

## **SYLLABUS: Intro to Political Science Research Methods (PoIS 503)**

**Course Description:** This is a course on social science research design 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 sessions, 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: 358-7900. Office hours: TBA 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 at least a failing grade for the course. If you have **any** questions about cheating, plagiarism, or scholarly standards, please ask.

#### **Required Texts:**

- *The Thinker's Toolkit (1998 version)*. (Jones, 1998, Three Rivers Press).
- *Research Methods in Criminal Justice and Criminology, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*. (Hagan, 2006)
- *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. (Salkind, 2004)
- 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, in-class final exam                                  | 20% |

**Days/Times/Locations:** The course meets every Monday in SAC 24 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. Pages should be stapled together. 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 Hagan (2006) Appendix G. *It will be graded according to the criteria on pp. 475-76 of Hagan’s book.* 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.

## Schedule, Lecture Topics, & Reading Assignments

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| Aug 21 | Introduction, administrative details, goals, and classroom review of key concepts.  |
| Aug 28 | Read Jones, pp. 0-124. 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). |
| Sept 4 | HOLIDAY: Labor Day  |

- Sept 11 Read Jones, pp. 125-314. 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).
- Sept 18 Read Hagan, pp. 0-75, DO Review Questions 1, 2, 3 on p. 32 and 2, 3, 4, 5 on p. 74 to turn in at beginning of class (3% of course grade based on quality and correctness). Note, each question should require no more than one, double-spaced typewritten page to answer.
- Sept 25 Joint work to draft posters for 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Design Research Conference: What Makes a Livable Community? and present posters at the Gamelan Brainstorming Poster Session.
- Oct 5 (Thursday)** Prepare posters. Attend 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Design Research Conference: What Makes a Livable Community? and present posters at the Gamelan Brainstorming Poster Session. *The Gamelan will be held in the South Campus facility courtyard (next to the campus bookstore). You should arrive at least by 5:30 p.m. to help set up posters, then participate throughout the rest of the evening.*
- Oct. 9 Read Hagan, Chapter 3. DO Review Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 on p. 113 (3% of course grade based on quality and correctness). Note, questions 1,2,& 3 should require no more than one, double-spaced typewritten page to answer. Question 4 should require about 3 pages.
- Oct 16 Read Hagan, Chapters 4, 5 & 6. DO choose two Review Questions from each chapter and answer them (3% of course grade based on quality and correctness). Note, most questions should require no more than one, double-spaced typewritten page to answer.
- Oct 23 Read Hagan, Chapters 7 & 8 then read Knauft (1987). DO choose two Review Questions from each chapter and answer them (3% of course grade based on quality and correctness). Note, most questions should require no more than one, double-spaced typewritten page to answer.
- 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>
- Oct 30 Read Hagan, Chapters 9, 11 and Appendix G. Review the research design template circulated last week, then outline the following research design steps with regard to the research proposal you have been considering for your semester project: 1) research question, 2) hypothesis to be tested; 3) causal diagram of relationship between independent and dependent variables at the conceptual level showing how that maps onto your operational variables.
- Nov 6 Read Hagan, Chapter 12. Class presentation of layout of research design concepts, research question, operationalization, etc.
- Nov 13 Read Hagan, Chapter 13
- Nov 20 HOLIDAY: Thanksgiving
- Nov 27 Finish stats review by reading through pp. 1-138 of Salkind's book and thinking about the logic. Choose one question from each of the 7 chapters and answer it in writing; this assignment will be turned in at the beginning of class.
- Dec 4 Course review & consolidation.
- Dec 11 Final Exam, Semester project due at start of exam.

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