CLJ 597c – Approaches to Theory Testing in Criminology

Professor: Derek Kreager 
Office: 904 Oswald 
Office Hours: T 1:00-2:00 or by appointment 
Email: dkreager@psu.edu 
Phone: 867-0217 

Class Location: 406 Oswald 
Class Hours: M 1:25-4:25 

COURSE OVERVIEW

What makes a scientific study interesting and/or important? How do advances in study design, measurement, methodological sophistication, and sampling contribute to our understanding of crime and delinquency? In this course, we will critically examine the innovative strategies that researchers take to test theory and push the field forward. With prominent and recent scholarly examples, we will discuss the feasibility and relevance of the various approaches and their applicability to graduate research. The goals of the course will be to (1) understand the current empirical status of influential criminological theories, (2) evaluate the relative contributions of theory-testing studies, and (3) connect theory-testing approaches to one’s own research agenda and current projects.

REQUIRED READINGS


Articles available on-line, via e-mail, or photocopied and placed in Oswald 211.

GRADING

There are five evaluation areas in this course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Area</th>
<th>Weightage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Leadership</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mock Journal Reviews</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final grades are based upon the following scale: A = 93-100; A- = 90-92.9; B+ = 87-89.9; B = 83-86.9; B- = 80-83.9; C+ = 75-79.9; C = 70-74.9; D = 60-69.9; and F = 59.9 and below.

Research Paper: You will be required to complete a seminar paper related to one of the areas covered in the course. The paper should be approximately 15-20 pages, double-spaced. You are encouraged, but not required, to include data analyses and results in your paper. At the least, you should identify a data source and method appropriate for your research question. A one-page abstract is due on March 2nd, and the final paper is due on April 20th. In addition, you will provide a 10-15 minute presentation of your paper on the final class period, April 27th.

Seminar Leadership: You each will sign up to lead three class discussions during the semester. The seminar leaders will play a large role in guiding and facilitating each week’s discussion. Each leader should develop at least five questions related to the week’s readings and the overarching topic. These questions will be distributed to the class at least one day prior to the class meeting. I will be available the week prior to the class period to develop an outline of topics and to answer any questions prior to the seminar.
Seminar Participation: The success of the class will depend on lively discussions and the sharing of ideas, so we all should come to the seminar having completed the readings and ready to contribute our thoughts. Along with the questions provided by the seminar leaders, everyone should come to class prepared to discuss the (1) feasibility, (2) general interest and social importance, and (3) scientific relevance of the week’s block of readings.

Mock Journal Reviews: A central goal of this course will be evaluating the relative contributions of various research approaches and empirical studies. An important aspect of an academic career is to evaluate the contributions of submitted manuscripts as part of the blind journal review process. To help socialize you to this role, I will provide an array of my prior reviews and ask you to be blind reviewers for your classmates’ papers. I will then perform the duties of the editor to consolidate the recommendations and provide my own summary report.

COURSE SCHEDULE

1/12 Introduction and Overview

1/19 The Gold Standard – Experimental Designs

1/26 My Theory is Better than Yours – Crucial Tests in Criminology

2/2 Testing Invariance – Conditional Effects and Subpopulation Analyses


### 3/2 Connecting across the Disciplines – Injecting Non-Sociological Ideas into Criminology

****One-page Abstracts Due****


### 3/9 Spring Break

### 3/16 Measurement Validity of Theoretical Concepts


### 3/23 Defining the Dependent Variable


### 3/30 What We Thought We Know Is Wrong – Research Reversals through Replication Analyses


**4/6 Widening a Theory’s Scope – Introducing new Dependent and Independent Variables**


**4/13 Beyond Coleman’s Boat – Testing Across Multiple Levels of Analysis**

**How’s My Theory Doing? – Meta-Analyses**

- Coleman 1990 Chapter 1


****Papers Due****


**4/27 In-Class Presentations**

**5/5 Manuscript Reviews Due**