



POLI 490-003

Advanced Undergraduate Seminar: Research on Race and Criminal Justice 452 Hamilton Hall, Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:35-4:50pm Fall 2018

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This course is designed for students who have already taken POLI 203, POLI 248, or equivalent coursework and who are interested in conducting their own research project into an aspect of the criminal justice system with a focus on racial differences. Each student will pick a particular research project and play a lead role on that, as well as participate in another project led by other students. Everyone will also participate in an on-going project throughout the term, which we will use as a running example and illustration. Readings will be specific to the research projects themselves, with some common background reading for all. Each student group will make periodic presentations to the class on the progress on their research and be expected to follow the research of their colleagues in the class as well. Grades will be based on participation, presentations, and a final group project. The final project must be written in the form of whatever publication outlet one seeks: law review, book chapter, academic article, etc. Each project will also lead to a popular publication such as an op-ed or significant blog contribution. In the last two weeks of class and again during the final exam period, the leaders of each group will present the project in the format of an academic conference presentation, and everyone involved will answer questions from the audience.

We will all constitute the group for one of the research projects, and I will do the analysis for that project, and show you how to do similar analyses for your own projects. We will use the collective project as a learning-by-doing experience taking the project from reviewing the literature to developing a theory and hypotheses, testing them, and writing up the results, as explained in the weekly assignments at the end of this syllabus.

Just as each of you will work on different research projects, but take the lead on one of them, so will each of you need to develop some specialized technical skills. Those depend on the research topics, but some of the key skills will include: a) interactive graphic web design for presentation of data; b) GIS and mapping; c) data analysis; d) statistical graphics; e) data management and manipulation; f) linking quantitative data with qualitative discussion and illustrations. All of you will learn the value of complete scientific documentation of what you do.

My role will be to work with the class as a whole and with individual groups to help you produce professional quality work. My goal is that each research team will produce work that can lead to a publication, and hopefully both a popular one as well as an academic one. Popular would include such things as op-eds or blog postings on prominent national blogs, and academic ones would be things like articles for journals or chapters for books. Some of this should be complete before the semester is over, and some may not be complete in the 16 weeks we have together. You can decide for yourselves whether you'd like to continue on if the work seems promising but not yet published.

In each class session, we will have some time devoted to technical issues such as how to program in Stata or R, how to make a graph or table to professional standards, how to design an interactive web page for the presentation of data, or how to organize and manage a large database. We may also discuss particular substantive research problems and topics, including relevant articles from the literature. We'll work on writing and presentation of an argument. Some days, this will be the topic where you are actively engaged, and on other days, it will be a topic where another student or group of students has taken the lead. But on no day should you be silent or disengaged.

Unfortunately, I also have to assign grades, so I will do so according to this formula:

Participation	25%
Three presentations, 10 points each	30%
Final exam / presentation	10%
Final paper	25%
Op-ed version of final paper	10%
Total	100%

The final exam will consist of presentations of the research projects in a format similar to what is done in a professional conference in political science.

Some of the work here will involve group projects, and I know that will make you nervous in terms of grading and credit. I will ask each of you to assess the work of the others as over-and-above, full contributor, weak contributor, or non-contributor, and I will take those assessments into account in assigning individual grades. Everyone in the same group will not necessarily get the same grade.

As my goal is that every project should be driving to publication status, potentially after the class is over, some of you may choose to become coauthors. Others may find this too much work. Here is my proposal on how to handle that. In any case where members of the group believe it is worth trying to submit work for publication, I will also review it. If we agree, I'll join on as co-author, which means that after you hand in your work for a grade in the class, I will then step in and make whatever revisions I think will help move the work toward professional standards needed for publication. And I will solicit each student's confidential assessment of whether all the other students deserve to be listed as a co-author. Any student who receives a majority of votes from the other students will be listed. Any student can choose not to be listed, of course. Students listed must be able to continue to work on the project if needed. Students not listed as co-authors will be acknowledged. The difference between being acknowledged for your help and being listed as a co-author is the difference between following instructions and doing your job in the class and becoming an intellectual partner in the project. Just doing the required classwork for a grade will not be enough to be listed as a co-author.

Course Policies:

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: Sometimes you will work in groups, but each of you needs to contribute individually and hand in work that clearly represents who contributed to it. 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>. Make sure that you are fully informed about the concept and practice of plagiarism, as well as other forms of unacceptable conduct. 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. Read the "Instrument of Student Judicial Governance" here: <https://studentconduct.unc.edu/sites/studentconduct.unc.edu/files/documents/Instrument.pdf>.

Cell phones: Turn them off, period. Don't even think about getting messages while in the classroom.

Computers: Generally, I say no computers in class. In this particular class, however, as we will be doing research, please bring your laptops to class and be prepared to share on the projector whatever you are doing. Lots of the work we will be doing will involve active learning using your computers, so be ready. Bring a USB flash drive in case you need to show some files on the projector. It should go without saying, but if I note non-class related computer activity I will be very unhappy and count is as a day without attendance.

Grades: I will assign number grades to all your assignments. These will be aggregated according to the formula above, and translated to letter grades with these break points: <60 = F; 60+ = D; 67+ = D+; 70+ = C-; 73+ = C; 77+ = C+; 80+ = B-; 83+ = B; 87+ = B+; 90+ = A-; 94+ = A. Fractional grades will round to the nearest whole number.

Late Work: Please respect everyone in the class and be on time with your work. Class presentations not ready when agreed will be marked down by one full letter grade, with a further mark down by one letter grade each class period. Final papers not ready will be marked down by one full grade each 24 hours. No penalties will apply to students with university approved excuses or who receive permission from the instructor ahead of time. This permission will be given only in cases of health, hardship or other extraordinary difficulty. I expect you to do your fair share of work, and on time.

Syllabus Changes / Class Web Site: Some elements of timing will be decided during the semester and promptly added to the course web site and discussed in class. You should pay attention to the course web site for updates. Required readings will often be announced on the class web site, so check there often.

Collective work: We will plan to publish the work we produce, if it rises to that level. I reserve the right to publish our work on my UNC web page and in other formats, always giving credit to those who participated.

Suggested Research Topics. Each of the topics below is a good potential research project where there are new data to analyze which I can provide or show how to find. Depending on the number of students in the class, we may do only some of these, or we may develop more.

1. The impact of officer demographics on the odds of search following a traffic stop. Do White, Black, Latinx, Male, and Female officers search drivers at similar rates? How does this differ by the race, age, and gender of the driver? (Charlotte data available; need to search for more data in other cities, review literature, develop statistical tests, do the analysis. This could be a journal article project, and will be our on-going class project throughout the semester.)
2. Variation in gun homicide victimization by race, gender, and age. County, state, and national data are available on all deaths, homicides, and gun homicides from the 1950s to present, but I have never seen these data analyzed. What percent of white and black males and females die by gun victimization. What about children? Discuss gun control and the death penalty with respect to these trends. (Potential journal article; potential section of chapter for the next edition of *Deadly Justice*.)
3. An Index of Racial Disparity for 100 NC Counties. Find data on racial differences in as many fields of public policy as possible, including educational outcomes, health and mortality, jobs and employment, wages, housing, criminal justice, and so on to see if the 100 counties of our state show consistent patterns of racial difference. Do these correspond with the use of the death penalty? (Potential journal article.)
4. Assess the lasting legacies of slavery and lynching. New databases have recently been released showing the US counties with more and fewer lynchings during the period when those were more common. A recent book (*Deep Roots: How Slavery Still Shapes Southern Politics*) has argued that the 1860 census showing the number of slaves in each county still predicts important social differences by county today. A simple test is whether either of these variables, or the two combined, predict the use of the death penalty, or the racial disparities uncovered in the project listed just above. (Potential journal article; potential section of chapter for the next edition of *Deadly Justice*.)
5. Racial variation in pre-trial detention and bond amounts. Use the NC AOC database (millions of court records for 2013-2017) to compare the amounts of bond required for different defendants before trial, controlling for the charges against them. Is it racially equitable? (Potential journal article.)
6. Understanding Structured Sentencing. Review the NC system of structured sentencing to compare crimes that generate different amounts of punishment. For example, murder, assault with the intent to commit serious injury, assault with a deadly weapon, assault, and the various “attempted” versions of these crimes carry very different punishments, as do things like voluntary manslaughter. If you look up the case of Serena and Venus Williams’ sister, you will see that she was killed when a gang member attempted to shoot her boyfriend (premeditated murder), but missed and killed her instead (voluntary manslaughter). That killer is now out on parole, whereas if he had killed the person he intended to, he’d certainly be in prison, probably for life. And yet a family still suffers the loss of a loved one. How do states come up with these systems? What are the racial and gender implications of them for punishments, using the NC AOC database? (Potential journal article.)
7. I am open to other suggestions but they have to be feasible, data-oriented, and potentially publishable.

Weekly schedule

Week 1. Aug 22, introductions.

Week 2. Aug 27, 29. A semester long collaboration: Officer Characteristics and Search Rates

- Readings and structured literature review, each student responsible for a different reading. (Monday, Wednesday)

Week 3. Sep 5. Develop testable research hypotheses from the readings last week.

- (No class on Sept 3, Happy Labor Day!)
- Revisit the readings and discussion from last week and translate these into testable hypotheses, given the data available for Charlotte, or other cities. (Wednesday)

Week 4. Sept 10, 12. Test the theory you developed last week.

- I will run the statistical tests you come up with and we will discuss. Maybe we need to revise / improve / clarify the theory. (Monday)
- Research teams established, initial meetings during class time (Wednesday)

Week 5. Sep 17, 19. Decide on the “Hook.”

- We will collectively decide what are the most powerful findings we have generated from the project above. Are we ready to write an article or do we need more data? (Monday)
- Research teams meeting in groups (Wednesday)

Week 6. Sep 24, 26. Develop a more powerful theoretical perspective on the precise question.

- Now that we have isolated a narrow theme for our article on officer characteristics, what are the relevant theoretical perspectives from outside the area of criminal justice, for example from psychology? Why do we think that officers differ in this particular way? What is our theory of this phenomenon? Why do we think it happens? (Monday)
- Research teams meeting in groups, first statements of the problem to the class (Wednesday)

Week 7. Oct 1, 3. Formalize the theory and hypotheses.

- Now that we have a theoretical perspective and a precise set of findings, let’s formalize the theory, state it clearly, and deduce the relevant hypotheses that we will test. (Monday)
- Research teams 1-3 (tbc) present to the class on initial plans. (Wednesday)

Week 8. Oct 8, 10. Structure the presentation of the data and results.

- What tables and figures do we need to make the case? In what order should they be presented? Exactly how should they look? (Monday)
- Research teams 4-6 (tbc) present to the class on initial plans. (Wednesday)

Week 9. Oct 15, 17. Write the results.

- Describe the results from the tables and figures. (Monday)
- Research teams 7-9 (tbc) present to the class on initial plans. (Wednesday)

Week 10. Oct 22, 24. Write the conclusions.

- What substantive conclusions and implications do we draw from this? Why did we do this study in the first place? How do we answer the question with which we started, and what are the practical, substantive, methodological, and moral implications of what we have found? What are the limitations we have to acknowledge? (Monday)
- Research teams 1-3 (tbc) present to the class on progress. (Wednesday)

Week 11. Oct 29, 31. Finalize the article.

- Go through the article from A to Z. Does it flow just right? Is it the right length? Are all the important people cited in the literature review, emphasizing their contributions, not their faults? Can an eighth-grader understand the results, so clearly are they presented? Are there any dead-ends or curly-cues that need to be eliminated so the article is as streamlined as possible, not posing any questions it does not answer? Is the reference list complete? Does it look professional? Are all the tables and figures just-so? (Monday)
- Research teams 4-6 (tbc) present to the class on progress. (Wednesday)

Week 12. Nov 5, 7. Draw out an op-ed.

- With the article completely drafted, is there anything newsworthy here? Can we distill it down to 1,100 words with one or two graphics and send it to the *Monkey Cage* (*Washington Post*), or down to 700 words with no figures and send it to a major newspaper such as the *News and Observer*? (Monday)
- Research teams 7-9 (tbc) present to the class on progress. (Wednesday)

Week 13. Nov 12, 14. Group projects and working in class.

- Make-up for any delays in weeks above, and office hours / consulting in class. (Monday, Wednesday)

Week 14. Nov 19. Group projects and working in class.

- Research progress and consulting in class. (Monday)
- (No Class on Nov 21, Happy Thanksgiving!)

Week 15. Nov 26, 28. Final Projects I.

- Final research presentations, 12 minutes each followed by 7 minutes Q&A (Monday, Wednesday)

Week 16. Dec 3, 5. Final Projects II.

- Final research presentations, 12 minutes each followed by 7 minutes Q&A (Monday, Wednesday)
- Written projects due in class Dec 5.

Final Exam: Saturday December 8, 4:00pm, regular classroom.

The final exam will consist of conference-style presentations of each research project. The lead authors will present and all members will answer questions from the professor and the other students, serving as audience members. Timing for the presentation and the q&a will be determined by the number of projects to be presented. Time permitting, this will be a 12 minute presentation followed by 7 minutes of questions.