POLI 490H
Advanced Undergraduate Seminar
Statistical Research in Criminal Justice
M, W 3:35–4:50 pm, Graham Memorial 038
Fall 2019

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Office hours: M, W 2-3:30 pm and by appointment

This course will focus on hands-on quantitative research projects conducted in close consultation with the instructor, either individually or in small groups. Topics will include statistical questions about the criminal justice system, with datasets and research questions provided by the instructor. Some projects will deal with the death penalty, updating and extending research previously conducted for the book, *Deadly Justice: A Statistical Portrait of the Death Penalty* (Oxford, 2018). Others will relate to a database made available from the NC Administrative Office of the Courts, consisting of millions of records of arrest throughout the state over the past five years. Others may relate to research on traffic stops, with an emphasis on racial and gender disparities in the outcomes of those routine citizen-police encounters. Students will gain hands-on experience in: a) data collection and management; b) data analysis; c) technical writing; d) oral and written communication; and e) speaking truth to power on controversial subjects of public policy.

Datasets, codebooks, and other materials will be made available on the class website: http://fbaum.unc.edu/teaching/POLI490H_Fa19/poli490H-Fa19.htm.

This website will also contain updated information about the assignments. The general idea will be this: for the first few weeks of the semester, we'll review three sets of research projects; one related to the US experience with the death penalty, surrounding the 2018 book, *Deadly Justice: A Statistical Portrait of the Death Penalty* (Oxford University Press); another related to research on racial disparities on traffic stops, around the 2018 book, *Suspect Citizens: What 20 Million Traffic Stops Tell Us about Policing and Race* (Cambridge University Press); and another relating to on-going research using the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts records of 5 years of arrests from 2013 through 2017, some 13.7 million observations.

These research projects and databases allow for a number of research projects. I would like each of you to gain at least two things this semester: a technical skill, and knowledge about a substantive area / data source. I'd also like you each to work in a group where you bring these skills and bits of knowledge together to form an important analysis.

Technical skills might be for this list, or others similar to these:
- database management in R or Stata
- GIS / mapping skills
- Statistical analysis skills
- Graphical presentation of data using R or Stata
- Web scraping and automated data collection

- Other technical skills as needed for your projects

Substantive knowledge might be such things as:

- Deep understanding of the NC AOC database on arrests, court procedures, punishments, bonds, fines, and so on
- Deep understanding of the death penalty in a particular state or county including such things as the prosecutors responsible for the most death sentences and so on
- Deep understanding of statistics related to traffic stops in a given jurisdiction, based on whatever databases are made public for that jurisdiction
- Other items of substantive knowledge based on your interests

Note: I don't expect each of you to learn all these things; but at least one from the first group and one from the second.

Depending on your interests, we may work on a collective research project involving the entire class, but in any case each of you will work on a group project of your choosing, and will present regularly to class, both about problems you are encountering, so others can help solve them, and about your progress. You'll make two formal presentations, one a preliminary statement of the problem and your approach, and the other a final project.

As you think about your research project, you'll need to find a source for data. Beyond the databases I'll make available, I'd particularly encourage you to look at city and state open-data portals for relevant databases. For example, the state of California mandated in 2015 that cities begin collecting traffic stops data and these will start being made public, based on the size of the city, in 2019. Based on litigation and local politics, different bits of data are available for various cities nationwide. So, feel free to dig into these databases and conduct projects based on what you find.

Keep in mind that your research project will not stand alone, but will stand on the shoulders of whatever previous research has been done in the area. Therefore it will need to have a good review of the relevant literature, and you'll need to become expert on what has been done in the area. A good research project invariably includes a detailed understanding of what research has previously been done in the area. So, hit the library and get used to JSTOR.

I will work closely with each group both in office hours and in class. I'll also help with technical trainings as needed. This is definitely a class where you'll want to use initiative and go out and learn new skills, or make use of skills you've learned in other classes; I'll encourage you to share those skills with others in class.

Your research projects should lead both to a PPT / slide presentation as well as a final report / term paper. The term paper should be complete with references, etc. See the class web site for a template which you can use that helps with formatting, etc. As a rough guide, your paper should be about 10 pages long, double-spaced, for each member of the group (so a 3 person group should do a 30 page paper). But if your paper is complete and contains complicated statistical, mapping, graphical, or other technical material, this can substitute for length, particularly if you have a group larger than 3.

<u>Grades will be calculated as follows:</u>

Class participation, including asking questions	25%
Learning both a technical skill and a substantive one	25
Oral presentations of your group	25
Written paper of your group	25
Total	100%

<u>Missed class and late assignments</u>: Missing class more than a few times will certainly affect your participation grade. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the day they are due. Any late papers / progress reports will be accepted but down-graded by 5 points after the class when they are due, then 5 more points each 24 hours including weekends; if you are late with the assignment, email me the paper. If you know ahead of time you will miss an assignment for some good reason, contact me so we may agree on an alternative, without any penalty. Similarly, if you have an illness or a university supported excuse then no penalties will apply. Just stay in touch.

Caveat: I consider the syllabus in a class to be a contract. However, I do reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates, when unforeseen circumstances occur. These changes will be announced as early as possible so that students can adjust their schedules.

Disabilities: Please let me know in the first two weeks of class if you need any accommodation for a disability. No problem. But don't delay in letting me know.

Academic Honesty: Study together but make sure the work you hand in is your own. For all course work, the Honor Code applies; the student's signature on her/his work confirms that the Code rules were respected. Familiarize yourselves with the Code at https://studentconduct.unc.edu/honor-system. You also need to familiarize yourself with the concept and practice of plagiarism in order to make sure that you avoid it. Plagiarism is defined as deliberate or reckless representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise. Take the library's tutorial at http://www.lib.unc.edu/instruct/plagiarism/ and ask me if you have any questions.

Effort: Don't come to class unprepared to participate.

Computers and cell phones: Turn off your phones, for sure. Computers are ok if used for note-taking and referring to the articles. I strongly prefer that you bring actual old-fashioned paper copies of the readings and take notes with pen and paper, so that your attention is directed only at the course material, not your social media. If I see anyone on an irrelevant web site, I'll mark you down a full letter grade in the class, so please do not do that.

For the weekly course schedule, please see the class web site.