

SYLLABUS: Criminology Theory (CrmJ555)

COURSE GOALS:

- Review and critique major criminological theories and assess their respective ability to explain the nature and distribution of crime.
- Develop an understanding of what theory-testing research does and doesn't reveal about how criminal behaviors, crime and crime control co-evolve;
- Identify disjunctures between theory and empirical findings that could be used as fodder for dissertations and theses.

During weekly seminars, we will compare the criminological theories and evaluate how well they are supported by research. After a textbook-based review of the development of criminology, we will focus on three questions whose study will be informed by books, research articles and statistics on crime:

- How do opportunities for crime arise?
- What motivates people to engage in criminal behavior—or refrain from doing so?
- What kinds of crime-control strategies are likely to be most effective?

Deliverables: In order to successfully complete this seminar you will have to participate in discussions and lead them periodically, demonstrate an understanding of key theoretical and research issues, and produce two high-quality essays, one for mid-term and the other during the last month of the semester.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Seminar location and time: Spokane Academic Center (SNRS 201); Mondays, 5:10 p.m.–8:15 p.m.

Professor: Bryan Vila, Ph.D.; room 403A, Spokane Academic Center; voice: 358-7711; e-mail vila@wsu.edu; fax: 358-7933. Office hours: by appointment and via email or telephone.

Policy Regarding Academic Dishonesty: Honesty and the search for truth are the bedrock of scholarship. Within the confines of University regulations, I will do my best to see that any student caught cheating on an exam or otherwise violating regulations regarding academic dishonesty receives a failing grade for the course. If you have **any** questions about cheating, plagiarism, or scholarly standards, please ask.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND ASSORTED READINGS:

- Daly and Wilson. 1988. *Homicide*. Aldine de Gruyter.
- Laub and Sampson. 2003. *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70*. Harvard University Press.

- Lilly, Cullen and Ball. 2010. *Criminological Theory: Context and Consequences, Fifth Edition*. Sage Publications, ISBN: 9781412981453.
- Piquero and Mazerolle. 2001. *Life-Course Criminology, Contemporary and Classic Readings*. Wadsworth Thompson.
- Savage (ed.), *The Development of Persistent Criminality*. Oxford University Press, ISBN: 0195310314

Books will be supplemented with the following journal articles:

- Beckman, Mary. 2004. "Crime, Culpability, and the Adolescent Brain." *Science* 305:596-599.
- Caspi, Avshalom et al. 2002. Role of Genotype in the Cycle of Violence in Maltreated Children. *Science*, 297:851-4.
- Caspi, Avshalom et al. 2003. Influence of Life Stress on Depression: Moderation by a Polymorphism in the 5-HTT Gene. *Science*, 301:386-9.
- Cohen, Lawrence E. & Marcus Felson. 1979. Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activity Approach. *American Sociological Review* 44:4:588-608.
- Cohen, Lawrence E. & Bryan J. Vila. 1996. "Self-Control and Social-Control: An Exposition of the Gottfredson-Hirschi/Sampson-Laub Debate." *Studies on Crime and Crime Prevention* 5:2:125-150.
- Ekblom, Paul. 1997. Gearing Up Against Crime: a Dynamic Framework to Help Designers Keep up with the Adaptive Criminal in a Changing World. *International Journal of Risk, Security and Crime Prevention*, Vol. 2/4:249-265 [with minor updates].
- Ekblom, Paul. 2005. Designing products against crime. In Nick Tilley (Ed.), *Handbook of Crime Prevention*. Devon, UK: Willan Publishing. (manuscript used with permission.)
- Land, Kenneth C., Patricia L. McCall and Lawrence E. Cohen. 1990. "Structural Covariates of Homicide Rates: Are There Any Invariances Across Time and Social Space?" *American Journal of Sociology*, 95:4, 922-963.
- Liberman, Akiva. 2007. Adolescents, Neighborhoods, and Violence: Recent Findings from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods. *NIJ Research in Brief*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Justice, NCJ 217397.
- Life-cycle articles from *Science* special edition 30Jun2006, pp. 1893-1914 plus Clelinsky, Eleanor. 1991, On the Social Science Contribution to Governmental Decision-Making. *Science*, 254: 226-31.
- Vila, Bryan. 1994. A General Paradigm For Understanding Criminal Behavior: Extending Evolutionary Ecological Theory. *Criminology*, 32:3:311-59.
- Vila, Bryan. 1997. "Human Nature and Crime Control: Improving the Feasibility of Nurturant Crime Control Strategies." *Politics and the Life Sciences* 16:1:3-55. Including roundtable discussion.
- Vila, Bryan and Joanne Savage. (in press 2011) Balancing Counterterrorism Strategies: Lessons from Evolutionary Ecology. In Brian Forst, Jack R. Greene and James P. Lynch

(eds.) *Security and Justice in the Homeland: Criminologists on Terrorism*, Cambridge University Press, chapter 4.

- Wikström, Per-Olof, et al. 2010. "Activity Fields and the Dynamics of Crime: Advancing Knowledge About the Role of the Environment in Crime Causation." *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* [on-line preprint, 31 Dec. 2009].

GRADING, EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

- Course preparation and participation (see "Attendance..." below) 40%
- Midterm essay 30%
- Final essay 30%

Decorum, Attendance, Participation, and Preparation: Courses such as this depend upon the active and thoughtful participation of each student. We will discuss many highly-charged topics in an honest, civil, and free manner that encourages critical thinking and respects the diversity of opinion and thought needed for a graduate education.

Classroom participation and course preparation will account for 40% of your grade. Half of this portion of your grade will be based on my perceptions from your participation in each week's discussions. The other half will be based on how well you are prepared when it is your turn to lead the discussion on a reading. Almost all of the readings discussions will be led by students, and most of these discussions will last about half an hour. *Discussion leaders are expected to have mastered the material about which they will lead.*

Obviously, you must attend class in order to participate. Two percent of your course grade will be deducted for each class missed, up to a maximum of 20%.

Essays: You will develop and submit written research essays on topics that will be assigned three weeks prior to the due date. The essays will be no longer than 2,500 words (roughly 10 pages) and must be neat, written on a word processor (double-spaced, 12 pt. type, Cambria, Calibri, Times/Times New Roman, Arial, Helvetica or Courier fonts), free of spelling and grammatical errors, and follow American Psychological Association (APA) style.¹ Only the most extraordinary excuses (e.g., certifiable serious illness or death in immediate family) will be accepted for not turning in an essay on time.

¹ See <http://apastyle.apa.org/> or <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/apa/index.html>

SCHEDULE, LECTURE TOPICS, & READING ASSIGNMENTS

- Jan 10 Introduction, administrative details, goals, and discussion of causation and what we know with good confidence about crime. **Assignment:** [Construct a theory matrix to help you summarize essential elements of central theoretical elements throughout semester.](#)
- Jan 17 Martin Luther King holiday; **Read** Lilly, Cullen and Ball Acknowledgements and Chapters 1-5
- Jan 24 **pre-READ** Lilly, Cullen and Ball Chapters 6-10
- Jan 31 **pre-READ** Lilly, Cullen and Ball Chapters 11-4
- Feb 7 **pre-READ:** Cohen & Felson 1979, Ekblom 1997 & 2005, Liberman 2007, and Wikström 2010. **Group research:** Nature and distribution of crime in the United States. Group online analysis of consistent trends in distribution of crime by: demographics, space and time. Choose most important trends about which to collect data and prepare for 30-minute discussion with Dr. Vila at beginning of next seminar.
- Feb 14 **pre-Read** Land, McCall & Cohen 1990; **Bring** crim theory matrix to discuss; **assign discussion leaders for remaining readings**
- Feb 21 Presidents' Day holiday
- Feb 28 **pre-READ** *Homicide* (Daly & Wilson 1988) **plus** Caspi 2002 & 2003. **Receive Assignment:** mid-term essay (due Mar. 21).
- Mar 7 **pre-Read** set of Life-cycle articles from *Science* **plus** Beckman 2004
- Mar 14 Spring Break
- Mar 21 **pre-Read** *Life-Course Criminology* (Piquero & Mazerolle 2001); **mid-term essay due at beginning of seminar.**
- Mar 28 **pre-Read** *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives* (Laub & Sampson 2003)
- Apr 4 **pre-Read** Vila 1994, Vila 1997, Vila & Savage 2011.
- Apr 11 **pre-Read** *The Development of Persistent Criminality* (Savage 2009) Final exam topic. Last seminar meeting. **Receive Assignment:** mid-term essay (due Mar. 21).
- Apr 18 **pre-Read** *The Development of Persistent Criminality* (Savage 2009) Class Discussion of Final exam topic. Last seminar meeting.
- Apr 25 **pre-Read** Seminar review and discussion. (Last seminar meeting.)
- May 2 **Final essay due via e-mail to Dr. Vila by 5:30 p.m.**

MID-TERM ESSAY: (EXAMPLE)

Following the instructions for essays in the course syllabus, tell me which theoretical perspective you think provides *the most effective approach* to each of the following crime control goals. Justify your choice of theory for each goal and describe why you think it is superior to other options. Consider this a high priority for the city of Seattle.

GOAL 1. During June, July and August of 2008, reduce by 25% predatory violent crimes such as robbery and rape that are committed in Seattle's public places (as compared to average rates for those same crimes and months during the past five years).

GOAL 2. By the end of 2012, reduce predatory violent crimes such as robbery and rape that are committed each year in Seattle's public places by 25% (as compared to average rates for those same crimes during the past five years).

GOAL 3. By the end of 2038, reduce predatory violent crimes such as robbery and rape that are committed each year in Seattle's public places by 25% (as compared to average rates for those same crimes during the past five years).