

Criminal Justice Research Methods

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The Basics

Class will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:00pm-3:20pm in 820 Swift.

The teaching assistant for this course is Murat Yildirim. Murat is a doctoral student in the School of Criminal Justice. Murat's e-mail address is yildirmt@mail.uc.edu and his office hours are from 10:00am-12:00pm on Wednesdays in 560 Dyer Hall.

Course Description

This course is designed to provide an overview of methods used by social scientists to advance our understanding of crime causation and “what works” to meet the goals of crime control and justice. All stages of the research process except for data analysis will be covered, from the development of research questions through the collection of data to answer these questions (data analysis is covered in a separate course titled “Criminal Justice Statistics”). Ethical considerations that must be made when conducting related research will also be reviewed.

Course Objectives

The effectiveness of police, the courts, and corrections agencies (including prisons) relies heavily on studies of crime causation and crime control, some of which you may have already come across in textbooks and journal articles assigned in other CJ classes. Most of our undergraduate students never engage in this type of research after they graduate, but many students do end up working in the criminal justice system and must follow the policies generated from research studies. Yet, one of the reasons why so many of our crime control policies are ineffective is because these policies were developed from poor research studies. This course is designed to make you aware of what is involved in criminal justice research so you are better equipped to critique the studies that contribute

to crime control policies and the treatment of offenders. As an employee of a criminal justice agency, you will read various reports based on research studies and should be able to evaluate those findings with a critical eye. I truly believe that the skills you will learn in this course will serve you well in your personal lives as well. *The most important thing to me is that this course helps you to be a more informed consumer of information.*

After completing this course, students are expected to know (a) the different types of research conducted in the discipline, (b) all of the steps involved in conducting criminal justice research, (c) what constitutes “good research at each step of the process, (d) how each step of the research process influences the findings of a study (for better or for worse), and (e) how to read and interpret research studies.

Course Structure

The substantive materials for this course include one optional textbook (listed below) and lecture notes which will be made available on Blackboard prior to each lecture. An overview of topics that will be covered is presented at the end of this syllabus. You are responsible for information in the lecture notes as well as information presented in lecture that may or may not be contained in the lecture notes.

Course Text (Optional)

Maxfield, Michael G. and Earl Babbie. *Basics of Research Methods for Criminal Justice and Criminology: Second Edition*. Belmont, CA: Wedgeworth, Cengage Learning. 2009. ISBN: 13-978-0-495-50385-9.

Evaluation

Your course grade will be determined on the basis of 200 possible points. Your letter grade will be assigned according to the following rubric where the points listed correspond to the minimum number of points needed to earn a particular grade.

- 196-200 points = A+
- 187-195 points = A
- 180-186 points = A-
- 174-179 points = B+
- 166-173 points = B
- 160-165 points = B-
- 154-159 points = C+
- 146-153 points = C
- 140-145 points = C-
- 134-139 points = D+
- 126-133 points = D
- 120-125 points = D-
- 0 to 119 points = F

Note #1: I reserve the right to lower these cutoffs as needed (e.g., Depending on the class' performance, I might decide that 170 points will earn an "A" and 150 points will earn a B).

Note #2: I reserve the right to place greater emphasis on the final examination to reward a student for having improved his or her performance relative to the midterm exam.

Thus, to be clear, these ranges represent the minimum grade you have earned in this class. I assume that no one will complain if I were to *raise* your grade!

Points will be determined on the basis of two exams and five problem sets.

Exams (140 points — 70 points each): Each exam (see schedule) will consist of a mix of multiple choice questions and short answer questions. These questions will cover the lecture notes and required readings. The second (final) exam is non-cumulative and will cover only materials presented after the midterm exam. Exams will be held during lecture on the following dates:

Exam #1: Thursday, October 17th [in class]

Exam #2: Tuesday, December 10th [10:30-12:30, room TBD]

Problem Sets (60 points — 12 points each): During the semester, I will hand out seven problem sets, of which you are required to complete five. If you hand in all seven problem sets, I will count your scores on the highest five. Each of the five problem sets is worth 12 points and is designed to allow you to apply the material you have learned to answer questions about hypothetical research scenarios. Some of these questions will be straightforward and easily addressed using the lecture notes. However, I will sometimes also ask you a couple questions that are genuinely challenging and require you to apply what you have learned in an unfamiliar setting. You are welcome to collaborate with one another as you complete the problem sets but it is important that you complete your own problem set in your own words. If two students hand in identical or nearly identical problem sets, this constitutes plagiarism and we will have a problem.

Each problem set should be submitted to me in hardcopy in lecture by 3:30pm EST on the day it is due. Two points will be deducted for each day a paper is turned in past the due date — yes, a paper will count as late if it submitted at 3:31pm. No exceptions. Before graded problem sets are returned, I will post a grading rubric that contains my answer key to the problem set.

Missed Assignments and Exams

The only excuses I accept for missing an exam include your own illness/injury or the illness/injury/death of an immediate family member. Paper documentation of the excuse is required. In the event that you have a valid excuse to have missed an exam, your remaining exam score will count for 140 rather than 70

points on your final grade.

Because you are only required to complete five of the seven problem sets, I will not accept excuses for missed problem sets. Please make sure that you hand in five problem sets on time by the end of the semester.

Office Hours

Students who wish to speak with me one-on-one have three options throughout the semester. First, students can visit my office (665AB Dyer Hall) between 12:30pm and 1:30 pm every Tuesday and Thursday. Second, if my office hours are inconvenient, you can e-mail me to make an appointment to meet with me at some other time. Finally, students can e-mail me at any time throughout the semester but with the understanding that I will generally respond within 24 hours (and not necessarily immediately).

Policy on Laptops, Tablets, Smartphones, etc.

Please feel free to bring your laptops, tablets, ipads, etc. to lecture with you. I am happy to accommodate your use of technology in the classroom as long as you are respectful of your fellow students. I really don't care if you check your e-mail or Facebook page sparingly during lecture (though, if you do so, you might miss something!) but, if you do, please do so in a way that doesn't compromise the ability of your fellow students to remain focused. If your use of a computer becomes a distraction in the classroom, I reserve the right to ask you to shut it down.

Policy on Attendance

Attendance is not included in your course grade (hence I will not take attendance) but it is nevertheless strongly encouraged. Much of the material we will cover this semester will be somewhat technical and my guess is that you will have difficulty with it if you do not regularly attend lecture.

Policy on Electronic Communication

It is important that you check your official UC e-mail account and the *Blackboard* course management website frequently. This will be the primary means I will use to disseminate course information including important announcements.

Policy on Accommodations

If you have a disability (e.g., visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical impairment, communication disorder, and/or specific learning disability) which may influence your performance in this course, you must talk with the Disability Services Office (DSO) to arrange for reasonable accommodations to ensure an equitable opportunity to meet all the requirements of this course. If you require

accommodations due to disability, please contact DSO at dso@uc.edu or (513) 556-6823.

Course Withdrawal

Please check with your advisor before withdrawing from any course. If you are receiving financial aid there could be repercussions from withdrawing. Also note that only in very rare circumstances will an “Incomplete” be given. Only students who have been attending class regularly and submitting assignments as required will be considered for an “I” grade.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense and, because it is unfair to your fellow students, cannot be tolerated in an academic community. Accordingly, university Rules, including the Student Code of Conduct, and other documented policies of the School of Criminal Justice, College, and University related to academic integrity will be enforced. Any violation of these regulations, including acts of plagiarism, cheating, verbatim use of previous course submissions, deception of effort, copying another students work, allowing other students to copy your work, or unauthorized assistance will be dealt with on an individual basis according to the severity of the misconduct. This may result in a failing course grade and/or suspension or dismissal from the program.

Students are expected to follow the mandates of the University of Cincinnati Code of Conduct. You may view this information online using the following link: [University of Cincinnati Code of Conduct](#)

Course Outline

1. INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

- Why do we need research?
- Theory and Hypothesis Testing
- Types of Social Science Research

2. GENERAL ISSUES IN RESEARCH DESIGN

- Causality in the Social Sciences
- Statistical, Internal, External and Construct Validity
- The Parameters of Research: Variables and the Unit of Analysis

3. CONCEPTS, OPERATIONALIZATION AND MEASUREMENT

- Operationalization: From Concept to Measurement
- Measurement and Variable Construction
- An Introduction to Criminal Justice Data

4. CAUSALITY AND THE RANDOMIZED EXPERIMENT
 - Causality in the Social Sciences: A Brief Review
 - The Rubin Causal Model
 - The Randomized Controlled Trial
 - Poorly Defined Treatments and the Effects of Causes
 - The “Guts” of a Randomized Experiment
 - Threats to Experimental Validity
5. QUASI-EXPERIMENTS I. (SELECTION-ON-OBSERVABLES DESIGNS)
 - Non-Equivalent Group Designs, Regression and Matching
 - Cohort Designs
 - Time Series Designs
 - There is no Santa Claus
6. QUASI-EXPERIMENTS II. (SELECTION-ON-UNOBSERVABLES DESIGNS)
 - Natural Experiments
 - Fixed Effects Designs
 - Regression Discontinuity Designs
7. SAMPLING
 - The Logic of Sampling
 - Probability Theory and Sampling Distributions
 - Types of Sampling Designs
8. SPECIAL TOPICS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH
 - Survey Research Methods
 - Program Evaluation
 - Research Using Secondary Data
9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
 - Core Principles of Ethical Research
 - Compliance with Ethical Principles
 - Selected Examples of Ethical Controversies
10. AN INTRODUCTION TO DATA ANALYSIS
 - Measures of Central Tendency
 - Distributions
 - An introduction to Descriptive Statistics