

**COURSE SYLLABUS**  
**Introduction to Criminal Justice Research Methods**  
**Spring 2009**

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**I. Introduction**

This course addresses Criminal Justice Research Methods. As described in the California State University Sacramento catalog (2008-2010), this is an,

*Introduction to the research methodologies used in the social sciences, with a special emphasis on those methods most often used in the study of the study of crime and criminal behavior, police/court systems, and correctional institutions, policies, and programs. Students will acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to understand, critically analyze, and assess descriptive and quantitative research studies. Topics include the role of theory and ethics in research, hypothesis testing, and research design (p.246).*

Assuredly, everything you know to be true is the end product of research, either yours or someone else's. We are all curious at some level; we all seek to gain or have information for any number of purposes. The function of research is to acquire enough information so that we can make decisions that will affect our lives. The fundamentals of any academic research methods course in any discipline are ultimately the same. The tools learned will help us understand that information gathering is a process, that this process is organized, and that it is up to us to put in practice that which we do learn.

Crime and criminal justice is the area on which this course, and your collegiate major, is focused. Fortunately, there are more unknowns that concern this course of study than there are knowns. Understanding the way information is gathered, processed, and ultimately used in our daily lives is the value of learning research methods. You are concerned with the way humans behave, or even better, do not behave. Research methods strategies provides you with additional tools to use to help you understand and perhaps predict why people do the things they do. The search to gather information is the soul of your endeavor. If you have not understood this yet, understand it now, **YOU ARE A SOCIAL SCIENTIST.**

This course introduces CRJ majors to the: explanation, measurement, prediction, examination, and processing of crimes and criminals. The underlying purpose in this effort is to help you appreciate that with more, clearer, and better information about crime, those who engage in this activity, and society's response to crime, that when you find yourself in the position to respond to your communities' needs to address criminal activity that you can play an active role in the solution, not just a passive observer of the problem.

## II. Breadth

- A. Format: Lecture/Discussion. Substantive course material (which will likely be that information included in examinations) will be presented in class via an idiosyncratic Socratic pedagogy. While I will mostly lecture, your questions/comments/responses will contribute a great deal to the course's development and direction. The minimum course expectations are that you attend class, remain conscious, and be courteous. Some benefit will be accrued by taking notes and reading the text.
- B. Course Objectives. By semester's end, students will:
- 1) use research terminology appropriately and apply research-related concepts to the field of criminal justice;
  - 2) understand the relationship between theory and research including familiarity with the issues and process of theory construction;
  - 3) recognize a wide variety of research techniques and design issues that are relevant to the criminal justice field;
  - 4) identify ethical obstacles and dilemmas encountered in the process of research and develop an appreciation for ethical research;
  - 5) interpret and critically appraise research literature to develop an ability to discriminate between "good" and "bad" research; and
  - 6) to learn the steps involved in conducting social science research.
- C. Grades: Performance evaluations will be realized based on achieving levels of course Objectives. These evaluations will result in the awarding of points which, when added together, will lead to the determination of semester final grades. Points will be earned based on performance in two areas: a semester long writing project broken up into 3 areas: a research paper annotation (40 points) leading to a research proposal (*two* 160 point papers); and three learning experiences (aka, examinations, each worth 100 points each. Final grades will not be based on any sort of evolutionary "curve". No evaluation will include an assessment of individual "effort" or lack thereof. Grades will be distributed based on the following ranges based on a total possibility **660** points.

Total Point Grade Distribution parameters are:

A = 618+ points	B+ = 552 - 578	C+ = 429 - 455	D+ = 306 - 329
A- = 579 - 617	B = 492 - 551	C = 366 - 428	D = 270 - 305
	B- = 456 - 491	C- = 330 - 365	F LE 269

Learning Experience Grade Distribution:

A = 92+	B+ = 85 - 89	C+ = 74 - 76	D+ = 63 - 64
A- = 88 - 90	B = 80 - 84	C = 68 - 73	D = 60 - 62
	B- = 77 - 79	C- = 65 - 67	F LE 59

Writing Assignment Scale:

A = 3.8+	B+ = 3.2 - 3.3	C+ = 2.3 - 2.4	D+ = 1.3
A- = 3.5 - 3.7	B = 2.8 - 3.0	C = 1.8 - 2.0	D = 1.0
	B- = 2.5 - 2.7	C- = 1.5 - 1.7	F LE 0.9

To calculate points from the writing assignments, multiply awarded annotation score by 10 (e.g., 3.0 x 10 = 30 points), and theory / methodology score by 40 (e.g., 3.0 x 40 = 120 points).

- D. Delinquency Policy: Make up learning experiences will not be rescheduled. For writing assignments, submissions are due as per directed on syllabus schedule. However, a “nice guy” clause does exist. Writing assignments will be accepted after the listed due date. These “late” papers will be accepted for a period of 7 days after their assigned due date with no need of explanation or excuse. Late is defined as after the end of the class period on which the assignment is due. This late policy is only in effect for the first two writing assignments, the annotation and the first section of the research proposal, NOT for methods portion. After this period, that assignment will not be accepted under any circumstance. This extension period comes with penalty. Work turned in ANY time after the end of original due date class period will be decremented a whole letter grade (i.e., work of B [3.0] quality, will be awarded a C [2.0]). A “redo” (do-over) will be allowed for the first writing assignment only. That is, if you are dissatisfied with your performance or my evaluation of your performance and the score you earned and believe you can improve on it, you will be allowed one week (7 days) to demonstrate this improvement. The re-do period begins at the end of the class in which the assignment is returned, not at the point when any one student may actually retrieve his/her assignment. Students must be in class on the return date in order to be eligible for a re-do. Initially Late submissions will not be afforded this opportunity.
- E. Extra Credit: None. If you are grade jeopardy, make an effort to see your friendly and helpful Research Methods professor or ANYone else who can provide effective assistance to you.
- F. Explanation of Assignments
- 1) The research annotation (a handout and example are available on-line) is a summary of and critique of an academic publication. It is no longer than 2 pages, double-spaced (500 words). The source must come from an article from a refereed journal (acceptable journal handout will be made available); a book/treatise; or chapter from an academic anthology.
  - 2) The "research proposal" (a hand out will be made available) is actually two mutually exclusive, but co-dependent assignments each worth 160 points. This assignment is

literally the focal point of the course. The first assignment is the first half of a facsimile of a research proposal. It includes the definition of the proposed research problem and the theory/explanation or solution to the problem identified. The second assignment is a description of the attempted methodology outlining how, specifically, from where, whom, and how the information sought will be gathered to prove that any explanation/solution is appropriate.

\*\* At least one "consultation" per section (theory and methodology) is required and will be incorporated into the assignment grade earned. Scheduling and actually making these consultations to resolve issues/questions about what is required for this assignment will lead to .2 grade *increment* (8 points) for each section of the proposal. Ultimately, this effort will be assessed by whether or not you actually create a proposal that actually leads to a doable research project.

On a cautionary note, the reality is that some very interesting ideas are unlikely to lead to a successful class research project, i.e., they are not doable, at least within the confines of this class assignment. Consultations will help alleviate anxieties as to what topic constitutes a doable project and how success may be realized.

Two member "teams" can be constituted to complete this assignment. In spite of effort or compatibility of any member, the same grade will be awarded to each team member. Therefore, team members should be judicious in the selection of the other member.

3) "Learning Experience" (examination) format will include four testing sections: true/false, multiple choice, short answer/written description/definitions, and longer written description/paragraphs/narratives. The "correct" answers (objective) for the true/false and multiple choice sections are taken from an instructor's manual that accompanies the text thus answers are found in the assigned readings. The written description (subjective) sections will come from class lectures. Reading the text and taking notes in class will increase, but not guarantee, the chances of success.

G. Courtesy: Be courteous. In this class setting be considerate of other learners sharing your environment. Get into the habit immediately as you sit down at your *turn all electrical devices: cellular phones, beepers, iPods, MP3 players, alarm watches, etc of., Remove earbuds or headphones.* If you use a laptop computer in class, please do not be a jerk about it. That is, do not come in, turn it on, logon to a wireless internet connection and access your myspace, facebook, or friendster account, read e-mail, look at porn, play Solitaire or Halo, send text messages because you find that you cannot focus on the class lecture/discussion, and lie about it saying you are not. Initial disturbance will lead to an attempt at public humiliation or shaming. Recidivism or incorrigibility may lead to banishment. Attending class demonstrates intent to focus attention on this class, not some other. Do not sleep, read materials unrelated to this course, clip nails or hair, or eat \*loud\* foods in class. Unfortunate bodily eruptions will be minimally tolerated. Practice prosocial personal hygiene and yourself regularly. Dress appropriately. Be punctual. If you find that these are

impossible standards to reach, it is your responsibility to explain your situation to your professor. Class begins when the professor (Dan) arrives. Attendance will not be taken nor will it factor, per se, into your final point total.

- H. Specific Individual Needs: AMERICAN DISABILITIES ACT: Students with any form of disability requiring academic accommodation must register with the Services to Students with disabilities (SSWD), and notify me about the special needs required. Official documentation will be required to verify any necessary accommodations. The SSWD web address is: <http://www.csus.edu/sswd/> and office phone number is 916/278-6955.
- I. Plagiarism/Cheating: These are current “hot-button” issues that have achieved significant divisional, institutional, and national prominence. If either activity is performed but it is only suspected, i.e., the criminal is so clever as to avoid verifiable detection, I will simply think evil thoughts about you for as long as I can remember or am reminded of you. On the other hand, if your indiscretion/s can be substantiated, the previously mentioned consequence likewise will be attached, along with a grade of "0" for that assignment and encouraged to drop this class. Even though this is a criminal justice course, if you are accused it will be your responsibility to demonstrate your innocence. As with English Common Law, suspects will be presumed guilty until innocence can be determined. Sacramento State University, the School of Health and Human Services, and the Criminal Justice Division maintain an institutional appellate process that allows an accused student relief. While this is true, it an added burden to criminal justice aspirants to recognize that s/he is a Criminal Justice major, therefore unlike some less than ethically grounded students on campus, and thus suspect non-majors, majors are expected to honor a code of moral and ethical probity. As in life beyond the confines of this institution, criminal justice scholars will be held to a higher standard than others. Failure to act accordingly reflects poorly on your social, moral, and personal character and familial upbringing. Do not plagiarize or cheat.

J. Required Text

Kraska, Peter B and W Lawrence Neuman (2008). Criminal Justice and Criminology Research Methods. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc

Recommended: a statistics text you can understand to use as a reference, a college-level dictionary and thesaurus (software sub-programs that spell-check or thesaurus are often inadequate and sometimes wrong).

### III. Summary

The goal of criminal justice research is to provide public policy decision-makers useful information to make reasoned, effective, and responsible policies. This is also the goal of science and the goal of the investigator. While this does not always happen, it is the goal nonetheless. Your goal is to appreciate the need for this process and product. While it is

understood that many of you believe that scientific research has no or little place in your life, this is not a certainty and you assuredly will conduct personal research to resolve assorted personal and/or professional problems. The resolution of these problems will be made easier if an organized, thoughtful process is employed. Asking the right questions from the right sources of information is more likely to gain a successful resolution to whatever problem is confronted. This is the soul of research. Good luck, it is hoped that our mutual search for truth will be mostly satisfying or at least not totally frustrating. Bonne chance, bon voyage.

#### IV. Tentative Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading Assignment
Jan 27	Course Introduction and Development of Perspective	Ch 17
29	Personal introductions	
Feb 3	Introductions II	
<i>Section I: Foundations, Theory, Conceptualization</i>		
5	Research Methods Ways of Thinking and Problem Solving	Chs 1,2
10	Models and Thinking	
12	Models II	
*17*	The Importance of Being Ethical	Ch 3
19	The Steps in Conducting Research	Ch 4
24	What is Research?	
Mar 3	Theory Construction	
5	Doing Research	
10	Summing Up	
12	<b>LEARNING EXPERIENCE I</b>	
<i>Section II: Causality, Measurement, Operationalization</i>		
17	Measurement/Conceptualization I	Ch 5
19	Measurement/Conceptualization II	
24	Relationships	Ch 4
26	Etiology and Meaning	
31	<b>CESAR CHAVEZ NATAL ANNIVERSARY</b> (pay homage to a California hero, campus closed)	
Apr 2	<b>SPRING RECESS</b> (get some rest, campus closed)	
7	The Research Design I	Ch 8
9	The Research Design II	

14	Survey Research: Introduction	Ch 9
16	Survey Research: Breeds of Data Gathering	
21	Scales and Indices	Ch 6
23	True Experiments	Ch 8

**28 LEARNING EXPERIENCE II**

*Section III: Data Sources, Feet Wet, Fun Research Stuff* ,

	30	Sampling I: Generalities	Ch 7
May	5	Sampling II: Specifics	
	<b>*7*</b>	Ethnography, Qualitative Analysis: Field Research	Chs 10,13,14
	12	Unobtrusive Measures	
	14	Summing Up / Clean Up / Close Down Day	

**19 LEARNING EXPERIENCE III; T, 1245-14045**

**BOLD = Important Dates**  
**\*DATE\* = Due Date**

## Assorted Research Topics

Research topics abound in criminal justice. Topics span the gamut of cause/s of social misery, but these same concerns provide ample opportunities for those wishing to examine their resolution as well as their influence. YOUR interest in crime and criminal justice is the primary factor in determining a topic's "researchability". What interests you should be consideration enough to pick an interesting proposal topic. Do not be reluctant to pursue your own imagination or ideology. Be Creative. Ask questions. Be curious. Be.

1. Police corruption. Sworn officers behaving criminally. What's up with that? If a "cure" is valuable, what does that cure look like? How do you explain such behavior? Prediction, deterrence, understanding, treatment, and elimination are possible, through research. How?
2. Courts. The courts are "soft" on crime. Is this fact or fiction? How can this adage be supported or refuted? Courts are too ruthless on criminals. Are they?
3. Rehabilitation does not work. What does this statement mean? How can your position on this be substantiated? Rehabilitation can work? How?
4. Gangs, terrorists, extremist groups, crime collectives continue to baffle law enforcement. What can be done? What information is needed to approach any sort of solution? How can you explain this behavior?
5. Discrimination runs rampant throughout the criminal justice process. How? What? What are the issues, attitudes, significance?
6. Younger and younger offenders are committing harsher and more severe crimes than ever before. If this is so, is there anything society can "do" about the problem? How do you explain this?
7. Law enforcement officers are being asked to be more: considerate and cordial while at the same time being more responsive and certain in their handling of the public and criminals. Where does society "get off" in demanding more of the police than they demand of themselves?
8. What would be the effect of reducing sentences for non-violent crimes, across the board, for juveniles as well as adults? What would the effect of such an attempt at creative criminal justice be on the community-at-large? Would the cost savings actually be significant enough to change public attitudes about "soft on crime" sensibilities?
9. Is prostitution or drug selling actually a responsible strategy to use to defray implementation of the social service industry and collecting financial subsidies from the community? That is, rather than take money that is not earned, prostitution and drug sales may actually be morally responsible actions? What?