

## **SYLLABUS: Graduate Seminar on Criminology Theory (aka Seminar in the Administration of Criminal Justice, CRMJ591)**

**Course Description:** How useful is criminology theory and research for controlling, preventing and responding to crime? This seminar assesses the ability of theory to explain longitudinal research findings and examines important gaps in those findings. Our goal is to understand what longitudinal research does and doesn't reveal about how criminal behaviors, crime and crime control co-evolve. During our weekly three-hour sessions, we will compare findings from large-scale longitudinal research projects with the predictions of contemporary criminology theories about how opportunities for crime arise, why people do or don't engage in criminal behavior and why various crime control strategies are implemented. We begin with a discussion of causality issues and what is known with good confidence about crime, then proceed with a critical review of major criminological theories. Our goal here is to assess the internal consistency and utility of various approaches to understanding crime. At the mid-point in this seminar, we pause to review findings from large-scale longitudinal criminological research studies, then begin looking for disjunctures between theory and empirical findings. These gaps, of course, are targets for future research and can be ideal fodder for dissertations and theses.

In order to successfully complete this seminar you will have to participate in – and periodically lead – discussions, demonstrate an understanding of key theoretical and research issues, and produce a high-quality essay on a topic that will be assigned during the last month of the seminar.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

**Professor:** Bryan Vila, Ph.D.; WSU – Spokane Campus, room 222, Phase I Classroom Building; voice: 358-7711; e-mail [vila@wsu.edu](mailto:vila@wsu.edu); fax: 358-7900. Office hours: Tuesday, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 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.

#### **Three Required Texts and Assorted Readings:**

- *Readings in Contemporary Criminological Theory*, edited by Peter Cordella & Larry Siegel; Northeastern University Press (1996); 1-55553-224-1

- *Homicide*, Martin Daly & Margo Wilson; Aldine de Gruyter (1988); 0-202-01178-X
- *Life-Course Criminology, Contemporary and Classic Readings*, Alex Piquero & Paul Mazerolle; Wadsworth Thomson (2001); 0-534-57492-0
- Assorted readings from large-scale longitudinal criminological studies will be provided.

### GRADING, EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

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|---|-------------------|
| 1. Course preparation and participation (see “Attendance...” below) | 40%               |
| 2. Take-home midterm essay exam                                     | 20%               |
| 3. Final essay  | 20%               |
| 4. In-class final essay exam  | 20%               |
| 5. Bonus assignment in lieu of 1/2 of midterm grade                 | 10% (see pp. 4-5) |

**Days/Times/Locations:** The course meets every Thursday in SCLS 131 from 5:30 pm to 8:30 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 that encourages critical thinking and respects the diversity of opinion and thought needed for a graduate education.
- **40%** of your grade will depend on course preparation and classroom participation. 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 30%.

**Research Essay:** You will develop and submit a written research essay on an assigned, course-related topic that is no longer than 2,500 words (roughly 10 pages). Your proposal must be neat, typewritten (double-spaced, 12 pt. type), free of spelling and grammatical errors, and follow the style used in *Criminology*. Only the most extraordinary excuses (e.g., certifiable serious illness or death in immediate family) will be accepted for not turning in essay on time.

## Schedule, Lecture Topics, & Reading Assignments

- Jan 12 Introduction, administrative details, goals, and discussion of causation and what we do know with good confidence about crime
- Jan 19 C&S<sup>1</sup> 1, 2, 3, 4 & 9 (Felson, Felson, Stafford & Ware, Braithwaite, Stark)
- Jan 26 Daly & Wilson 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 & 12, Caspi et al. 2003 + Supplement (p. 4 footnote)
- Feb 2 C&S 7, 8 & 10, 11 & 12 (Moffitt, Farrington, Messner & Rosenfeld, Agnew, Paternoster & Iovanni)
- Feb 9 C&S 13, 14, 15, 16 & 17 (Gottfriedson & Hirschi, Wilson & Herrnstein, Thornberry, Laub, Farrington)
- Feb 16 C&S 20, 21, 22, 24 & 18 (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, Simpson, Daly & Chesney-Lind, Cordella, Vila)
- Feb 23 P&M<sup>2</sup> 1, 2 & 6 (Elder, [Sampson & Laub]<sup>2</sup>) **GET TAKE HOME MID-TERM**
- Mar 2 Take-home Mid-term, no class meeting (WORK STRESS CONFERENCE)
- Mar 9 P&M 3, 5, 7, (Cohen et al., Moffitt, Nagin et al. )
- Mar 16 SPRING BREAK!
- Mar 23 Cohen & Vila. 1996<sup>3</sup> *plus* P&M 8 & 9, 10 (Horney et al., Hirschi & Gottfredson)
- Mar 30 P&M 10, 11, 12 (Sampson & Laub, Rowell et al., Paternoster et al.)
- Apr 6 P&M 13, 14, 15 Shover & Thompson, Laub et al., Tremblay et al.)
- Apr 13 [longitudinal study issue 1]
- Apr 20 [longitudinal study issue 2]
- Apr 27 [longitudinal study issue 3]
- May 4 Final Exam, Essay Paper due at start of exam.

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<sup>1</sup> Cordella & Siegel, *Contemporary Criminological Theory* (1996)

<sup>2</sup> Piquero & Mazerolle, *Life-Course Criminology* (2001)

<sup>3</sup> “Self-Control and Social-Control: An Exposition of the Gottfredson-Hirschi/Sampson-Laub Debate.” *Studies on Crime and Crime Prevention* 5:2:125-150

From: Vila, Bryan  
Sent: Fri 27-Jan-06 09:39  
To: Vila, Bryan; smmccormick@wsu.edu; tboice@wsu.edu;  
tmichaud@wsu.edu; nrjahns@doc1.wa.gov; ajrussell@wsu.edu;  
rongstewart@hotmail.com; dlively@wsu.edu; jst237@wsu.edu;  
kfhouse@doc1.wa.gov  
Cc: Lovrich, Nicholas P  
Subject: Please read for next week: Genes, Life Stress & Depression, Caspi  
et al. 2003 + Supplement<sup>4</sup>

CRMJ 591 Seminar participants:

I'll make you a special deal: Take an honest whack at this unscheduled assignment -- no more than three hours of work -- and count it as worth half of your mid-term grade.

This is a follow-on article to the one I sent last night. It more clearly shows the way that a genes' expression can vary depending on experiences during a critical developmental window.

1. NOTE that these windows occur only during one period of the life course. This insight may have important implications for our analysis of longitudinal criminological research during the second half of the semester.
2. I know that few, if any, of you have much of a background in genetics, but that doesn't mean that you can't dig through technical articles such as this from the most prestigious scientific journals in order to pick out what's relevant for you. (The main article is accompanied by a supplement that describes the research methods -- parts of the supplement are much easier reading and they may help you understand the main article.) So try to answer these questions with one or two sentences each:

Q: What key role does serotonin play in brain function?

Q: What is an allele? (look it up on-line at Wikipedia using this link <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allele> )

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<sup>4</sup> Caspi, A., K. Sugden, T. E. Moffitt, A. Taylor, I. W. Craig, HL Harrington, J. McClay, J. Mill, J. Martin, A. Braithwaite, R. Poulton. (2003) "Influence of Life Stress on Depression: Moderation by a Polymorphism in the 5-HTT Gene." *Science*, 18 July, v. 301:386-89. **Plus** Supplementary Material – Material and Methods, 5HTT X Life Stress, *Science Online*.

Q: What does it mean when they say that some people were homozygous for an allele and others had polymorphisms for an allele of the 5-HTT gene?

Q: When in the life course was the developmental window during which this genetic switch could be thrown?

We will discuss this question at the start of our seminar: What insights, if any, does the presence of this sort of mechanism provide us when trying to understand criminal behavior?

If you find this article only slightly less intimidating than translating the Bible from the original Aramaic and Greek, let me give you a hint. First, read the abstract carefully, then the first two full paragraphs and the last two full paragraphs. Then look up the terms I've asked questions about if you still need to. Then read the first two paragraphs again and skim the rest, taking time to puzzle out what figures 1, 2 & 3 mean.

Cheers,  
Bryan

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