

**Research Proposal Description**  
**JS 300, Fall 2007**  
**Dr. Kent R. Kerley**

The research proposal will give you the opportunity to display your mastery of the course materials. This proposal will account for 20 percent of your course grade. You will design a proposal to test one of the following two theories: 1) Agnew's General Strain Theory or 2) Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory. Below is a brief list of articles to help you get started with your literature review.

General Strain Theory:

Agnew, Robert. 1992. Foundation for a General Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency. *Criminology* 30:47-87.

Agnew, Robert. 2002. Experienced, Vicarious, and Anticipated Strain: An Exploratory Study on Physical Victimization and Delinquency. *Justice Quarterly* 19:603-632.

Self-Control Theory:

Hirschi, Travis and Gottfredson, Michael. 1987. Causes of White-Collar Crime. *Criminology* 25:949-974.

Arneklev, Bruce J., Grasmick, Harold G., and Bursik, Robert J. 1999. Evaluating the Dimensionality and Invariance of 'Low Self-Control.' *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 15:307-332.

To evaluate the theory you have chosen, you will be given a survey questionnaire that contains measures of both theories, as well as a full range of demographic, family, and criminal justice variables. The questionnaire can be downloaded from the class webpage. The survey was distributed to a random sample of inmates in an Iowa prison. You will examine the questionnaire and select the variables that would be appropriate for testing the theory. You should identify appropriate dependent variables, variables that measure the theory you have chosen, control variables, and anything else that would be important to include in an analysis.

This handout contains the guidelines for the project. These guidelines should be followed extremely closely. **Failure to follow them will result in a significant deduction of points.** The guidelines are divided into three sections. The first section includes the outline to be followed. The second section includes guidelines for the format and visual presentation of your paper. The third section involves substantive suggestions for how to formulate and write the paper.

The final proposal should be 12-19 pages and is **due by class time on November 29.** On September 20, you will be required to submit a list of at least eight research articles you will use in the proposal.

**Outline:**

The research proposal should be organized as follows:

I. Title page – Include a title page with the title of your proposal, your name, course name, instructor’s name, and date. The title page will be the first page, but should not be numbered.

II. Abstract – A short abstract (125-200 words) of the proposal should appear on the second page and be labeled as page 1. An abstract is a summary that provides an overview of the proposal. The abstract is very important because it provides a first impression of the entire paper. You can take a look at an issue of most any criminology or criminal justice research journal for examples.

III. Introduction – Here you will provide a statement of the issue and theory that you are addressing. In this section, you will provide readers with the “setup” or “hook” for the proposal. Explain what you are going to study and why anyone might want to read it. The introduction will begin the third page of the proposal and will be labeled as page 2. This is the beginning of the “text” or “body” of the paper. This section should be about 1-2 pages. (Note: Be sure that the hook is consistent with the survey questionnaire.)

IV. Literature Review – Provide a review of at least 8 research articles (plus relevant books if necessary) on the theory you have chosen. You will want to select articles that 1) provide information about the key propositions of the theory and 2) review previous tests of the theory. Try to avoid putting the 8 studies in chronological order and providing simple summaries of each one. A good literature review should tie previous studies together in some logical fashion and should lead readers to anticipate something important to be gained from your study. This section should be about 3-4 pages.

V. Data and Methods – Because you will be provided with a survey questionnaire, you will not be required to find information about the sample and dataset. I will supply you with a description of the sample that you will insert into the paper at the beginning of this section. Your main task is to identify dependent and independent (e.g., theoretical variables, demographic variables, criminal history) that would be needed for your test of the theory. Identify the variables that you want to use in your analysis by their question numbers and then explain how they are measured and why they would be useful. You should have about 3-5 dependent variables and 20-30 independent variables.

VI. Discussion – This section will provide a summary of the previous sections. You will want to review the main topic of the proposal and reiterate why your study is important. Then review the data and methods section and speculate on what you think you might find if you did the analysis. If you actually conducted this study, how would it be useful? Finally, comment on the policy implications of your study. If your state senator asked you to design a crime control bill based on the findings from your study, explain what it would entail. This section should be about 2-4 pages.

VII. References – Conclude the paper with the list of articles/books that are referenced. Follow the format found on the example page from *Justice Quarterly* that will be distributed in class. This section should be about 1-2 pages.

**Thus, including all 7 sections, your proposal should be between 12 and 19 pages.**

**Formatting Guidelines:**

- Include a separate title page with the title, your name, course name, instructor’s name, and date.
- Do not number the title page.
- Do not repeat the title on subsequent pages.
- Use Times New Roman script with a font size of 12 for the entire document.
- Make the entire document double-spaced.
- Tab once at the beginning of each new paragraph.
- Do not include bullets, numbered lists, drawings, or algebraic formulas in your paper. Use only text.
- Do not type in ALL CAPS except for the title of paper.
- Pick one referencing style and use it for in-text citations and the reference pages.
- Margins should be at least one inch all around (most programs are preset this way).
- Staple all pages together in the top left corner before submitting.
- Do not place the paper in any type of binder, folder, or cover. Just staple the pages and submit it.

**Substantive Guidelines:**

- Be sure to define any major terms, concepts, or theories used in the paper.
- Always use the spellchecker function in your word processing program to check for spelling errors.
- Always proofread your paper because there are many errors that the spellchecker will not catch. For example, if you meant to use the word “where” but instead typed “were” the spellchecker would not catch that.
- Do not use contractions. It is better to say “she does not” than “she doesn’t.”
- Use only gender neutral language. Thus, if you do not know the gender of someone, do not use “his” or “him.” You can typically avoid this situation by using plural pronouns.
- Possessives, however, are fine to use, but be careful to place the apostrophe in the right place. For example, it is correct to say "Miner's article was written in the 1950s." However, saying "Miner's arguing that people should be cultural relativists" is incorrect. In that case "Miner's" is not possessive but is an incorrect substitute for "Miner is." To provide another example, if you say "Dr. Kerley’s going to his house" that is incorrect (it should be "Dr. Kerley is"). However, if you say "we are going to Dr. Kerley’s class" that is correct.
- Unless asked for your opinion on a particular topic, use first-person terms like “I” or “we” only sparingly.
- Pay attention to the length of paragraphs. A paragraph that lasts one full page is too long, while one that is only one sentence is too short. Generally, your paragraphs should not be longer than one-half to three-fourths of a page.

- Watch for grammatical errors in which an incorrect verb tense is used. For example, “she went to the game” is correct, but “she had went to the game” is incorrect (it should be “had gone”). Likewise, “he was absent” is correct, but “they was absent” is incorrect (it should be “they were”).
- Try to avoid using absolute terms like “always, invariably, truth.” We rarely deal with absolutes, so use qualifiers like “tends to, may influence, may lead to, or is correlated with.”
- Along this same line, be careful not to make declarative statements for which you do not have empirical support. For example, if you say “All Florida Gator fans are obnoxious,” you have made a generalization that you cannot support with any empirical evidence. Regardless of how strongly you believe in something, do not make strong and absolute statements unless you have empirical information to support it (the fact that your grandmother told you does not make the statement valid).
- Use direct quotations only sparingly, especially ones that are lengthy. Most of the time, you should be able to paraphrase someone else’s work and still make the same point.
- Try to be as concise and clear as possible when writing. Also, make sure there is a flow to your writing. Each sentence should logically flow into the next and each paragraph should flow to the next.