Instructor

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Course Overview

This course is designed to engage students in the process of summarizing, evaluating, and empirically testing criminological theory. **This course is in no way intended to be a substitute for CCJS 654.** Students will review the current state of criminological theories as part of class discussion and an empirical paper, identify a suitable research question that tests a unique hypothesis that advances a theory, write up this analysis in article format, present the results of their analysis to the class, and submit the article for publication consideration. Students will also participate in critically reviewing their peer's work. Additionally, the course will focus on importing concepts from other social science disciplines (e.g., psychology, economics, sociology, judgment and decision-making) to advance the testing of theories about crime.

The goals of the course (in order) are for the student to: 1) become a better overall social scientist, 2) develop critical thinking and analytical skills on the topic of evaluating quality (and sub-quality) research, and 3) develop a completed, journal quality manuscript intended to be submitted for publication either at, or shortly after, the end of the semester.

Course Structure

This course will run as a professional seminar-discussion format. As such, your active participation is required each class. I will assign readings which will form the basis of that week's discussion. I expect you to come to class totally prepared to fully participate. This means that you should do all readings prior to coming to class, and have thought critically about the readings. I reserve the right to have you lead the discussion in class about one of the articles assigned for that week.

There would be no formal lectures on theories or methods, but instead any discussion of such specifics would arise organically out the research, as it does in practice. The benefits of this model—on top of a hopeful publication—would be development and feedback of your idea throughout the semester, critical reviewing in the form of both getting some and learning how to better constructively 'dish-some-out', as well as gaining experience in presentations as both a presenter and critic. On top of being the instructor/moderator, I would also offer my own paper idea as a way to actively participate with the group.
The ‘formal’ component of this course will involve an a) initial presentation of a paper topic, specifically a research question, which would be discussed by the class, b) developing this idea in some rigor, c) reading of other students’ manuscripts in various stages to offer reviewer-like feedbacks, d) an ASC-style presentation of a developed paper near the end of the semester, and e) a final, submission-ready (or close to it) manuscript by the end of the term.

**Prerequisites**

I will assume that you have a dataset to work on and at least a rudimentary idea for a paper topic. This topic cannot be something you are working on for a thesis or another class, although you may certainly use the same dataset.

Furthermore, I will also assume that you have successfully completed all of your theory courses and are proficient with statistics (at least at the level of CCJS 710). If you are not current or proficient, I strongly suggest that you review that material and/or revisit this course at a later point in your doctoral studies. Given the advanced nature of this course, a strong willingness to put in appropriate time and effort to do quality, quantitative empirical research in criminology/criminal justice is also a necessity. This means spending time outside of the lectures and assignments to learn and master the material. If you have questions about this, be sure to speak to me as soon as possible. I will treat this course as a responsibility and opportunity to train future colleagues; thus, I expect you to reciprocate and take this responsibility and opportunity seriously.

**Grading**

Your grade in this course will be determined from four equally weighted (i.e., 25% each) components: participation, paper, presentation and reviewer activities.

**Research Paper**

Throughout the term we will focus on developing a research paper will be submitted for publication. At various stages throughout the semester, you will be expected to discuss and defend the progress of this paper. Remember, a good research paper should answer exactly four questions:

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

The format of the course will be such that you develop your paper throughout the semester with the help of feedback and critique. You will need to hand in a (reasonably) well-developed front end before spring break. The second half of the course will focus on your empirical approach. A draft of your completed manuscript will be prepared and circulated to the class so that you may get feedback before completion of the semester.
Reviewer Activities

As a social scientist, you will need to learn how to think critically and effectively evaluate research. Therefore, you will actively be reading and reviewing each other's work throughout the semester (and responding to these comments). To become comfortable thinking like a reviewer, we will have two 'practice reviews' of existing papers early on. You will be asked to review a manuscript and produce reviewer comments on it, as if asked by an editor. When your own paper is 'reviewed', you will be expected to draft a coherent response to these comments as if responding to an editor.

Reviewer Activity #1: You should read each of these papers, and prepare a referee report for any one of them that you like. I will then respond to your reviews and questions in a critical discussion:


Reviewer Activity #2: I will select three papers (TBD). You will need to prepare a referee report for one, and be prepared to review a second one.

Reviewer Activity #3: I will assign you to one of your classmates and you will provide reviewer-like comments (in multiple stages) to the manuscript drafts that they turn in.

Disability Accommodations

Persons with a documented disability requesting reasonable accommodations should contact me by the second class meeting. We will then work with Disability Support Services (DSS) to make arrangements with you to determine and implement appropriate academic accommodations.

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.
Late Work and Incomplete Grades

Extensions for assignments or exams will not be given except in cases of a medical or family emergency. Proper accompanying written documentation is required. Any problems that a student encounters must be brought to my attention as soon as possible. Incomplete grades are strongly discouraged and will be given only in situations where (a) a student has completed a majority of the course requirements and (b) shows substantial proof of hardship that necessitates more time to meet those requirements. As noted elsewhere, no late homework will be accepted. In the event of either of the above circumstances, a make-up assignment will be given. To be clear, I have a strong prejudice against the use of “incompletes” to allow for more time to complete the requirements of graduate courses, and I reserve the right to decide on the appropriate extension case-by-case.

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course under any circumstances. All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported directly to the Honor Council. If you engage in it, I will take the proper actions to ensure that you receive a failing grade in the course and are disciplined by the University to the fullest extent possible.

Readings

I will assign readings for each class based on the progression of the discussion and topics.

Additionally, you should get a copy of the following texts if you do not already have them:


Finally, you should read at least two (but preferably all) of the following books before spring break, to get a better perspective on how scholars from other disciplines think about and attack problems similar to the ones we work on in this field:


Tentative Schedule and Timeline

As I said, the topics we specific topics we cover this course will grow organically out of our discussions of your own research interests. Therefore, the coarse topics listed below could change a bit. I will assign readings for each class as the course progresses. I will try to assign readings at least 2 weeks in advance of class. To get the progress started, however, I have listed the readings we will cover for the first several weeks of the course so that you may get started.

Jan 28 – Introduction; Initial Paper Topic Discussion

Feb 4 – General Overview; Initial Research Questions due


Feb 11 – Measurement


Feb 18 – Testing Theory with Experiments


Feb 25 – Testing Typological Hypotheses; Reviewer Activity #1 Due

Mar 4 – Dealing with General Selection Nonsense

Mar 11 – Multidisciplinary Approaches to Theory Testing; Front End Draft due, given to anonymous reviewer

Mar 18 – Spring Break

Mar 25 – Reviewer Activity #2

Apr 1 – Analysis

Apr 8 – Analysis

Apr 15 – Results Due

Apr 22 – Reviewer Activity #3

Apr 29 – Presentations

May 6 – Presentations; Final Papers due