

**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

- ◆ *Hay, Carter, and Ryan Meldrum. 2016. Self-control and crime over the life course.* Thousand Oaks: Sage (ISBN# 978-1-4833-5899-4). This book is available at the FSU Bookstore and from other online vendors. [28340]
- ◆ 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 Sunday at 11:59 p.m. ET.

## 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:

A/A+	93.00-100.00	B+	87.00-89.99	C+	77.00-79.99
A-	90.00-92.99	B	83.00-86.99	C	73.00-76.99
		B-	80.00-82.99	C-	70.00-72.99
D+	67.00-69.99	F	59.99 or below		
D	63.00-66.99				
D-	60.00-62.99				

## 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 11:59 p.m. ET on Sunday 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 11:59 p.m. ET on Sunday 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 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 11:59 p.m. ET on Sunday 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.

### **Course policies**

1. Changes in the reading, schedule, or any other part of the course may occasionally be made. It is each student's responsibility to stay involved in the course and remain informed of any changes.
2. In any online discussions, be sure to communicate in ways that show respect to other students and viewpoints.

3. It is my expectation that all assignments will be turned in on time, and I do not anticipate accepting any late assignments. I therefore recommend that you stay on top of your assignments and avoid the practice of cramming right before a deadline. It is recognized, however, that in a very small number instances, unavoidable emergencies occur that may warrant accepting a late assignment. Under such circumstances, you need to contact me as soon as possible to discuss your situation.
4. **University Attendance Policy:** Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.
5. **Academic Honor Policy:** 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/academic-resources/academic-integrity-and-grievances/academic-honor-policy>)
6. **Academic Success:** Your academic success is a top priority for Florida State University. University resources to help you succeed include tutoring centers, computer labs, counseling and health services, and services for designated groups, such as veterans and students with disabilities. The following information is not exhaustive, so please check with your advisor or the Dean of Students office to learn more.
7. **Americans with Disabilities Act:** Florida State University (FSU) values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. Our goal is to create learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive, and welcoming. FSU is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities in a manner that is consistent with academic standards of the course while empowering the student to meet integral requirements of the course.

*To receive academic accommodations, a student:*

(1) must register with and provide documentation to the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS);(2) must provide a letter from OAS to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type; and, (3) should communicate with the instructor, as needed, to discuss recommended accommodations. A request for a meeting may be initiated by the student or the instructor.

Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations to a student until appropriate verification from the Office of Accessibility Services 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

Office of Accessibility Services  
874 Traditions Way  
108 Student Services Building  
Florida State University  
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167  
(850) 644-9566 (voice)  
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)  
oas@fsu.edu  
<https://dsst.fsu.edu/oas>

8. **Confidential Campus Resources:** Various centers and programs are available to assist students with navigating stressors that might impact academic success. These include the following:

Victim Advocate Program  
University Center A, Rm. 4100  
(850) 644-7161  
Available 24/7/365  
Office Hours: M-F 8-5  
<https://dsst.fsu.edu/vap>

Counseling and Psychological Services  
Askew Student Life Center, 2nd floor  
942 Learning Way  
(850) 644-8255  
<https://counseling.fsu.edu/>

University Health Services  
Health and Wellness Center  
(850) 644-6230  
<https://uhs.fsu.edu/>

9. **COVID:** We expect everyone to wear a face covering or mask at all times when inside any FSU facility, even if you are vaccinated. This includes all of our students, faculty, staff, vendors and visitors. Recent studies and guidance from the CDC state that both unvaccinated and vaccinated individuals can transmit the current COVID-19 variant to unvaccinated persons. We expect you to help mitigate the spread by wearing a mask.

We expect everyone to be vaccinated against COVID-19, even if you've had COVID-19 in the past. If possible, aim to be fully vaccinated, but if unable, strive to have at least

one shot of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine no later than August 22. Please visit [vaccine.fsu.edu](http://vaccine.fsu.edu) for walk-in clinic dates and hours at the Tucker Center in Tallahassee or [vaccines.gov](http://vaccines.gov) to locate a COVID-19 vaccine provider near you.

We expect you to stay home when sick, self-quarantine and get tested for COVID-19 no sooner than 24 hours after your symptoms begin. You can test for no cost at the Tucker Center. Schedule your test at [uhs.fsu.edu/coronavirus/testing](http://uhs.fsu.edu/coronavirus/testing).

And finally, we expect you to continue to practice good hygiene habits such as washing your hands frequently.

[See the reading assignments and schedule on the next page]

## READING AND SCHEDULE

### Unit I. Introductory issues and concepts (4 weeks)

Dates: Monday, August 23–Sunday, September 19

Reading:

1. The preface and Chapters 1-2 from Hay and Meldrum (2016).
2. Moffitt et al. (2011), “A gradient of self-control...,” from *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.
3. Gopnik (2012), “What’s wrong with the teenage mind?,” from the *Wall Street Journal*.

\*\*\*Sunday, Sep. 12, 11:59 p.m., deadline for discussion postings (DQ1)\*\*\*

\*\*\*Sunday, Sep. 19, 11:59 p.m., deadline for completing Unit I. exam\*\*\*

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

Dates: Monday, September 20–Sunday, October 17

Reading:

1. Chapters 3-4 from Hay and Meldrum (2016).
2. Pronk et al. (2011), “How can you resist? ...,” from *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.
3. Nelson et al. (2009), “The deprived human brain...,” from *American Scientist*.

\*\*\*Sunday, Oct. 3, 11:59 p.m., deadline for discussion postings (DQ2)\*\*\*

\*\*\*Sunday, Oct. 17, 11:59 p.m., deadline for completing Unit II. exam\*\*\*

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

Dates: Monday, October 18–Sunday, November 7

Reading:

1. Chapters 5-6 from Hay and Meldrum (2016).
2. Gallagher (2015), “The healthy child: Assembly required.” Viewable at <https://fpg.unc.edu/news/ted-talk-they-keep-talking-about-power-high-quality-early-ed>. This webpage also includes a link for Gallagher’s 12-minute TED Talk.

\*\*\*Sunday, Oct. 31, 11:59 p.m., deadline for discussion postings (DQ3)\*\*\*

\*\*\*Sunday, Nov. 7, 11:59 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 8–Sunday, December 5

Reading:

1. Chapters 7-9 from Hay and Meldrum (2016).
2. Hart and Risley (2003), “The early catastrophe,” from *American Educator*.



\*\*\*Sunday, Nov. 21, 11:59 p.m., deadline for discussion postings (DQ4)\*\*\*  
\*\*\*Sunday, Dec. 5, 11:59 p.m., deadline for completing Unit IV. exam\*\*\*