

# THE CAPSTONE COURSE

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Course #: CCJ 6935

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## **Purpose**

The capstone course is the last course you will take as part of the cohort program. The cohort program was designed so that you should have initially constructed a research proposal in your Research Methods course and you should have continued to revise your original draft as you progressed through the program. Each course should have provided you with more in depth scholarship that you could add to your research proposal. The purpose of this course is to provide you with the structure to finalize your research grant. This research grant is the equivalent to a Master's Thesis.

## **Organization of the Course**

We will meet as a group on the first and last day of the course. Otherwise, the course is designed so that you can personally meet with me in order to produce the final draft of your research proposal. Please email me and give me multiple times when you can meet and I will adjust my schedule to meet with you during those times. Note also that I will need at least 3 days to read the draft of your research proposal. Consequently, I will not be able to meet with you unless you have sent me your draft and 3 days has transpired.

## **Grade**

Your grade will be based on your research grant and your final presentation, which will be on the last day of the course. You must present your research proposal. You will earn an "F" for the course if you do not present your research grant via a PowerPoint presentation on the last day of the class in person. The other criminology faculty at USF-SM will attend your presentations.

You will earn less than a B (a failing grade) unless you have mastered your research proposal. I consider you as extension of the quality of our graduate program upon your graduation. You not only represent our graduate program but also the quality of my instruction upon your graduation. You will not earn a passing grade in the course, that is, graduate from the program, unless your research proposal more than adequately demonstrates that you have conquered the fundamentals of academic scholarship.

Your grade will be the weighted average of the grades you earned on your presentation and your research proposal. The research paper will account for 75 percent and your presentation 25 percent of your final grade.

## **Basis of Evaluating Your Research Proposal**

This project is intended to give you “hands on” experience in doing research. For this class project, you will construct a “grant proposal;” a proposal designed to be submitted to the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institute of Justice (NIJ), or some other agency requesting funds to conduct your research.

Your grant proposal must be original. You will be required to theoretically justify the selection of your topic, do an extensive literature review, define your key theoretical constructs, construct the hypotheses that you will test, operationalize your independent and dependent variables (developing scales to measure each), design the questionnaire, select and justify the sample to whom you will administer the questionnaire to, and present a polished research report of your work.

Because you will be spending quite a bit of time on this project throughout the semester, it is important that you select a topic that is relevant and interesting to you. In selecting your topic, it is also critical that you narrow and focus your topic. It is better to beat a small problem to death than take on a large project and do it poorly.

## **RESEARCH PROJECT**

Your project will be divided into the following eight parts.

### **I. Introduction**

Here you should clearly state your research question. This is usually the most difficult section to write because it demands that you clearly understand exactly what you intend to do and are able to clearly write it. This section will require multiple drafts.

### **II. Theoretical Justification—Literature Review**

This section addresses the related research on your question. You should include a review of the most PERTINENT and RECENT research articles from professional journals. Use SOCIOFILE and ERIC to find these articles. Use at least five articles. You should begin your literature review as soon as possible, as acquiring some of your articles may require interlibrary loan and you will need to complete this section before designing your questionnaire. Your discussion and analysis of the literature should be directed toward your research question.

### **III. Define your key theoretical constructs and construct the hypotheses that you will test**

First, you need to theoretically define (e.g., Marx defines social classes differently than functionalists) your key theoretical constructs. Note that theoretically defining your key constructs differs from empirically operationalizing them. Second, you need to identify your independent and dependent variables. Third, you have to empirically operationalize your independent and dependent variables by constructing indices or scales.

### **IV. Methods**

This section should include an extensive discussion of the methodology that you intend to use. In particular, you should describe the sample, including how and why you will generate your sample. Discuss possible sources of bias in your sample. Describe any problems that you may encounter in your design or procedures.

### **V. Variables and Data Section—based on your questionnaire**

In this section, you need to outline the measure you will include in your analyses. How you construct these variables is defined by the questions included in your questionnaire. Consequently, your questionnaire needs to include demographic measures, the indices measuring your independent and dependent variables, and other variables/questions that could render the relationship between your independent and dependent variable to be spurious (i.e., all relevant covariates).

### **VI. Conclusion**

The conclusion needs to include a summary of why your research is of theoretical interest. It also should include a possible policy justification for your grant proposal. That is, why should hard working Americans pay their taxes so that the government funds your project?

### **VII. References**

All ideas taken from published material that are used in your paper must be cited in the text of your paper. At the end of the relevant sentence, include the author's last name and the year of the publication in parentheses--(Jones, 1994). These should not be direct quotations; rather they should be your words expressing the author's idea to best make YOUR point. All work cited in your paper must be included in the reference section. Include the full references in a standard format in alphabetical order by the author's last name at the end of your paper.

### **VIII. Appendix**

Include a copy of your questionnaire.

I can provide you feedback on each part of your project. Take advantage of this opportunity by

submitting the best work you can on each occasion. If you do not, your assignment grade will suffer and your final project grade will undoubtedly reflect the lost opportunity for effective feedback.

The text of your project should be about 20 typed, double spaced pages, not including tables, references, or the appendix. Everything should be your own words—you should have no more than 3 direct quotes. All proposals will be run through a plagiarism software program—so please cite your materials.

Any late projects will be penalized 10% for each 24 hour period. Computer problems are NOT an acceptable excuse for late projects so start your proposal early and expect problems. Be sure to back-up all of your work.

### **USF Policies, Procedures**

- **Religious Observances:** The University recognizes the right of students and faculty to observe major religious holidays. Students who anticipate the necessity of being absent from class for a major religious observance must provide notice of the date(s) to the instructor, in writing, by the second week of classes.
- **Disabilities Accommodation Statement:** Students are responsible for registering with the Office of Students with Disabilities Services (SDS) in order to receive academic accommodations. Reasonable notice must be given to the SDS office (typically 5 working days) for accommodations to be arranged. It is the responsibility of the student to provide each instructor with a copy of the official Memo of Accommodation. Contact Information: Pat Lakey, Coordinator, 941-359-4714, [plakey@sar.usf.edu](mailto:plakey@sar.usf.edu), or [www.sarasota.usf.edu/Students/Disability/](http://www.sarasota.usf.edu/Students/Disability/)
- **Academic Dishonesty:** The University considers any form of plagiarism or cheating on exams, projects, or papers to be unacceptable behavior. Please be sure to review the university's policy in the catalog, [USFSM Undergraduate Catalog](#) or [USFSM Graduate Catalog](#) and the [USF Student Code of Conduct](#).

**Academic Disruption:** The University does not tolerate behavior that disrupts the learning process. The policy for addressing academic disruption is included with Academic Dishonesty in the catalog:, [USFSM Undergraduate Catalog](#) or [USFSM Graduate Catalog](#) and the [USF Student Code of Conduct](#).

### **Emergency Preparedness**

It is strongly recommended that you become familiar with the USF Sarasota-Manatee Emergency Action Plan on the Safety Preparedness site <http://www.sarasota.usf.edu/facilities/SafetyPreparedness.php>

#### **Fire Alarm Instructions:**

At the beginning of each semester please note the emergency exit maps posted in each classroom. These signs are marked with the primary evacuation route (red) and secondary evacuation route (orange) in case the building needs to be evacuated.

- **Contingency Plans**

In the event of an emergency, it may be necessary for USFSM to suspend normal operations. During this time, USFSM may opt to continue delivery of instruction through methods that include but are not limited to: Blackboard, Elluminate, Skype, and email messaging and/or an alternate schedule. It's the responsibility of the student to monitor Blackboard site for each class for course specific communication, and the main USFSM and College websites, emails, and MoBull messages for important general information. The USF hotline at 1 (800) 992-4231 is updated with pre-recorded information during an emergency.

See the Safety Preparedness Website for further information.

<http://www.sarasota.usf.edu/facilities/SafetyPreparedness.php>