

THE CAPSTONE COURSE

James D. Unnever, Ph.D., Duke 1980

Course #: CCJ 6935

Office: Sarasota Campus, C247

Office Phone: 359-359-4218 or call 359-4454 and leave a message

Email address: unnever@sar.usf.edu

Home page: <http://www.sarasota.usf.edu/academics/cas/faculty/unnever.php>

Purpose

The capstone course is the last course you will take as part of the cohort program. The cohort program is designed around your successful completion of a major research grant. You should have constructed a research proposal in your Research Methods course and then 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 (01/14/2012) and last day of the course (05/05/2012) from 12:00pm-02:50pm. The course is designed so that you can personally meet with me in order to produce the final draft of your research proposal. Please e-mail me and provide me with multiple times when you can meet and I will adjust my schedule to meet with you during those times. I will need at least 3 days to read the draft of your research proposal before I meet with you. Consequently, I will not be able to meet with you unless you have sent me the draft of your research grant 3 days prior to our scheduled meeting.

Grade

Your grade will be based on your research grant and your final presentation, which will be on the last day of the course, 05/05/2012. You must present your research proposal. You will earn an "F" for the course if you do not present in person your research grant via a PowerPoint presentation on the last day of the class. The other criminology faculty at USF-SM may attend your presentations.

You will earn less than a B (a failing grade) unless you have mastered your research proposal. I consider your graduation as a statement of the quality of our graduate program. 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

Your research grant is intended to give you “hands on” experience with doing criminological 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 critical 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 PowerPoint presentation of your proposal.

Because you will be spending all of your time on this project in this course, it is important that you continually redraft your project. It is critical that you narrow the focus your topic. It is better to beat a small problem to death than take on a large project and do it poorly.

STRUCTURE OF YOUR 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.

You will earn a failing grade for your research grant if it does not include a clearly written introductory section succinctly outlining the intent of your research.

II. Theoretical Justification—Critical Literature Review

This section addresses the related research on your question. It is key section of your research grant. The quality of your literature review defines the quality of your research project. The review must be exhaustive and current (citing 2012 literature). It must include a critical summary of the extant literature. The literature review determines the hypothesis that you will test and how you will operationalize your key constructs. Your research specifically addresses

what the prior research has either omitted or has not done well.

You should include a review of the most PERTINENT and RECENT research articles from professional peer reviewed journals. Use GOOGLE SCHOLAR, SOCIOFILE, and ERIC to find relevant articles in only peer reviewed journals. Your discussion and analysis of the literature should be directed toward your research question. This must be an exhaustive current review of the literature. I will go online and conduct a search of my own related to your topic. You will fail this section of your research project if I find pertinent articles that you did not cite.

The key paragraphs in this section are at the end of your literature review. You **must** include at least two paragraphs that clearly define how your research project advances the literature on your topic. This sentence can be structured as follows: “My research project advances the prior literature in X ways. First,....”

You will earn a failing grade for your research grant if it does not include a section detailing how your research advances the literature.

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 derived from your data collection instrument.

The quality of how you define and operationalize the chief variables for your research project flows from the quality of your literature review. For example, if your subject is child abuse you will need a crystal clear definition of what you mean by child abuse and you will need valid measures to assess whether the child has been abused. Again, these measures should reflect and improve upon how previous scholars have defined and operationalized the concept of child abuse.

You will earn a failing grade for your research grant if it does not include a section detailing how you have defined and operationalized your key concepts.

IV. Methods

This section should include an extensive discussion of the methodology that you intend to use. In particular, you should describe how you will collect the data that you will analyze. You will need to review Babbie (the text you used for your Research Methods class) to clearly present your research methodology and my class notes. You **must** clearly justify your choice of how you will collect your data (e.g., a cross sectional survey). There should be a clear discussion of how you will guarantee that your data will be representative of the population that you will study. Discuss possible sources of bias in your sample. Describe any problems that you may encounter in your design or procedures for your data collection.

You will earn a failing grade for your research grant if it does not include a section detailing the methodology you will employ for collecting your data.

V. Variables and Data Section—based on your questionnaire

In this section, you need to construct your questionnaire, which will be included at the end of your research grant in the Appendix. 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 or control variables).

You will earn a failing grade for your research grant if it does not include a clearly constructed questionnaire.

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 will 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 opportunities 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.

YOUR POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

On the last day of our class (05/05/2012), you are responsible for doing an oral presentation in person using PowerPoint of your research project. You will have 25 minutes for your

presentation. I will let you know how much time you have left as you present.

The presentation must highlight the key components of your research. Consequently, you must have an introduction, a review of the literature, a bulleted slide where you detail how your research advances the literature, how you will define and operationalize your key concepts (valid measures), the methodology you will use to assure that your sample is representative of the population you are studying (it is generalizable), a discussion of your questionnaire (hand out a hard copy of it), and a discussion of your conclusions.

You will be graded on the clarity and the substance of your presentation.

USF Sarasota-Manatee Policies and 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.

<http://generalcounsel.usf.edu/policies-and-procedures/pdfs/policy-10-045.pdf>

Disabilities Accommodation

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. www.sarasota.usf.edu/Students/Disability/

Contact Information: Pat Lakey, Coordinator 941-359-4714

plakey@sar.usf.edu

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.

Undergraduate: <http://www.sarasota.usf.edu/Academics/Catalogs/>

Graduate: <http://www.sarasota.usf.edu/Academics/Catalogs/>

USF Student Code of Conduct: <http://www.sa.usf.edu/srr/page.asp?id=88>

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.

Undergraduate: <http://www.sarasota.usf.edu/Academics/Catalogs/>

Graduate: <http://www.sarasota.usf.edu/Academics/Catalogs/>

USF Student Code of Conduct: <http://www.sa.usf.edu/srr/page.asp?id=88>

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.

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.