Instructor:

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Course Overview: This course is intended to (a) provide an in-depth understanding of how criminological research is produced and to (b) prepare CCJS Departmental Honors students for writing an honors thesis. It will focus on helping students develop critical thinking skills, improve writing, and build an expertise on a topic area of their choosing. The course will begin by reviewing the nature of social science research and writing. Students will build upon this foundation by critically reading articles on various criminological topics. Students will critique each article in class, paying attention to content, the methodology, and the implications. Throughout the semester, students will work on identifying a potential thesis topic, locating relevant readings on the topic, and developing one or more research questions that could be addressed in an honors thesis. In subsequent semesters, students will further develop the thesis topic, write and defend the honors thesis.

Prerequisites: Registration for this course is by permission of the instructor only.

Course Expectations: This class will operate very much like a graduate-level seminar. The course requires attendance for all classes and substantial participation in the course from all class members. The best two ways to become a better researcher are by reading and writing. As such, this course will be heavily focused on both. You should come to each class prepared to discuss the assigned readings and the issues they address. I expect that your ability to think critically about issues will increase throughout the semester.
Required Text


Additional Readings

We will also be reading research articles throughout the semester for which you will be responsible for getting a copy. These articles are listed in the course schedule. You will typically be able to download these articles free of charge on campus. In the event any of these articles are restricted, I will make a copy available for you and deal with the copyright issues.

Finally, in preparation for your thesis topic, you will need to find supplemental texts and articles. I will provide more instruction about this throughout the semester.

Course Policies

Attendance

The course is structured around a seminar format. I will lecture part of the time, but the class will primarily be focused on discussion. All students are expected to attend class every week. If you must miss a particular class or meeting, please give me advanced notice. If you do miss class, you should copy notes from a classmate, and let me know ahead of time. I will not post lecture notes from class, and please do not email me for them.

Additionally, I expect you to complete all readings by the assigned date. Readings will be the basis of class discussions. Most weeks you will be required to hand in a short summary (no more than 2-3 pages; described below) of the material in the readings, which will get you thinking about the topic in greater detail. You should prepare a one-page typed response to question to hand in at the beginning of the class. This summary will be expected even if you must miss class for a legitimate reason.

Disability Accommodations

If you have a documented physical or learning disability, I am willing to make the necessary accommodations. Persons with a documented disability requesting reasonable accommodations should contact me by the second week of class. We will then work with Disability Support Services (DSS) to make arrangements with you to determine and implement appropriate academic accommodations. If you need test accommodations, I will need the testing form 1 week before the exam in order to get the exam to DSS in a timely manner.

I am unable to accommodate students who are not registered with Disability Support Services or who do not provide me with documentation that has been reviewed by DSS.
Classroom Behavior

I expect the classroom to be an intellectually stimulating and respectful environment. Disruptive students who demonstrate a lack of respect for others will not be tolerated. Students are required to be courteous to each other and to me. Any student who engages in disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom and will have points deducted from his or her final. If a second disruption occurs, you will be asked the class, and your name will be referred to the Director of Judicial Programs. Additionally, you are expected to adhere to the Code of Student Conduct.

Disruptive behavior includes repeatedly coming late to class or leaving the classroom without authorization, making loud or distracting noises, sleeping, speaking without being recognized, reading outside material, using a laptop for purposes other than note-taking, and talking on cell phones or text-messaging. Cell phones should be silenced during class and put away. Laptop computers are allowed in this class solely for note-taking. If a student is found to be using personal technology devices in any way that is not specifically related to the day’s class discussion, I will consider it a form of disruptive behavior. If fellow students are not acting in a respectful manner, please inform me and I will deal with it.

More on Technology in the Classroom

As I said above, you may use your laptop in class to take notes only. If you are found to be using a laptop for any other reason than taking notes, then, you will lose the privilege of bringing a computer to class for the rest of the semester. Furthermore, all technological devices, except a laptop computer are prohibited in this class including MP3 devices, smart phones, phones, calculators, gaming devices, etc. If these devices are seen and/or used during the class, you will be asked to leave class immediately.

Communication

If class is canceled for any reason or if there are any other changes to information contained in the syllabus, I will notify you via email and if time permits, announce the changes in class. The preferred means of communication is via email or in person during my office hours. All emails should also address the recipient properly, be proofread, and signed with your name.

Religious Observances

Any student who anticipates the necessity of being absent from class due to the observation of a major religious observance must provide notice of the date(s) to me, in writing, by the second class meeting. The request should not include travel time.

Course Evaluations

Your feedback about this course is very important to me and therefore we do several forms of evaluations throughout this semester. One important campus-wide evaluation is the online evaluation at the end of the semester. I will inform you of the date that CourseEvalUM will be open to students to complete their evaluation for Fall 2013 courses when I learn it. You can go directly to the website (www.courseevalum.umd.edu) to complete your evaluations.
Athletes and Other University Organization Members

Official athletic schedules must be submitted to me by the 2nd week of class. It is the student’s responsibility to inform me of upcoming absences. Practices do not count as an excused absence. Papers that are due on game days must be submitted before the due date. Athletes who miss exams or paper deadlines due to games or other commitments yet never submitted an official athletic schedule by the 2/4 and never spoke with me will receive a grade of zero for the relevant assignment.

Make-up Policy

NO LATE WORK IS ACCEPTED. There are a limited number of circumstances under which assignments can be made up: 1) serious illness, 2) a death in the immediate family, 3) religious holiday observance, and 4) circumstances beyond the student’s control. Advanced notice is required (i.e., prior to missing a class). Proper written documentation includes an obituary/death notice, an official health center excused absence form, or hospital records. I will not accept a Health Center honor statement to verify an illness. In the event of a court appearance, a copy of the court appearance notification is required. You must see the instructor directly; do not rely on friends or anyone else to contact me on your behalf.

I must be notified in person or by e-mail PRIOR to missing an exam for me to consider giving you a makeup. All makeup exams are essay in nature. If you have a problem on the day of an exam, call me. If you know in advance that you will be absent for an exam with an approved absence, you will be expected to take the exam prior to the exam date. Failure to abide by these rules will result in a grade of zero on the assignment/exam.

Grade Disputes

If you have questions or concerns about your grade(s) and believe I should review them, you must submit a written request over email to me that describes your concern in detail. This request must be submitted within one week of the day that grades for the relevant assignment are disseminated.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity. Plagiarism, passing other’s work off as your own (e.g., buying or downloading papers or reports), cheating on examinations, submitting fraudulent documents or forged signatures, and so forth will not be tolerated. Students who violate these standards will be reported to the Office of Judicial Programs. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Honor Council, please visit the following website: www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html
Grading

Your final grade will be based on your performance in four components: 1) class participation (30%), 2) preliminary development of a thesis topic (15%), 3) critical analyses of three papers (45%), and 4) a final presentation (10%).

Class Participation

Participation is the key element of this course. Questions and discussion are highly encouraged, and excessive participation is vital. I want you to be obsessive about the readings, and do all readings prior to coming to class. Not all of the material you will find to be straightforward, so you are encouraged to discuss them with one another if you are having difficulty understanding them.

Also, a good reason not to talk is NOT because you think you’ll say something stupid and embarrass yourself. Nearly every researcher—myself included—has been put in their place many times for making incorrect assertions!! We’ll try to keep the environment respectful and light so you feel comfortable speaking up.

To facilitate discussion, in weeks where we will be discussing research papers, you will need to prepare a brief (2-3 pages) summary of the paper to hand in at the beginning of class. These dates are marked on the schedule. This summary should be primarily objective (as opposed to critical), and it should be structured by answering the following four questions:

1) What is the problem?
2) Why is it important?
3) How do they solve it?
4) What did they find?

Note that while some of the articles we discuss may involve advanced statistical methods, I am less concerned about your understanding of the specifics of the methodology, so do not be intimidated. These summaries will be graded as follows: √+ (outstanding), √ (acceptable), √- (poor or incomplete), or 0. These grades will be factored into your final participation grade.

Development of a Preliminary Thesis Topic

To begin to get you thinking about your thesis, you will be required to hand in a statement of five possible thesis topics several weeks into the class. This will account for 5% of your overall grade. After going through your list, we will arrange a one-on-one meeting with me to help narrow this down to a topic you can begin to think about. Shortly after this, you will need to develop an appropriate reading list for one possible thesis topic, which will account for 10% of your overall grade. I will provide specific instructions for each.
Critical Analyses

The primary focus of this course is to learn how to think critically. Therefore, you will be required to write three critical essays of articles pertaining to your chosen thesis topic. I will provide clearer instructions about which specific articles should be selected later on.

The essay can be structured similarly based on your answers to the same four questions:

1) What is the problem?
2) Why is it important?
3) How do they solve it?
4) What did they find?

For these exercises, however, you will need to critically dissect the article, taking time to talk about the thesis/research question, methodology, findings, limitations, and broader impact of the article. Finally, you should summarize with a discussion of how the article is relevant to your interests and has influenced your own thinking. More detail will be provided in class.

I am less interested in you writing a certain number of pages than I am you providing a concise, well-structured, thoughtful and critical response to the article. No credit will be given for extraneous length (in fact that is usually a bad thing). That said, I expect the average length of these essays to be between 6-10 pages.

Final Presentation

The last two weeks of class will be reserved for you to give a brief presentation on the topic area for which you developed a reading list and began preliminary research. Other members of the class are expected to ask questions to which you can respond. Specific guidelines for the presentation will be provided.

We will sign up for times the third week of class.
Course Schedule

9 September 13 – Introduction to Course; Overview of Honor Thesis

16 September 13 – Asking Interesting Questions
Booth, Colomb and Williams, Sections I and II

23 September 13 – Developing Hypotheses and Finding Support
Booth: Colomb and Williams, Sections III and IV

Due: List of possible thesis topics

30 September 13 – Translating Research Problems into Testable Questions


Due: Summary of Sampson et al.

7 October 13 – Conceptualization and Measurement


Due: Summary of Piquero
    Reading List Assignment

14 October 13 – Sampling


Due: Summary of Grasmick et al.
21 October 13 – No Class; I will be traveling to China

28 October 13 – Establishing Causality I – Experimental Designs


Due: Summary of Sherman and Berk

4 November 13 – Establishing Causality II – Non-Experimental Designs


Due: Summary of Loughran et al.
Critical Analysis #1

11 November 13 – Evaluation and Policy Analysis


Also read this summary for an example of how the research is presented to broader audience: http://www.nij.gov/journals/263/redemption.htm

Due: Summary of Blumstein and Nakamura

18 November 13 – Reporting Research Results


Due: Summary of McGloin
Critical Analysis #2
25 November 13 – More on Theory Testing; Offender Decision-Making


**Due:** Summary of Paternoster et al.

2 December 13 – Class Presentations

**Due:** Nothing

9 December 13 – Class Presentations

**Due:** Critical Analysis #3