A. Course Description

This is the first half of a graduate-level introduction to research in criminal justice: process of raising of a theory, stating a testable research hypothesis, constructing a model, designing a procedure for collecting data, reducing and analyzing data, documenting the results, and acknowledging the limits of the conclusions. Learning objectives: to give you experience in the essentials of research methodology, at least as a knowledgeable consumer of research, through the readings and classroom discussion, and from hands-on project experience.

B. Text and Readings

One text is required:


An additional text is recommended for students especially interested in survey methodology:


Additional readings will be handed out in class; you should be prepared to discuss them at subsequent meetings.

C. Course Design

The course will be managed primarily in a seminar format, although you will find the seminar leader prone to lecture now and then. Each student is expected to have read the assigned material prior to class and be prepared to discuss the readings and inquire about points of uncertainty.
D. Grading and Course Requirements

Your success in this course will depend on your preparation for and participation in the classroom discussions (15% of your final grade), your performance on the midterm and final examinations (each 25%, final exam to emphasize material after the midterm but cover the entire course), the quality of your research proposal (30%), and the quality of your comments on the research proposal of another student (5%). Points will be lost due to lateness; makeup exams, given only in case of documented extreme emergency, will be more difficult than the original.

E. Class Project

The final class project, a research proposal, will be presented to the class and handed in at one of the last two sessions of the course. It can be done either alone or in partnership with another student. The project will apply the concepts discussed in class to any crime/justice issue. Page length guideline: 10-20 pages per student. Project scores are based on skillful use of course concepts (25%), awareness and handling of threats to validity (20%), thoroughness (20%), creativity/originality (10%), importance of the problem (10%), clarity of report (10%), and neatness (5%). Two copies of the draft research design will be handed in on October 9 (one for the instructor, the other for critique by a classmate, due on October 23); the final copy will be turned in by November 20.

F. Emergency Preparedness

In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site (www.prepared.american.edu) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/college-specific information.
F. Schedule of Topics, Deliverables, and Reading Assignments:

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<th>Topic and Deliverable</th>
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<td>Introduction, Course Overview</td>
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<td>9 10</td>
<td>Epistemology of crime; Theories, hypotheses &amp; models; Realism vs. simplicity; Cause &amp; effect</td>
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<td>9 17</td>
<td>Coincidence &amp; causality; Research Design Basics; Measuring Crime</td>
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<td>9 25</td>
<td>Empirical Designs I: Experiments in Criminology</td>
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<td>10 1</td>
<td>Empirical Designs II: Quasi-Experiments, Threats to Validity, Surveys, Field Research</td>
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<td>10 8</td>
<td>Empirical Designs III: Secondary Research, Policy Analysis; Example: Deterrent Effect of the Death Penalty; Content Analysis; Big Data</td>
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<td>10 15</td>
<td>Validity and Reliability: Threats and Precautionary Measures; Minimizing Bias in Surveys; Review for Midterm</td>
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<td>10 22</td>
<td>Midterm Examination</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 29</td>
<td>Research Ethics: Integrity, Compassion, Credibility, Ideology; Hand in Critique (2 cys)</td>
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<td>11 5</td>
<td>Discuss projects, Big Themes in Justice; Basics of Sampling, Data Preparation</td>
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<td>11 12</td>
<td>Elements of Statistics</td>
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<td>11 19</td>
<td>Review Session</td>
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<td>11 26</td>
<td>Thanksgiving Break</td>
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<td>12 3</td>
<td>Project Presentations</td>
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Final Examination
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Name: ____________________________________________________________
e-mail address: ____________________________
Tel. no(s.): ________________________________________________________ Home
town: ____________________________

Primary academic interests: _____________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Primary nonacademic interests, activities, hobbies: _____________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Post graduation aspirations? ____________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Any prior courses in research methods, statistics? Which? Where? _____________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Please attach a photograph of yourself and hand in this page at the next session.

___________ ☺☺ ☺☺ ☺☺ ☺☺
THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL: ORGANIZATION & CONTENT

The purpose of the research proposal is to give the student a hands-on experience with the principles of the course—to stimulate learning by doing. Your research proposal should raise an important question in the field of justice, law, and society, and develop an effective means to address it empirically. Here is a suitable framework for doing this; it is offered primarily as a guideline, not as a required format.

I. Introduction

A. Statement of the Problem: This should be a specific, clear, and concise statement of the question to be studied.

B. Importance of the Problem: You should give the significance of the research question in terms of its relevance to policy, societal impact/cost, timeliness, breadth and nature of the population affected, absence of prior research on the topic, and prior ambiguity on an important aspect or aspects of an issue.

II. Literature Review

The introduction to this section should describe the general domain of inquiry, the foundation for your inquiry. You should refer here to the primary theoretical and empirical works that give rise to the issue that you propose to address. You should consider the following in this section:

A. A discussion of the relevance of this domain to your issue.
B. Discrepancies in the literature that relate to your issue.
C. Review of the prior empirical work related to your issue.
D. Synthesis of prior findings that lead logically to your issue.

III. Your Hypothesis or Hypotheses

This section should combine the information from your literature review with your relevant personal experience and intuition to develop the hypothesis or hypotheses to be tested. You should:

A. Specify and explain relationships among the concepts you discuss.
B. Give any special conditions under which your predictions will/won’t hold.
C. State the hypothesis or hypotheses (H₀: no effect; H₁: an effect).

IV. Methods

Introduction and basic design: Give an overview of the material to be included in this section, and indicate the basic design (e.g., experiment, quasi-experiment, survey, secondary analysis).

1. Indicate why the basic design selected is the most appropriate.
2. Compare your selection with designs used in prior research.
3. Identify the primary threats to validity to be overcome in the selection of your design (to be discussed in more detail in Section IV.E., below).

Sample: Describe the units you propose to observe to generate the data needed to test your hypothesis(es).
1. Define the universe, population, frame and sample(s).
2. Give your rationale for this sample.
3. Describe your frame and how you will select your sample from it.
4. Give the rationale for your creation of experimental and control groups or your use of quasi-controls.

C. Instrumentation: Describe the questionnaire or data collection form to be administered on your sample.

1. List the key variables, distinguishing dependent, independent, and any control variables. Indicate the dimensions of these variables and your scaling rationale, relating your choices to your hypothesis(es) and to scaling conventions and dimensions used in prior research.
2. Indicate the form of your instrument and justify this choice.
3. Give sample questions, observational protocols, and so on.
4. Indicate the primary threats to validity that confront your choices (to be discussed in more detail in Section IV.E., below).

D. Administration: Give the instructions regarding the administration of your instrument to your sample—in sufficient detail to permit another researcher to replicate your study. You should consider:

1. When to administer the instrument.
2. Where to administer it.
3. How to administer it.
4. Indicate the primary threats to validity that confront your choices regarding administration.

E. Limitations: Indicate the limits of your proposed research, in light of the threats to validity and in spite of the measures you are taking to counter those threats. You should consider:

1. Internal and external threats to the validity of your findings.
2. Threats to the validity of measurement (instrument).
3. Threats to the reliability of measurement (instrument).
4. Threats to the validity of the proposed treatments and experimental setting (administration).

V. Conclusion

Give a brief statement justifying the proposed research design. See if you can make the case that the benefits of the proposed research outweigh the costs— that the importance of the issue and the prospect of your design overcoming the primary threats to validity make the proposal worth carrying out.