the field of criminal justice, broadly defined, must utilize several research methods, such as secondary data analysis, survey research, interviewing, and ethnography, and must be cleared by Human Subjects. I have submitted an application to study binge drinking among college students.

Once Human Subjects clearance is obtained, the class will be divided into several groups. One will be a Write-Up group, charged with producing the final research report; the others will be research groups, each one assigned a single research method. Each research group will be required to make at least one oral presentation in class during the semester. In addition, each student must assist at least one other research group with its research by administering some surveys, conducting some interviewing, or doing some ethnography. The results of the research will then be handed to the Write-Up group, who will present the collective findings in class.

Each group will be assigned a grade, though I reserve the right to give some members of the group a higher or lower grade than others.

## REQUIREMENTS

Research article presentation (in class, first two weeks)	10%
First Test (Friday, September 18)	10%
Second Test (Friday, October 23)	20%
Class Project: Presentation of Research Results	20%
Individual Research Proposal (due Friday, December 4)	20%
Final Examination (Wed., December 16, 8:00-11:00)	20%

## GRADING

A	93-100
1.	90-92.99
B+	87-89.99
B	83-86.99
2.	80-82.99
C+	77-79.99
C	73-76.99
C-	70-72.99
D	60-69.99
F	0-59.99

Note that for Sociology and Criminal Justice majors, a C- will not count toward major completion. Students in the Franklin College must earn a C or better in major courses.

## MAKE UP EXAMS

Make up exams will only be permitted for good reason (e.g., medically certified illness). If you need to make up, please see me after class.

## CLASS ATTENDANCE

Class attendance is compulsory. I take a daily roll. Students who have more than three unjustified absence may be dropped. (An absence is "justified" only in the case of a severe medical or personal problem. Medical problems must be documented by a certificate or note from a health professional.)

## CLASSROOM CONDUCT

You are expected to attend every class in mind as well as body. Your job is to listen, speak, and think about the material being presented. To that end, please

- Turn off all cell phones and pagers
- Do not even think of texting during class
- Put away all newspapers - including the crossword puzzle.
- Do not do homework for this or other courses during class time.

## LAPTOP COMPUTERS

I do not allow laptops in class. They are, I believe, more of a hindrance than a help to students. They can be too easily used for other purposes during class time - checking Facebook or email, surfing web sites etc. Even when used just to take notes they can distract students from listening to classroom discussion. Although I generally prohibit laptop use, I may, however, grant an exceptions to a student who can justify a special need (e.g., being a particularly slow writer).

## DISABILITIES

If you have a disability and would like to request classroom accommodations, please see me (instructor) after class or make an appointment during office hours.

## TEXT

Bachman, Ronet and Schutt, Russell K.

2008                      Fundamentals of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice. Thousand Oaks:  
Sage.

## ACADEMIC HONESTY

All academic work must meet the standards contained in "A Culture of Honesty." Students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.

## CAVEAT

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

## COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1: August 17  
Read Ch. 1

Week 2: August 24-28  
Read Appendixes A, B, and C

Week 3: August 31-Sept 4  
Read Ch. 2

Week 4: Sept 9, 11  
Read Ch. 3

Week 5: Sept. 14-18  
Read Ch. 4                      Test #1: Friday, Sept. 18

Week 6: Sept 21-25  
Read: Ch. 6

Week 7: Sept 28-Oct 2  
Read Ch. 6

Week 8: Oct 5-9  
\_\_\_\_\_ Read Ch. 7

Week 9: Oct 12-16  
Read: Ch. 7

Week 10: Oct 19-23  
Read Ch. 8                      Test #2: Friday, Oct. 23

Week 11: Oct 26, 28  
Read Ch. 8

Week 12: Nov 2-6  
Read Ch. 5                      \_\_\_\_\_

Week 13: Nov 9-13  
Read Ch. 10

Week 14: Nov 16-20  
Read Ch. 10

Week 15: Nov 30- Dec 4  
Read Ch. 11: \_\_\_\_\_ Individual Proposals due: Friday, Dec. 4.

Week 16: Monday, Dec. 7 (last day of class)

Wed., Dec. 16 8:00-11:00:      Final Exam

## INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL

### General Instructions

1. Your individual proposal is due the second last day of class. That date will come upon you quicker than you realize. I strongly advise you to think about your individual proposal from the beginning of the semester and to work actively on it once the second test has been completed.
2. Your topic should relate to the area of criminal justice, broadly conceived. It should describe a project that you could complete in 15 weeks (the duration of an Internship). A good topic is broad enough to be interesting, but narrow enough to be practical; it has not been researched before, yet it relates to an existing body of literature; and while it can be stated in clear and simple terms, it is neither trivial nor obvious.
3. Although you must think up your own research topic I will be available to help you select and define it. It is a good idea to discuss your topic with me at least once before you write your proposal.
4. Your proposals must be typed (double-spacing).
5. Use a recognized citation system. The system used by the major sociology journals, reproduced below, is strongly recommended.
6. The proposal should be as long as is necessary to cover the issues. There is no fixed number of pages required; proposals often vary significantly in length. In general, it is better to be concise rather than long-winded.
7. I will discuss the proposal in class and I will be available to discuss your individual projects after class and during office hours.
8. I will review a draft of your proposal if you submit it to me a week in advance of when it is due.
9. Before you write your proposal, read Ch. 11 and Appendixes B, C, and D of Bachman and Schutt.
10. Make sure to save a copy of your proposal.

### Proposal Format

A research proposal typically has six sections.

#### 1. Introduction

This section briefly describes the main features of the proposal – the problem you are studying, how you will obtain your data, and how you plan to analyze it. The purpose of the section is to provide the reader with a quick overview of the whole project.

#### 2. Problem Statement

In this section, the researcher presents a clear and concise statement of the topic being investigated and why it is important. Precision and clarity are very important here – be crystal clear about your research plan.

The importance of a research topic can be justified in a number of ways. For instance, the research might test or advance a theory, fill a gap in the existing research literature, relate to an important practical or policy issue, or open up a neglected area of inquiry.

### 3. Review of the Literature

The review section situates your research within the existing literature on the issue. Often, this is the longest part of the proposal, but in your case, you need only reference the principal articles and books. The "principal" publications are those that are cited over and over again. As you read in the area, it should become obvious to you what those publications are.

The work for this section will be based on library research. Be thorough and creative. If you have difficulty finding literature, ask the library staff for assistance. They are a tremendous source of information.

In reviewing the literature, you will have to use some judgment about how widely to cast your net. If your topic has been the focus of a lot of scholarship then you can confine your review to the literature directly relevant to it. If, on the other hand, your topic has not been researched much then you will probably have to review publications which touch upon the topic, even if they are not directly relevant to it. For instance, say you are researching police responses to crime in the Asian community. You might find that there are very few books or articles directly on this topic in which case you should draw on the police literature dealing with crime among ethnic and racial minorities in general.

As a general rule, stick to academic publications -- material which appears in journals and books designed to advance scientific learning. Be careful about using popular magazines or newspapers or the web sites of pressure groups. They may occasionally contain some relevant factual material, but they are highly unlikely to contain extended discussions of much value.

In writing up your literature review, organize the contents in terms of common elements. Tell the reader what they contain, without going into irrelevant details.

### 4. Methodology

The heart of any research proposal is a section describing the technical details of the research. This section should include the following:

-- Research Design

Specify what methods you will use to gather you data (i.e. experiments, observations etc).

-- Specify and operationally define the variables

State the dependent and independent variables. If you are going to control for other variables, specify them as well. For each variable, (1) provide an operational definition, and (2) state the level at which it will be measured.

Specify the efforts you will take to ensure the reliability and validity of the measurements you mention. You may cite prior literature: established use in prior research helps to promote the soundness of your operational definitions.

-- Unit of Analysis and Sampling

Specify your unit of analysis. If you plan to draw a sample, specify your sampling method. State whether it will be a probability or non-probability sample. Address the issue of how far your results will allow you to generalize.

-- Research instrument

State how you will collect and record your information. If you are going to conduct a survey, list, at a minimum, the principal questions you will ask and their response categories. If your design calls for the analysis of documents, indicate the format in which you will record the data. If you are doing observation research or in-depth interviews, state the method you will use to record the data (e.g., will you use a tape-recorder).

-- Hypotheses

If you are doing explanatory research, it is important that you state your major hypotheses. One way of doing this is to specify the null and alternate hypothesis.

If you are doing descriptive or exploratory research, a formal statement of hypotheses may not be appropriate. Even so, you should provide the reader with a sense of what you expect to find.

## 5. Data Analysis

You should indicate the methods you will use to analyze your data. If your research will yield quantitative data, specify the kinds of statistical tests you will employ. You should consider including some mock tables that indicate the kind of analysis you will undertake and the kinds of results you expect.

If your research is primarily qualitative, indicate how you will analyze the data with reference to the literature on qualitative data analysis.

## 6. Conclusions

Describe the likely significance of your results: what will they tell us that we did not know before? State how far they can be generalized, and what implications they might have for theory or public policy.

Finally, one general piece of advice. The most common weakness of research proposals is vagueness: The writer is not specific enough about what he or she is planning to do. This is understandable, since the research has not yet been carried out. But a strong proposal conveys to the reader a very clear sense of the purposes, methods, modes of analysis, and reasons for the study. Keep this in mind when writing your proposal; I certainly will when grading it!

For further information, consult Maxfield and Babbie, Appendix C. A very useful additional source is Delbert C. Miller, Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement. New York: David McKay, 1977).

## Citation System

### Format of References in Text:

All references to monographs, articles, and statistical sources are to be identified at the appropriate point in the text by last name of author, year of publication, and pagination (i.e. page numbers) where appropriate, all within parentheses. Footnotes are to be used only for substantive observations. Specify subsequent citations of the same source in the same way as the first one; do not use "ibid," "op.cit.," or "loc.cit."

1. When author's name is in the text: Duncan (1959). When author's name is not in text: (Gouldner 1963).
2. Pagination follows year of publication: (Lipset 1964, pp. 61-65).
3. For more than three authors, use "et al." For institutional authorship, supply minimum identification from the beginning of the complete citation: (U.S. Bureau of Census 1963, p. 117).
4. With more than one reference to an author in the same year, distinguish them by use of letters (a,b) attached to the year of publication: (1965a).
5. Enclose a series of references with a single pair of parentheses, separated by semicolons.

### Format of References

List all items alphabetically by author (providing the full list of multiple authors) and, within author(s), by year of publication, in an appendix titled "References."

#### Examples:

Davis, K. 1963a. "Social demography." Pp. 124-37 in The Behavioral Sciences Today, edited by Bernard Berelson. New York: Basic.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1963b. "The Theory of Change and Response in Modern Demographic History." Population Index 29: 345-66.

Goode, W.J. 1967. "The protection of the inept." American Sociological Review 32: 5-19.

Moore, Wilbert E., and Arnold S. Feldman. 1960. Labor Commitment and Social Change in Developing Areas. New York: Social Science Research Council.

Sanford, Nevitt, ed. 1962. The American College. New York: Wiley.

Weber, Max. (1921) 1968. "Society's Problems." pp. 12-16 in Economy and Society, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. New York: Bedminster.

from: American Journal of Sociology

