

## **SYLLABUS: Political Science & Criminal Justice Research Methods (PoIS 503)**

**Course Description:** This is a course on social science research methods. It will introduce you to important concepts, approaches, and methods for conducting and critiquing empirical research about social science problems – especially those that have to do with the criminal justice system.

During each week's three-hour session, we will use lecture, discussion, practice exercises, and individually-developed research designs to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the major approaches to doing social science research. In order to successfully complete this course you will have to show that you can be a critical consumer of other people's research and of criminal justice system data. You also must demonstrate that you can design a practical research project to study a real-world problem.

Each student's course project will be a fully developed research proposal that will identify a problem, provide a succinct review of relevant literature, state a research hypothesis, define key concepts, and describe ways to measure those concepts and to control for potential confounds. Your proposals also will include detailed descriptions of ways to collect and analyze valid data. Because our goal is to enable each student to *do* meaningful research, you also will develop a budget and realistic timetable.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

**Professor:** Bryan Vila, Ph.D.; WSU – Spokane Campus, room 403A, Spokane Academic Center (SAC) building; voice: 358-7711; e-mail [vila@wsu.edu](mailto:vila@wsu.edu); fax: 358-7933. Office hours: TBA and by appointment – and via email.

**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 at least a failing grade for the course. If you have **any** questions about cheating, plagiarism, or scholarly standards, please ask.

#### **Required Texts and Reading:**

**#1:** PRIMARY TEXTBOOK FROM BOOKSTORE, WE WILL READ THIS FIRST: You may choose from either A or B below:

**A.** Conventional hardcopy textbook: *Exploring Research, 7th Edition*, Neil J. Salkind (2009, 336 pages) [Pearson Education, ISBN-13: 9780205756766, approx. \$85.00]

**B.** Downloadable or on-line textbook (180 day license, NONREFUNDABLE): *Exploring Research, 7th Edition*, Neil J. Salkind (2009, 336 pages) [Pearson Education, ISBN-10: 0136042716 ], [Pearson Education, approx. \$51.00]

**#2:** SUPPLEMENTAL TEXTS THAT WILL BE ASSIGNED LATER IN THE SEMESTER AND WHICH YOU MAY ACQUIRE FROM EITHER THE BOOKSTORE OR ELSEWHERE:

- *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 3rd Edition*, (Thomas S. Kuhn, 1996) [Univ. Chicago Press, ISBN-10: 0226458083, ISBN-13: 978-0226458083.]
- *The Tiger That Isn't: Seeing Through a World of Numbers* (Blastland & Dilnot, 2008) [Profile Books Ltd., ISBN-10: 1846681111, ISBN-13: 978-1846681110]
- *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (Bernstein, 1998) [Wiley, ISBN-10: 0471295639, ISBN-13: 978-0471295631]
- *The Thinker's Toolkit* (1998 version). (Jones, 1998) [Three Rivers Press, ISBN-10: 0812928083, ISBN-13: 978-0812928082]

**#3:** Assorted journal articles and other materials as assigned.

#### **GRADING, EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS**

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| 1. Course preparation and participation (see "Attendance..." below) | 30% |
| 2. Take-home assignments, projects and exams                        | 30% |
| 3. Research design project  | 30% |
| 4. Cumulative final exam  | 20% |

**Days/Times/Locations:** The course meets Wednesday in **SAC 205** from 5:30 pm to 8:15 pm.

***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. We will respect the diversity of opinion and thought needed for a graduate education. And we especially will cultivate a culture of critical thinking.

30% of your grade will depend on participation in seminar discussions. You are expected to carefully read all assignments *before* each class and to be prepared to discuss them thoughtfully.

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 30%.

***Examinations:*** The format and content of examinations will be discussed prior to each exam.

***Research Design Paper:*** You will develop and submit a written research proposal (roughly 10-15 pp. long, maximum 3,750 words). *You will not actually conduct the research for this course*, but your design will provide all the information needed to do the research. Your proposal must be generated using word processing software (double-spaced, 12 pt. type), free of spelling and grammatical errors, and follow scholarly conventions for references. It also must be neat and professionally presented. Place your name and the course number (POLS 503) in the upper right-hand corner of the first page. Your research design should follow the format and recommendations in Salkind (Chapter 13, Writing a Research Proposal) *It will be graded according to the criteria described in this chapter*. Only the most extraordinary excuses (e.g., certifiable serious illness or death in immediate family) will be accepted for not turning in your research design on time.

**Students with Disabilities:** Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please visit the Disability Resource Center (DRC). All accommodations MUST be approved through the DRC (Admin Annex Bldg, Room 205). Please stop by or call 509-335-3417 to make an appointment with a disability specialist. If you have questions, please contact Rosie Pavlov at pavlovr@wsu.edu or 335-3417. Additional information is available on the DRC website is [www.drc.wsu.edu](http://www.drc.wsu.edu).

**Preparing for Emergencies in Class or on Campus:** WSU policy suggests that you always should be prepared to take steps to maintain your own safety during an emergency situation. It also suggests that you should be prepared to assist others as long as it does not jeopardize your own safety. As active members of a free society, you also might decide to exceed those minimal requirements when, in your opinion, the risks of altruism are overshadowed by the probability that you can succeed in helping others. For additional information about the university's emergency notification and safety programs, go to [www.spokane.wsu.edu/campusalert/](http://www.spokane.wsu.edu/campusalert/). For additional information about altruism, social duty and delegation of protective responsibilities to "the authorities," attend class.

### Schedule, Lecture Topics, & Reading Assignments

- Aug 25 Introduction, administrative details, goals, and classroom review of key concepts.
- Sept 1 Salkind, **beginning of book** (p. xvii) through end of **Chapter 3A**: Selecting a Problem and Reviewing the Research (p. 78).
- Sept 8 Salkind, **Chapter 3B**; The Importance of Practicing Ethics in Research (p. 79) through end of **Chapter 4**: Sampling and Generalizability (p. 102). **Assignment:** Go to Web site for CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative): <https://www.citiprogram.org/Default.asp?> Then register, choose Washington State University's Basic Course for Human Subjects Research. When you have completed the on-line course, e-mail a copy of your certification to me at [vila@wsu.edu](mailto:vila@wsu.edu).
- Sept 15 Salkind, **Chapter 5**: Measurement, Reliability, and Validity (p. 103) through **Chapter 6**: Methods of Measuring Behavior (p. 148) Choose two exercises for each chapter, complete them, then turn in via e-mail before class.
- Sept 22 Salkind, **Chapter 7**: Data Collection and Descriptive Statistics (pp. 149-170). Complete all of the exercises for Chapter 7 and bring to class on Sept. 22. **AND** Salkind, **Chapter 8**: Introducing Inferential Statistics (pp. 171-192), choose four exercises from Chapter 8 and bring to class on Sept. 22. (Lecture by L. James.)
- Sept 29 Salkind, **Chapter 9**: Nonexperimental Research: Descriptive and Correlational Methods (p. 193) through **Chapter 10**: Nonexperimental Research: Qualitative Methods (p. 224). Be prepared to discuss exercises from both chapters in seminar using Socratic method. **Also read:** Bruce Knauft, 1987 Reconsidering Violence in Simple Human Societies: Homicide among the Gebusi of Papua New Guinea. *Current Anthropology* 28:457-500.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.anthropology.emory.edu/FACULTY/ANTBK/#JournalArticles](http://www.anthropology.emory.edu/FACULTY/ANTBK/#JournalArticles) for sound files and photos of the Gebusi.

- Oct 6 Salkind, **Chapter 11**: Pre- and True Experimental Research Methods (p. 225) through **Chapter 12**: Quasi-Experimental Research... (p. 254). Be prepared to discuss exercises from both chapters in seminar using Socratic method. **Tour Sleep Lab and new Critical Job Task Simulation Lab.**
- Oct 13 Mid-term examination. (Details TBA in seminar.)
- Oct 20 In-class research design exercise to begin your research design project. Salkind, **Chapter 13 and 14** (pp. 255-288).
- Oct 27 Read **Blastland & Gilnot**. Bring ten examples of the misuse of numbers in public media (news papers, popular journals, on-line media, etc.) Be prepared to present your examples in class and discuss why they are flawed according to Blastland and Gilnot.
- Nov 3 **Read Bernstein**, be prepared to discuss the history of “risk” with regard to issues such as the importance of science/research/statistics for business, social life and government. Also be prepared to discuss the impact of business, social life and government on the development of scientific research. as well as the reverse
- Nov 10 **Class does not meet:** Read Jones, pp. 0-314. DO all exercises and keep notes showing errors and successes to turn in at end of class (3% of course grade based on completeness of exercises).
- Nov 17 **Kuhn** (pp. 0-210). Turn in outline of your research design project.
- Nov 24 HOLIDAY: Thanksgiving
- Dec 1 In-class peer-critique of course projects. Prepare a **brief** 10-min. Powerpoint presentation. **Time limit is critical, practice several times in advance. You will be stopped at the 10-minute mark.**
- Dec 8 Course review. Turn in semester project. Last day of instruction.
- Dec 15 Final Exam due.