SELF-CONTROL, CRIME, AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Florida State University

CCJ 5039, Spring 2024

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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 to act in ways that advance long-term interests for themselves and others. Self-control has attracted significant attention from criminologists, and this course will cover that literature to explore the consequences, causes, 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 three units:

**I.** Introductory issues and the consequences of low 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. We then will review the research that has revealed low self-control as a significant cause of criminal, deviant, and harmful behaviors over the life course.

**II.** Causes of low self-control and the related issues of stability and change. We first address the factors that affect whether or not a person develops strong self-control in the first decade of life. We then consider the longitudinal research that has examined how a person’s level of self-control may change—or not change—as they advance to different stages of the life course in adolescence and adulthood. We consider the evidence of 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.

**III.** 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 this is less 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 session. This is done first in reference to the overall causal framework that has been built across the units of the course, and then in reference to how this framework informs public policy.

**Course format**

This is a fully online course—there will never be an instance in which all students must “attend” at the same time. Each week begins on Monday with an announcement from me that addresses our key focus. During weeks in which assignments are due, students can submit anytime during the week. (You’ll see that all deadlines are shown in the syllabus).

# 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. Also, for this graduate level course, successful students will be able to accomplish these objectives in part by incorporating the insights that come from empirically-oriented peer-reviewed journal articles that are included among the reading assignments.

# Reading material

* *Hay, Carter, and Ryan Meldrum. 2016. Self-control and crime over the life course.* [28340]Thousand Oaks: Sage (ISBN# 9781483384481).

This book is available for free in e-book format from FSU Libraries. Go to ***Files*** on the Canvas page, and you’ll see an entry for “**CCJ5039 ereserve.docx**.” It will take you to a page providing a link to click on to get to the Sage Publications page providing the e-book.

**Important note**: Prior to this free option becoming available, the book was entered into the Follett Access program, which is **not free**—it automatically enrolls you to receive the book and it charges you for the book (through your FSU portal) **unless you opt out**. To opt out, go here:

<https://accessportal.follett.com/0208>

For more information on Follett Access, go here:

<https://studentbusiness.fsu.edu/how-pay/follett-access-textbook-program>

Last, if you would like a hard copy, new and used books can be purchased from Sage Publications or various online vendors.

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

The reading assignments appear below. Also, at the beginning of each unit, I send a “context statement” (2-3 pages of notes) that gives an overview of the topic being covered in that two-week unit and places the readings in the overall context of that topic.

## The sequence for each unit

The units of the course are covered in a 4-5 week periods, and these units follow a similar sequence:

* Reading week(s): A “context statement” for this unit will be posted under ***Files*** on the Canvas site. This 2-3 page statement (1) provides an overview of the topic being covered in this 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: Students will continue their reading, while also providing postings for an online discussion on Canvas’s discussion board.
* Exam week: Students will finish their reading and prepare for and take the open-note/open-book unit exam that will consist of one essay and a timed multiple-choice test (10 questions) completed in Canvas.

**Course requirements and grades**

Your grade for this course will be based on two things: Online discussion postings (2 per unit) that are worth 5 points each and exams (1 per unit) that are worth 25 points each. The exams will have two parts: An essay portion (15 points) and a 10-question multiple choice/true-false portion (10 points).

This creates a total of 105 possible points (75 from exams, 30 from discussions). Your final grade will be based on your course average (points earned divided by 105), with the below ranges used to assign letter grades. Important point: There will be no rounding or adjustment of grades—the ranges below will be used exactly.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 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 discussions**

During the 6 discussion question weeks (labeled DQ1-DQ6 in the schedule), 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 each discussion 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, I encourage you to avoid waiting until the deadline to make your postings. This original post will be worth 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 (the deadline for this also is 11:59 p.m. ET on the Sunday of the discussion week). This posting also is expected to be informative and well-written, although it is not expected to be as lengthy as your original post. This response post will be worth 1 point (1=satisfactory or above, 0=unsatisfactory).

Putting these two together, each discussion week produces a total of 5 possible 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 three exams include both essay and multiple choice/true-false components.

Regarding the essay portion (worth 15 points): During an exam week, I will post an essay question by 12:00 noon on Monday and I must receive your completed submission by 11:59 p.m. ET on Sunday of that same week. (The exception is the 3rd exam—as listed in the schedule below, that is due on Friday because the semester ends on that day). In answering the essay question, you should provide a clear, well-organized discussion that is professional and well written. The best answers will be those that directly address the issues raised by the question, correctly describe and elaborate on the relevant and appropriate issues from the reading, and are well-written (organized, clear, and free of distracting problems with misspellings, typos, and punctuation/grammar).

Regarding the multiple choice/true-false component (worth 10 points): This portion of the exam will be completed within Canvas, using its test tool (more on that later). The exam will be available sometime on Monday-Tuesday of the test week, and then it must be completed by 11:59 p.m. ET on Sunday of that same week. (The exception again is the 3rd exam—as listed in the schedule below, that is due on Friday because the semester ends on that day). The exam will consist of 10 questions, with each worth 1 point. Once you start the exam, you must complete it, and you will have 20 minutes to do so.

For both portions of the exam, 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.

And last, at the beginning of each test week, directions will be provided that specify all the relevant details.

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. 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>)
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. 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>

1. **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 (CAPS)**  
Florida State University’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) primary mission is to address psychological needs and personal concerns, which may interfere with students’ academic progress, social development, and emotional well-being. The following in-person and virtual (tele-mental health) services are available to all enrolled students residing in the state of Florida:

1. Individual therapy  
2. Group therapy  
3. Crisis Intervention  
4. Psychoeducational and outreach programming  
5. After hours crisis-hotline  
6. Access to community providers for specialized treatment

Call 850-644-TALK (8255) for more information on how to initiate services.

Counseling and Psychological Services  
250 Askew Student Life Center  
942 Learning Way  
(850) 644-TALK (8255)  
Walk-in and Appointment Hours:  
M-F 8 am – 4 pm  
<https://counseling.fsu.edu/>

**Services at UHS are available to all enrolled students residing in Florida**:  
The mission of University Health Services (UHS) is to promote and improve the overall health and well-being of FSU students. UHS provides a coordinated continuum of care through prevention, intervention, and treatment. Services include general medical care, priority care, gynecological services, physicals, allergy injection clinic, immunizations, diagnostic imaging, physical therapy, and a medical response unit. The Center for Health Advocacy and Wellness (CHAW) assists students in their academic success through individual, group, and population-based health and wellness initiatives. Topics include wellness, alcohol and other drugs, hazing prevention, nutrition and body image, sexual health, and power based personal violence prevention. For more information, go to uhs.fsu.edu.

University Health Services  
Health and Wellness Center  
960 Learning Way  
Tallahassee, FL 32306  
Hours: M-F, 8 am – 4 pm  
(850) 644-6230  
<https://uhs.fsu.edu/>

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

## READING AND SCHEDULE

**Unit I. Introductory issues and the consequences of low self-control**

Dates: Monday, January 8-Sunday February 11

Reading: 1. The preface and Chapters 1-3 from Hay and Meldrum (2016).

2. Gopnik, A. (2012), “What’s wrong with the teenage mind?,” from the *Wall Street Journal*.

3. Schreck, C. (1999). “Criminal victimization and low self-control: An extension and test of a general theory of crime.” *Justice Quarterly*, 16, 633-654.

\*\*\*Sunday, January 21, 11:59 p.m., deadline for DQ1 postings\*\*\*

\*\*\*Sunday, February 4, 11:59 p.m., deadline for DQ2 postings\*\*\*

\*\*\*Sunday, February 11, 11:59 p.m deadline for Unit I. exam\*\*\*

# Unit II. Causes of low self-control and stability/change in self-control

Dates: Monday, February 12–Sunday, March 24 (this unit includes Spring Break)

Reading: 1. Chapters 4-6 from Hay and Meldrum (2016).

2. Nelson et al. 2009. The deprived human brain (PDF in Canvas).

3. Burt, Simons, and Simons. (2006). “A longitudinal test of the effect of parenting and the stability of self-control: Negative evidence for the general theory of crime.” *Criminology*, 44, 353-396.

\*\*\*Sunday, February 25, 11:59 p.m., deadline for DQ3 postings\*\*\*

\*\*\*Sunday, March 10, 11:59 p.m., deadline for DQ4 postings\*\*\*

\*\*\*Sunday, March 24, 11:59 p.m., deadline for Unit II. exam\*\*\*

# Unit III. Concluding issues: conditional effects and master themes

Dates: Monday, March 25–Friday, May 3

Reading: 1. Chapters 7-9 from Hay and Meldrum (2016).

2. Hart and Risley. 2003. The early catastrophe: The 30 million word gap by age 3. American Educator. (PDF in Canvas.)

3. Gallagher (2015), “The healthy child: Assembly required.” Viewable at <http://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.

4. Piquero, Jennings, and Farrington. (2010). “On the malleability of self-control: Theoretical and policy implications regarding a general theory of crime.” *Justice Quarterly*, 27, 803-834.

\*\*\*Sunday, April 7, 11:59 p.m., deadline for DQ5 postings\*\*\*

\*\*\*Sunday, April 21, 11:59 p.m., deadline for DQ6 postings\*\*\*

\*\*\*Friday, May 3, 11:59 p.m., deadline for Unit III. exam\*\*\*