

SENIOR RESEARCH PROJECT

JUSTICE STUDIES 499, THREE SEMESTER CREDITS

Crime, Justice, and Policy



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Office Hours M/W 1:30-2:30; T/TH 3:00-4:00

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<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZWxocmAzVs1YJeENv3Pe2Q>

INTRODUCTION TO SENIOR RESEARCH PROJECT

COURSE DESCRIPTION: The objective of this course is to provide an opportunity for students to conduct extensive research on a compelling issue of criminal justice. Senior research is organized into three domains: (1) Identification of the Problem, (2) Selection of Proper Methodologies, and (3) Analysis of the Research Data. The first section focuses on identifying a compelling research topic or problem relating to crime, criminology, law enforcement, prosecution, adjudication, or corrections. A review of relevant literature is conducted to better understand the scope (nature and extent) of the problem and to develop a thesis statement about the "cause-effect" relationship of the problem. Part Two involves selecting the proper research methods to be used when collecting and measuring the data. Detailed attention is also given to the application of quantitative and qualitative methods, survey research, statistical approaches, and research based ethics. The final section focuses on analyzing the data and drawing conclusions about factors impacting the problem and the relationship between variables underlying the problem. This analysis should also consist of recommending public policies carefully designed to resolve or ameliorate the effects of the problem. By focusing on these general areas, the course will provide students with an opportunity to accomplish the following objectives:

- A. To develop a better understanding of the social scientific research process as applied to some compelling issue of crime, justice, and public policy.
- B. To gain a perspective of the nature and extent of the research problem by conducting a literature review and developing a thesis statement.
- C. To select and employ the proper research methodologies (qualitative and/or quantitative) for purposes of collecting, classifying, and measuring data.
- D. To analyze the research data in order to explain the factors and variables relating to the problem and make recommendations to remedy the problem.

COURSE TEXTBOOKS: The optional texts for the course include Ronet Bachman and Russell Schutt, *Fundamentals of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice* (Chicago: Sage, 2018) and Victor Kapeler, et al., *The Mythology of Crime and Criminal Justice* (London: Waveland, 2017). In writing these texts, the authors have concentrated on how to research and evaluate compelling issues of crime, justice, and policy. *Fundamentals of Research* offers thorough coverage of the thesis statement, literature review, quantitative and qualitative methods, and data analysis of problems relating to criminal justice. *The Mythology of Crime and Criminal Justice* contains a wide variety of articles written by academics who question conventional perspectives of crime, criminology, law enforcement, prosecution, adjudication, punishment, and corrections. These texts go beyond simply presenting general information about the criminal justice system. They also show how social scientists raise questions, use proper methodologies, and evaluate their findings with regard to issues of crime, justice, and policy.

COURSE WORK AND EVALUATION: The work requirements for this course consist of a senior research project analyzing a contemporary issue of the criminal justice system. Its quality of research, coverage, analysis and writing are each worth 100 points, totaling 400 possible points. The paper must contain (1) a thesis statement, (2) literature review, (3) research methodologies, (4) analysis and findings and (5) policy recommendations. It must explain, analyze and evaluate how the criminal justice system has dealt (empirical component) and should be dealing (normative component) with the particular problem. The paper must be a minimum of 12 pages (6000 words) and draw from and cite at least ten academic sources, including six from scholarly journals. The students are also required to make oral presentations describing their research questions, methodologies, findings, and recommendations. At all times the students are required to write and present their research in their own words, except for those few occasions where they find it necessary to quote and cite authorities. The course work is structured to evaluate not only the student's knowledge and application of the subject, but also his or her ability to analyze and synthesize it. In terms of the grading scale, the research paper will account for entire course grade and is worth a total of 400 possible points with the following breakdown:

| <u>Grade In Course</u> | <u>Percent of Total</u> | <u>Range of Points</u> |
|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| A+ | 100-97% | 400-388 |
| A | 96-93% | 387-372 |
| A- | 92-90% | 371-360 |
| B+ | 89-87% | 359-348 |
| B | 86-83% | 347-332 |
| B- | 82-80% | 331-320 |
| C+ | 79-77% | 319-308 |
| C | 76-73% | 307-292 |
| C- | 72-70% | 291-280 |
| D+ | 69-67% | 279-268 |
| D | 66-63% | 267-252 |
| D- | 62-60% | 251-240 |
| F | 59-00% | 239-00 |

SUGGESTED STUDY METHODS: No method of study can meet the diverse needs of each student. Still a number of strategies can be used to gain a better perspective of the subject. Before attending class, the students should read the materials and carefully review the chapter questions assigned by the syllabus. This will allow students to familiarize themselves with the focus of the readings and at the same time allow them to digest the reading assignments. After the readings have been completed, the students should outline the material around the basic principles and issues relating to their research project. The outlines should also accentuate the reading materials which correspond to the end of chapter questions. This will enable students to focus on what the questions are asking and respond by examining how the questions impact their own research. The last strategy is to attend class and meet often with the instructor. After all, the classroom is where the greatest amount of learning takes place through an open dialogue. Plus the research project must be tailored around the class lectures and reading materials. It is important to realize that students actually learn what they read and write about on a regular basis. So the key to unlocking the doors of the Senior Research Project is to take the assignments seriously.

STEPS FOR SENIOR RESEARCH PROJECT

Step One: Enrollment verification and introduction to the justice studies senior research project.

Step Two: Meeting with Dr. Gene Straughan to discuss the details of the senior research project.

Step Three: Carefully selecting a research topic to turn into a narrowly tailored research question.

Step Four: Identification and collection of the empirical and/or normative data to be analyzed.

Step Five: Conducting the senior research project with guidance from Dr. Gene Straughan:

- A. Proper selection of research methodologies to conduct analysis of data;
- B. Reviewing the research literature and writing the research introduction;
- C. Conducting the proper analysis of empirical and/or normative data;
- D. Drawing reasonable conclusions about the results of data analysis; and
- E. Making public policy recommendations based on research findings;

Step Six: Drawing from and citing at least ten academic sources regarding the research topic.

Step Seven: Providing periodic student updates about the progress of the senior research project.

Step Eight: Making an oral presentation on the analyses and findings of the research project.

Step Nine: Writing a final research paper with analyses, findings, and policy recommendations.

Step Ten: Handing in the finalized version of the senior research project.