

CRIM/SOCI 4000: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Course Syllabus, Spring 2008

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Office Hours: Tues./Thurs. 11:00-12:00 and 2:00-3:30 & Wed. 10-12, 1:00-4:00

Required Course Materials: Corbetta, *Social Research: Theory, Methods & Techniques*

More Information on Sociology & Criminology:

For more information on the fields of sociology, criminology, and criminal justice (including types of jobs that are available to you, information on graduate school, career preparation, and other various links), visit the American Sociological Association: www.asanet.org/student/student.html, American Society of Criminology: www.asc41.com, and Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences: www.acjs.org. For information on the related fields of forensic science and criminal investigations, visit the American Academy of Forensic Science: www.aafs.org, and the American Academy of Forensic Psychology: www.abfp.com.

Academic Journals Available Online (free):

Western Criminology Review: <http://wcr.sonoma.edu/>

Southwest Journal of Criminal Justice: <http://swjcj.cjcenter.org/masthead.html>

Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture: <http://www.albany.edu/scj/jcipc/index.html>

Justice Policy Journal: <http://www.cjcj.org/jpj/>

Online Quarterly Review of Crime, Ethics and Social Philosophy:

<http://www.erces.com/journal/Journal.htm>

International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences: <http://www.ijcjs.co.nr/>

Course Description (Catalog pp. 197 & 360):

“An introduction to the logic and procedures of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Focuses on research design, use of computer and statistical packages, data interpretation, the relation of research and theory, and the writing of scientific research reports.”

Learning Outcomes (adapted from program outcomes, Catalog pp. 194 & 357)

- “Knowledge of the basic research methods in the social sciences”
- Ability to study sociological and criminological theory through research methodology
- Be able to communicate (orally and in writing) how sociological and criminological research contributes to an understanding of social reality
- Understand methodological approaches to the description and interpretation of social data
- Knowledge of how institutions employ social research methods.

- Ability to ask relevant questions and engage in research to explore issues in sociology, criminology, and criminal justice, including their effects on the larger society
- Understand the scientific approach to identifying the nature of culture and social structure
- Understand the scientific approach to identifying the roles of race/ethnicity, class, and sex/gender in human behavior and society
- Ability to apply methodological principles, concepts, and techniques to address “real life” problems—to think/analyze critically
- “Demonstration of strong oral and written communications skills”
- Ability to utilize appropriate technology in conducting research in sociology, criminology, and criminal justice
- Knowledge of career options (including criminal justice), and continued academic study in sociology and criminology, that demand research skills
- Ability to engage in ethical behavior while conducting professional research

Course Expectations & Classroom Conduct:

- Complete all exams and written assignment.
- Complete reading assignments prior to class (see “Schedule”).
- Avoid tardiness and leaving class early (without a valid excuse).
- Do not interrupt or speak disrespectfully to your fellow students or myself.
- Do not talk during lecture and discussion, videos, or other presentations.
- Do not carry on “side conversations” during class.
- Silent cell phones and other noise-making devices before entering the classroom.
- Do not read or do any kind of work unrelated to this course in this classroom.
- Do not threaten, intimidate, or harass fellow students or myself in any way.
- Do not make comments or actions that are insensitive to anyone’s social statuses: race, ethnicity, sex, gender, social class, sexual orientation, age, religious, ability, etc.
- Do not become angry or upset when we politely and intelligently criticize your views.
- Do not demean, devalue, or in any way “put down” people for their experiences.
- Avoid any other forms of disruptive, socially unacceptable behavior.

Readings:

The assigned readings are indicated in the “Tentative Course Schedule.” The readings are important to develop an understanding of the terms and ideas that you are expected to learn. The lectures and class discussions will benefit you more if you have the chapters read before class, or, before the date they are listed on the schedule. Students are responsible for all the assigned readings as well as anything else covered in class, including guest lectures.

Attendance:

Because of the design of the course, regular, productive attendance is the best way to learn, and you will be graded on the basis of how well you have learned. Much of the information you need to do well on exams and assignments is available only in class, so it is vital that you attend and take thorough notes. Chronic absence will severely limit your learning and

hurt your performance in this course. You are always responsible for anything covered or introduced in class, including guest-lectures, videos, announcements, and additional readings. Missed exams and due dates must be formally excused by me.

Excused Absences

I will excuse an absence only in cases of proven unavoidable and **dire** circumstances, such as **serious** illnesses and some university sponsored activities (excluding most Greek activities). You must provide me with proof of such circumstances, such as an authentic doctor's note or a notice from another university department asking that you be excused. If you know ahead of time that you will be absent, you must make arrangements with me right away to turn in assignments and/or take exams. Or if an unforeseen emergency incident renders you absent, then you must make contact with me **very soon** after that incident. In the case of an excused absence, you will still be responsible for making up any missed exams or assignments. A different version of the exam will be used as a make-up. **It is your responsibility to bring me proof of an excusable absence.** For example, I will not contact agencies, individuals, and other university departments to acquire your initial proof of excuse (although I will usually contact them to verify it.) **Also, please note that I am allowed to make judgments on what constitutes an excusable situation,** and I do not see conditions such as a touch of the flu or a typical cold as excusable for something as important as an exam or assignment due date even if you have proof of such a condition. **I will not excuse an absence, in advance or afterward, in situations in which it is simply inconvenient for you to come to class.**

Exams:

There will be 5 essay exams (4 unit exams and 1 final) worth 50 points each. **Exams must be taken on the scheduled dates in the “Tentative Course Schedule.”** A make-up exam will only be given for an excused absence. In most cases, arrangements for alternative exam dates must be made **prior** to the scheduled exam date. **Exams, including the last one during finals week, will not be available on days prior to the scheduled date.** As a University of West Georgia student, you are expected to prioritize your academic obligations over many others such as work, friendship, and even many family matters. You are obligated to be present here for all classes throughout the entire semester, including finals week and the days prior to and after breaks. In most cases, it is inappropriate to make plans that conflict with your course schedules. For example, I will not accept time and/or travel conveniences as excuses to leave campus before an exam during finals week (if you already made plans to leave early that is your fault).

Important: Your answers to the exam questions must be in essay form. Be articulate--make complete statements and use proper grammar and formal language. Remember, we are in an academic setting and you are being asked to demonstrate an adequate knowledge of social science, so you need to provide intelligent answers (without being ostentatious). Provide complete and accurate information and express complete thoughts—do not assume that I “know what you mean”; I will only grade what is actually written on your exam. Using “telegraphic speech” and listing buzzwords will earn you very few, if any, points. At the same time, you must “get directly to the point”—only provide information that answers the question. Avoid

making self-evident statements and those that repeat the content given in the question; these are a waste of space and time and will likely hurt your answer and cost you points. My advice, however, is to never leave a question blank--always answer the question to the best of your ability. Finally, follow all directions in the exam carefully. For example, if a question asks you to list 5 items, list 5 items only.

Written Assignment:

For this assignment, you will find 5 (and only 5) articles from academic social-scientific journals (no books) that report on research studies, and you will write about their methodology. **Avoid articles that do not report on empirical, social scientific studies.** Have me approve your articles before using them—you will lose 10 points for each article I deem inappropriate for this assignment. In your paper, do all of the following for each article:

- *Describe what the study is generally trying to find out.
- *Identify all hypotheses or research questions.
- *Give a description of the specific type of method(s) being used.
- *Identify the sample type(s) and describe the sampling procedure(s).
- *Identify the data collection type(s) and describe the collection procedure(s).
- *Identify the data analysis technique(s) and describe the analytical procedure(s).
- *Give the study's results (exact statistics not necessary).
- *Give the author's(s') conclusions/theoretical interpretations of results.

In covering these articles, **use direct quotes very sparingly.** Your answers must be your work, using your own words--paraphrase autonomously and condense and synthesize the information from the articles. But remember to thoroughly cite your sources. At the same time, **do not present your own opinions and personal experiences** or other information not contained in the articles. **Do not evaluate** the articles—objectively analyze and report on them.

Your write-up must conform to the following criteria, which will be strictly enforced:

- *Coverage of the articles must be 6-8 pages, **excluding references and title page.**
- *Balance coverage of the articles—about 1.2 full pages per article.
- *Use a standard title page and do not repeat its information anywhere else.
- *Use authors' last names and year only when referring to the articles in the body.
- *Double-space, with 1.25" margins, Times New Roman font, and 12 point size.
- *Avoid any form of “fluffing” such as extraneous spacing, excessive wording, unnecessary details, and excessive headings/sub-headings.

Your write-up must contain correct in-text, parenthetical, citations and full bibliographical references. **Failure to provide me with the information needed to verify your sources will result in severe point loss.** You must format and compose your write-up according to ASA (American Sociological Association) or APA (American Psychological Association) writing style guidelines. **You are responsible for knowing how to use one of these guidelines**—being unfamiliar with both ASA and APA will not be accepted as an excuse for

unclear formatting and incomplete and/or inconsistent citation. I welcome you to use our department's web page for ASA style writing: <http://www.westga.edu/~soccrim/Styleguide.htm>.

This assignment assesses your ability to identify and analyze published research studies. Your write-up is worth 50 points—10 per article, and I will grade it on the basis of the following guidelines: Overall Thoroughness and Accuracy in Responding the Above Questions—30%; Overall Coherence and Clarity—30%; Appropriateness & Coverage of Journal Articles—30%; Grammar—10%. I expect the paper's quality to be very high and will grade it according to high standards. You need to start on it as soon as possible, about 2 or 3 weeks into the semester. A hard copy of your written assignment is **due by Thursday, April 17**.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism:

Important! This course is covered by the Department of Sociology & Criminology's Academic Honesty Policy. Familiarizing yourself with this policy will help you avoid plagiarism and other activities that could create serious problems for you. Violations of this policy will be met with sanctions and ignorance of its provisions is not an acceptable excuse. Please read the policy by going to the department's website (<http://www.westga.edu/~soccrim/>) and clicking on "Statement on Academic Honesty" underneath "Student Resources." Also read the university policies regarding plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty in your student handbook.

Basically, plagiarism is the use of others' words and/or ideas without giving them proper credit, which includes passing another person's paper off as your own and failing to properly cite a source. **You are responsible for knowing how to properly cite sources**—being unfamiliar with a system of citing conventions (such as ASA and APA) will not be accepted as an excuse for failure to properly cite sources. For a more precise definition, go to the English Department at <http://www.westga.edu/~engdept/Plagiarism/pladef.html>.

Grading:

I use points and grades to assess only the student's knowledge of the subject matter delivered in a course. I do not *directly* evaluate your behavior. Rather, I directly evaluate how you demonstrate your knowledge of the subject of this course. Neither do I *directly* grade your effort. A great deal of effort on your part is essential in fulfilling the requirements of this course, and increases your chances of getting your desired grade, but does not guarantee that you get your desired grade. If you are working hard but not receiving the grade(s) you want, you need to consider revising your learning strategies for the course and seek assistance from the University's tutoring and/or writing center services. Further, I do not consider hardships in students' lives when I grade their work—I will not "give you a break" because you are going through some tough times. I will make reasonable accommodations for students with excusable problems, but I will not lower standards or decrease the amount of work. Simply put, it is not enough that you work hard in the course; you have to provide correct answers/high quality work as "the bottom line" for evaluation. Please realize that I am evaluating your performance on assignments and tests, not you as a person. **There will be no curve.**

Your final grade will be the percentage of your total accumulated points out of the 300 possible points from the exams and written assignment, using the following scale: **90% + = A; 80-89% = B; 70-79% = C; 60-69% = D; 59% and below = F**

Tentative Course Schedule:

1/10: Introduction

1/15-17: Corbetta Chpt. 1

1/22-24: Corbetta Chpt. 2

1/29-31: Corbetta Chpt. 3

2/05-07: **Exam 1 on Tues. 2/05—Chpts. 1-3;** Corbetta Chpt. 4

2/12-14: Corbetta Chpts. 4-5

2/19-21: Corbetta Chpts. 5-6

2/26-28: Corbetta Chpt. 6; **Exam 2 on Thurs. 2/28—Chpts. 4-6**

3/04-06: Corbetta Chpt. 7

3/11-13: Corbetta Chpt. 8

3/25-27: Corbetta Chpt. 9

4/01-03: **Exam 3 on Tues. 4/01—Chpts 7-9;** Assignment Workshop

4/08-10: Corbetta Chpt 10

4/15-17: Corbetta Chpt. 11; **Written Assignment due by Thurs. 4/17**

4/22-24: Content Analysis; **Exam 4 on Thurs. 4/24—Chpts. 10 & 11, Content Analysis Notes**

4/29: Visual Methods (just read notes)

5/08: **Final Exam—8:00-10:00am or 11:00am to 1:00pm** (usual classroom)