SELF-CONTROL, CRIME, AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE
Criminology and Criminal Justice (CCJ) 4938

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Course overview

This course will provide students a broad understanding of the evolving theory and research on the concept of self-control. This individual quality involves people’s willingness and ability to override immediate urges and impulses and, instead, act in ways that advance long-term interests for themselves and others. Self-control attracts significant attention from a wide range of behavioral science disciplines, including especially criminology. This course will cover that literature to explore the causes, consequences, and development of self-control over the life course. Also, significant attention will be devoted to the policy implications of this research. The course will consist of four units:

I. Introductory issues and concepts in the science of self-control. In this unit, we cover foundational issues for the approach used throughout the session. This will involve attention to the meaning of self-control, the interdisciplinary life-course approach that we use to examine it, and the prominent theoretical perspectives in this area of research.

II. The consequences and causes of low self-control. In this unit, we first concern ourselves with the research revealing low self-control as a significant cause of criminal, deviant, and harmful behaviors over the life course. We then move to the issue of causes—we address the factors that affect whether or not a person develops strong self-control in the first decade of life. We conclude by discussing the implications this research has for policy efforts meant to prevent problems with self-control development.

III. Stability and change in self-control. This unit focuses on the longitudinal research examining how a person’s level of self-control shifts across different stages of the life course. Much of this research shows strong stability in self-control—a person with high self-control at one point in life tends to have high self-control at later stages of life. However, research also consistently finds instances of major self-control change. This unit considers this evidence for both stability and change, along with research and theory on the factors that give rise to each pattern. This unit also considers key policy implications.

IV. Concluding issues: Conditional effects and identifying master themes. This last unit has two key goals. The first is to consider an issue neglected thus far, namely that the harmful consequences of low self-control often vary—low self-control can lead to substantial harm in some instances or for some people, but the opposite is true for other instances and people. We consider the major factors that drive this pattern. Our second goal is to summarize the arguments that have been made over the course of the semester. This is done first in reference to the overall causal framework that has been built across the units of the course, and then second in reference to how this framework informs public policy.

Course format

This is an entirely online (“distance learning”) course—there are no face-to-face class meetings.
Course objectives

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to demonstrate their knowledge on the causes, consequences, and development of self-control over the life course. This will include knowledge of prominent theoretical perspectives and the reliable conclusions that have emerged in empirical research. Successful students also will be able to demonstrate knowledge of how this research informs evidence-based policy efforts to reduce problems in the area of self-control development.

Reading material


♦ Additional excerpts/articles that will be provided as PDFs on the course website—these will come up for all units of the course.

My basic approach for assigning reading is to require moderate amounts of reading, but to hold students accountable for the reading that is assigned. Material that is covered only or primarily in the reading (rather than in notes that I provide) will be well represented on the exams, so significant attention to the reading is needed to do well.

The sequence for each unit

The different units of the course last either 3 or 4 weeks, and in each instance, they follow a sequence in which they advance from reading to discussion to the exam.

♦ Reading weeks: This will be the first 1-2 weeks of a unit. For reading weeks, a “context statement” is available under “Files” on the Canvas site. That context statement covers the whole unit. This 2-3 page statement (1) provides an overview of the topic being covered in that unit and (2) places the readings in the overall context of that topic. During reading weeks, students are to review the context statement and start into the reading assignments.

♦ Discussion weeks: These will occur in the middle of units (with one discussion per unit). During discussion weeks, students will continue their reading while also providing postings for an online discussion on Canvas’s discussion board.

♦ Exam weeks: This will be the final week of each unit. Students will finish their reading and prepare for and take the open-note/open-book unit exam. Exams will be available on Canvas sometime on Monday of that week and it must be completed by Friday at 5:00 p.m. EST.

Exams and grades

Your grade for this course will be based on two things: Online discussion postings and exams:

♦ During discussion weeks you will be assessed on the basis of discussion postings that allow you to earn up to 5 points per discussion (20 points total for the session).
During exam weeks, you will be assessed on the basis of exams that are worth 25 points for each exam (100 points total for the session).

This creates a total of 120 possible points. Your final grade will be based on how many points you earn during the session, with the following thresholds used to assign letter grades:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93.5%</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>B-</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<td>D+</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>D-</td>
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<td>F</td>
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Details regarding discussion postings

During discussion weeks, I will post a discussion question on Canvas’s discussion board by 12:00 noon on Monday. You will be expected to post a reply by 5:00 p.m. EST on Friday of that same week. Responses are expected to be approximately 3-4 paragraphs, but the most important issue will be content—your posting should answer the question that was posed, cite relevant reading materials, and be clear, organized, professional, and well-written. Also, to encourage an interesting and productive dialogue, you should avoid waiting until the deadline to make your postings. Original posts can earn up to 4 points (4=excellent, 3=good, 2=acceptable, 1=poor, 0=no post submitted).

In addition to your original post, you must also reply to at least one posting offered by another student. This also is due by 5:00 p.m. EST on the Friday of discussion weeks. The priorities for this reply will be the same as for your original post (i.e., cite relevant materials, and be clear, organized, professional, and well-written), although it is understood that your reply may be shorter in length than the original post. This reply is worth 1 point.

With 4 points for the original post and 1 point for the reply post, each discussion is worth up to 5 points.

One key rule that will govern this process: Discussion postings cannot be made up and late postings will not be accepted.

One other point: These discussion postings are meant to simulate in some way the normal discussion that might occur in a classroom. Their potential to be informative really depends on each student providing thoughtful, well-articulated responses, and then taking the time to read and consider the postings offered by other students. When this is done, these discussions can truly be an interesting part of the course. To assist with this, I also will occasionally offer replies to your postings to highlight important issues that have emerged in the discussion.

Details regarding exams

The five exams will include questions that use multiple choice and true/false formats. Each exam will have 25 questions, each worth 1 point.

The exams will be completed in the Canvas website—it will be posted on the Tuesday of each unit’s exam week, and students can access the exam and complete it anytime between then and 5:00 p.m. on Friday of that same week. However, once the exam is started, you will have 45 minutes to complete it.
I place no restrictions on your use of notes or the course readings. In other words, the tests are “open book” and “open note.” You cannot, however, gain assistance from or provide assistance to another student—your exam must reflect your independent effort. Communicating with other students about exam questions or answers during an exam week is prohibited and a violation of the academic honesty policy. Also, you should not consult sources outside of the course materials (e.g., the Internet), largely because doing so will waste your time (which is important, given the 45 minute limit) and likely will hurt your grade (because of the unreliable information on many websites).

A key point to emphasize: The 45 minute time limit will require that you have significantly prepared for the exam in the same way that you would for an exam in which there is no access to notes or readings. Any attempt to learn the material as the exam is being taken will almost certainly prevent you from completing the exam on time or doing well. Exams that are turned in after 45 minutes will be accepted, but there will be a 5-point penalty for each 5 minute increment over the allotted time.

**Other policies and issues**

* Each exam must be taken at its scheduled time.

* Changes in the reading and schedule may occasionally be made. Notice of such changes will be made through the Canvas website (with e-mails or course announcements) and students are responsible for getting this information.

* Students are responsible for learning how to make use of the various features of Canvas. If you have any questions about this, click on the “Help” button to get to the FSU Canvas Support Center.”

* Also, you are responsible for setting up an FSU e-mail account and routinely checking it so that you receive messages that I send to the class.

* The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University’s expectations for the integrity of students’ academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to “... be honest and truthful and ... [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University.” (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at [http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy/](http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy/).

* Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should:
  1. register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and
  2. bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type.

Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from the Student Disability Resource Center has been provided.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.
For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Student Disability Resource Center
874 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)
sdrc@admin.fsu.edu
http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/

[See the reading assignments and schedule on the next page]
READING AND SCHEDULE

Unit I. Introductory issues and concepts (4 weeks)

Dates: Monday, August 26–Friday, September 20
Reading: 1. The preface and Chapters 1-2 from Hay and Meldrum (2016).

***Friday, Sep. 13, 5:00 p.m., deadline for discussion postings (DQ1)***
***Friday, Sep. 20, 5:00 p.m., deadline for completing Unit I. exam***

Unit II. The consequences and causes of low self-control (4 weeks)

Dates: Monday, September 23–Friday, October 18
Reading: 1. Chapters 3-4 from Hay and Meldrum (2016).

***Friday, Oct. 4, 5:00 p.m., deadline for discussion postings (DQ2)***
***Friday, Oct. 18, 5:00 p.m., deadline for completing Unit II. exam***

Unit III. Stability and change in self-control (3 weeks)

Dates: Monday, October 21–Friday, November 8
Reading: 1. Chapters 5-6 from Hay and Meldrum (2016).

***Friday, Nov. 1, 5:00 p.m., deadline for discussion postings (DQ3)***
***Friday, Nov. 8, 5:00 p.m., deadline for completing Unit III. exam***

Unit IV. Concluding issues: Conditional effects and master themes (5 weeks, counting final exam week)

Dates: Monday, November 11–Friday, December 6
Reading: 1. Chapters 7-9 from Hay and Meldrum (2016).

***Friday, Nov. 22, 5:00 p.m., deadline for discussion postings (DQ4)***
***Friday, Dec. 13, 5:00 p.m., deadline for completing Unit IV. exam***