Students as Scholars: Integrating Independent Research into Undergraduate Education

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Undergraduate programs across the country are working to develop students as scholars, integrating independent scholarly experiences into traditional undergraduate classroom environments (see, e.g. George Mason University’s Students as Scholars Quality Enhancement Plan; Boston University’s Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program; University of Houston’s Learning through Discovery; University of Michigan’s Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program; etc.). Scholars and universities have touted the benefits of engaging students in research experiences for students as well as faculty. However, there is little empirical work exploring how undergraduate students adapt to their new role as scholars. In this paper, we explore the process of students integrating research into their undergraduate classroom experience. Based on participant observation and pre and postsemester survey data, we discuss the process of students learning as scholars in a capstone Criminology, Law & Society course. We focus on how students gathered and analyzed data and integrated their research experience into their overall learning for the course. We find the process of research reinforces the learning objectives of the course.

Introduction

Over a decade ago, the Boyer Commission called for a more progressive understanding of undergraduate education where inquiry- and research-based learning are the norm on college campuses (Boyer Commission, 1998). In the ensuing years, academic institutions around the country have answered the call, developing a variety of inquiry- and research-based curriculums in undergraduate programs. These programs generally integrate university missions by focusing teaching on knowledge production and training students into that process (Bennet, 2010; Brakke, Crowe, & Karukstis, 2009; Crowe & Brakke, 2008). The desired outcome is a more holistic learning process, rather than a polished
research product (Belton & Scott, 1998; Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Payne & Monk-Turner, 2005; Spronken-Smith, 2010).

While scholars and institutions around the country continue to tout the benefits of engaging undergraduate students in rigorous research experiences, there are few empirical studies focused on how students process their research experiences. Below, we briefly review prior scholarship focusing on engaging students as scholars in undergraduate education. We then discuss our research-intensive capstone course and the survey and observation data we gathered in the eight sections of the Capstone in Criminology, Law & Society course we taught in the 2010–2011 academic year. Finally, we discuss our findings in light of the national movement pushing for research experiences in undergraduate education and present some practical policy implications of this innovative teaching strategy.

The Benefits of Integrating Research into Undergraduate Curriculum

Scholars argue that teaching and research do not have to be antagonistic. Rather, they should be integrated in undergraduate curriculum, particularly at research universities (Boyer, 1990; Boyer Commission, 1998; Healey, 2005). In this regard, Brakke et al. (2009) argue that bringing students into the process of research enhances the atmosphere of research universities, contributing to a culture focused on knowledge creation and scholarship. Much of the scholarship that supports bringing students into the process of research encourages the idea of promoting a teaching–research nexus that respects, supports, and mutually reinforces both endeavors. Teaching the research process enhances students’ understanding of the process and discipline, as well as promotes a university culture, which values and supports scholarship (Bennet, 2010; Boyer, 1990; Boyer Commission, 1998; Brakke et al. 2009; Healey, 2005). This cultural shift at universities benefits students through enhanced pedagogy, while also benefitting faculty — aligning their research and teaching goals.

One area of skepticism in the movement towards inquiry- and research-based learning is a shift in authority from faculty to students in the learning process (Sgroi & Ryniker, 2002). Scholars note that the shift to active, research- and inquiry-based learning is not consistent with most current teaching strategies in undergraduate education (Kember, 2009; Sgroi & Ryniker, 2002). Sgroi and Ryniker (2002) and Kember (2009) argue that current pedagogy often focuses on instructor-led passive learning in the classroom. Under this traditional model, the faculty lead the students, and have control over the structure, content, and flow of the course. One of the difficulties of developing research- or inquiry-based learning on campus is developing buy-in from the faculty. Kember (2009) notes that the underlying skepticism towards shifting to student-centered modes of learning links to teacher’s beliefs about teaching, which makes it difficult to implement change on campuses looking to shift towards more inquiry-based models of teaching and learning. When
shifting to an active inquiry- or research-based pedagogical model faculty may feel that they must relinquish their authority in the classroom. While the shift in learning process does demand a fundamental change in teaching style, it does not necessarily require a shift in authority in the classroom. Research experiences may be highly structured and faculty-led within the existing learning environment (Boyer Commission, 1998). Healey and Jenkins (2009) detail four ways that faculty may engage students in inquiry-based learning: (1) research-led-learning about current research in a topic area; (2) research-oriented-developing proficiencies in research skills; (3) research-based-engaging in research or inquiry; or (4) research-tutored-involving students in research discussions.

While there is little empirical work examining the effects of integrating inquiry- or research-based learning into criminology or social science undergraduate courses, the available scholarship, largely focusing on science, technology, engineering, and math fields, finds a nexus between research and teaching. Inquiry- and research-based teaching facilitates student learning and engagement in the classroom (Apedoe & Reeves, 2006; Baldock & Chanson, 2006; Matand, Wu, & Rollin, 2011; Spronken-Smith, 2010; Spronken-Smith & Walker, 2010). Matand et al. (2011) find that students at all achievement levels can thrive and benefit from research experiences. They set up an experiment where they admitted both low Grade Point Average (GPA) students (GPA < 3.0) and high GPA students (above 3.0) to a competitive research program that includes a six-step training and preparation course. The results suggest that low GPA students were just as successful in the research-based course as the high GPA students. In fact, three of the best performers had a GPA of less than 3.0. In turn, these scholars argue that because the research process itself is a teaching process, it can benefit all students. Further, it may also engage students who do not respond well to other traditional forms of instruction.

What does it mean to Integrate Research into Undergraduate Curriculum?

There is a nationwide call for more inquiry- and research-based learning in undergraduate curriculum, but there is no set standard for how this new type of teaching process should integrate into university classrooms. Research- and inquiry-based pedagogy ranges from highly structured research experiences on joint or solo research projects to open forms of inquiry through exploratory learning processes (Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Lambert, 2009; Nikolova Eddins & Williams, 1997). Spronken-Smith and Walker (2010) argue that open forms of inquiry are the best ways to establish a research–teaching nexus. They urge instructors not to overly structure inquiry-based processes, asserting that the open process of inquiry best facilitates students’ learning. Students develop critical thinking skills through open exploration of topics, themes, and evidence. Alternatively, Bartholomae (1986) argues that universities often expect students
to partake in a discipline’s discourse before they have acquired the skills to do so. He advocates that students become involved in a structured scholarly project in order to practice disciplinary styles of thought and writing. Through a more structured pedagogy, professors can socialize students into the discipline while introducing and fostering the norms of scholars and practitioners in their field. Healey and Jenkins (2009) lay out a variety of ways that faculty may engage students in the research process from highly structured learning about research to structured processes where students engage in independent research activities. There is no consensus amongst scholars regarding how to incorporate students into the research process; however, most scholars agree that meaningful inquiry- or research-based teaching processes have students directly engage with knowledge production through analysis of evidence and writing (Boyer, 1990; Boyer Commission, 1998; Brakke et al., 2009).

In the 2010–2011 academic year, we integrated an experiential research experience into a newly redesigned undergraduate capstone course in Criminology, Law & Society at a large public research university. The capstone course is designed to focus on cutting-edge research in the field that synthesizes the students’ undergraduate experiences in the major. The course fills the university’s writing intensive (WI) requirements and integrates experiential learning through independent research experiences for students. Based on qualitative and quantitative data gathered from approximately 140 students in eight sections of the capstone course, we find that students benefit from engaging in well-structured independent research. The processes of data gathering and data analysis are new and challenging experiences for students. However, engaging with the research process helps students understand how scholars create scientific knowledge while simultaneously increasing their understanding of the subject material, and developing their critical thinking skills.

Research Setting and Design

The Criminology, Law & Society Department at George Mason University implemented a newly designed capstone course for the undergraduate major during the 2010–2011 academic year. The course fulfilled two of the universities’ general education requirements-operating as a WI course and as a synthesis course.1 WI courses require that students write a minimum of 3,000 words in formal classroom assignments. Synthesis courses are culminating courses in the general education curriculum, which focuses on: (1) bringing interdisciplinary perspectives to major topic areas or developing policies or issues; (2) developing students’ ability to communicate both in writing and orally; and (3) facilitating students’ application of critical thinking skills.

The department also redesigned the course to have an experiential component where students experience some aspect, outside of a classroom setting,

1. For more on the university’s general education requirements, please see: http://provost.gmu.edu/ gened/general-education-requirements/.
of the criminal justice system that aligns with current faculty research. In an effort to expose students to the research of faculty, maintain faculty interest in the course, and provide a meaningful culminating educational experience, the topic is open and may change each semester. While the course was traditionally taught by adjuncts, now only core research faculty in the department are assigned to teach the course. The course serves as the culminating course in the major and, with the fluid topic, is meant to expose students to current topics and policies of interest in the field. Faculty may align the course with any current research topic and analytic method of their choice.

In the 2010–2011 academic year, the same two faculty members taught the class during the fall and spring semesters. The faculty are currently collaborating on a long-term study on the implementation of problem-solving courts in the federal judicial system. They co-designed the course around one type of problem-solving courts—drug courts. As their main assignment for the course, students produced an academic paper based on individual research. Students used qualitative methods to gather data on drug courts—conducting direct observations and two interviews—to answer one of five research questions (see Appendix B for research questions). Observations took place in one of three local courts. Prior to conducting their observations, students were required to read academic literature on ethnographic fieldnotes. They turned in their fieldnotes as part of their grade for the course. In order to facilitate the large number of students enrolled in the course, faculty brought members of local drug courtroom workgroups to the class on two occasions. Rather than having the guests give prepared lectures in the course, the time was devoted to students conducting interviews with prepared and semi-structured questions students produced. Students also turned in their interview notes for a grade. The students’ evaluations and grades were based, in part, on their data collection for the course.

Students wrote papers resembling academic articles, without a methods section as their methods were provided for them. They wrote the papers in an iterative process. Students prepared their literature review, and brought it to class for a peer-review assignment. They revised based on peer comments and turned it in for a grade and comments from the instructors. They went through the same process for their findings section. At the end of the semester, students combined their literature and findings with an introduction and conclusion and turned in the paper in its entirety for a final grade. The final paper was designed to go through at least three full rounds of revisions before they submitted it for a final grade to encourage a culture of scholarship and revision in the course.

As a course that is required for graduation, the goal is to provide a research experience for all students in the major, rather than focusing exclusively on individualized research experiences for high-achieving students. While the university and department do offer a number of individualized research experiences for students as well. While individualized experiences often mean working for a faculty member as part of their team, the course-based research experience allows students to lead their own data collection for their own use. The approaches provide different types of experiences; here we focus on class-based experiences.
course is meant to be a culminating experience in the undergraduate major, which would ideally take place in the student’s last semester, students may take the course whenever they would like once they have completed 60 credit hours including the introduction to the major and their basic English writing requirements. With over 700 majors, and only 140 seats open in the course per semester, students often take the class whenever they qualify and their schedule permits. Since students may take the course out of sequence with others in the major, and because the basic research methods course is not required for the course, faculty must cultivate research and methodological skills as a part of the course.

Because of the WI requirement, each course section is capped at 35 students. In order to facilitate faculty teaching the course, as well as low instructor-to-student ratios, faculty teach the course two days a week. On the first day of each week, two sections meet together for a lecture from the faculty member teaching the course. On the second day of each week, sections meet separately with a graduate teaching assistant for a research-writing lab. Each semester, two faculty teach the course, resulting in four sections of 35 students every semester. The hybrid approach to the course, with separate lectures and research-writing lab sections fosters increased structured engagement between the students and the activities of the course. Scholars have found that hybrid courses facilitate active learning more so than larger traditional lecture courses (Gordon, Barnes, & Martin, 2009).

In this paper, we rely on data gathered from the eight sections taught during the first year of implementation of the new course design (2010–2011). Two graduate teaching assistants assisted with the course sections for the year. They were first year Ph.D. students, new to George Mason University. Both had MAs in criminology and had previously worked as teaching assistants or instructors in their own courses. George Mason University is a large public research university with approximately 30,000 students. It is located in the Virginia suburbs outside of Washington, DC. It is one of the most diverse public research institutions in the nation, with a large international student population. In the second semester of course implementation, a writing fellow from the University’s Writing Center joined the faculty–teaching assistant team and helped with the course. The writing fellow was an undergraduate student who had previously worked as a writing tutor. She came in with specific training in working with second-language writers. The writing fellow provided additional voluntary writing assistance for students in the course, assisted in the research-writing labs, and helped with data collection for this paper.

We rely on three forms of data for this paper. The first are the pre and postsemester surveys completed by students in the course (see Appendix C for survey instrument). The quantitative portions of the survey were the same for the pre and postsemester. The presemester survey provided basic baseline

3. For more information about these specific sections, please see the sample course syllabus in Appendix A.
data about student writing and students’ exposure to the topic of the course—drug courts. While the current course is the only one in the major that specifically focuses on drug courts, a number of courses require that students observe various aspects of the criminal justice process. Students also may engage in a number of internship programs through the major, so the pre-semester survey was intended to gather basic information about student exposure to the topic area in addition to their self-reported views about the writing and research process. The post-semester survey also included open-ended response questions about the research and writing portions of the course.

The second form of data is observation notes collected by the writing fellow assigned to all four sections of the course in the spring semester. The writing fellow attended alternating lectures for the course as well as two writing labs per week (alternating between the two graduate teaching assistants). She collected observation notes on her experience, paying particular attention to how students spoke about the research process. She spent 3 h teach week conducting observations (42 h throughout the semester), which resulted in hundreds of pages of notes detailing how students interacted with the course and discussed the writing and research process.

Finally, the writing fellow also collected tutoring notes. These notes focused on one-on-one tutoring sessions with students outside of class. Most of the tutoring sessions took place in the graduate teaching assistant offices, but the writing fellow would also meet students at the library or other mutually agreed upon places throughout campus. Students voluntarily participated in tutoring sessions with the writing fellow. Seven students participated in intense one-on-one tutoring with the writing fellow throughout the semester. Over the course of two semesters, approximately 140 students completed the course.

Using Atlas.ti (qualitative data software), we linked all observation notes, tutoring notes, and qualitative responses on the pre and postsurveys. We employed a grounded theory approach to data analysis (Charmaz, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that begins with inductive logic, we first engaged in systematic, line-by-line coding that considers broad and emergent themes (Charmaz, 1995). This process entails reading each line of fieldnotes and coding individual words or phrases using the language of the research subject whenever possible. We followed up on this process by re-coding the data around the broad themes emerging from the line-by-line process. The two faculty co-authors, both trained qualitative scholars, completed all coding. Suggested by Emerson (2001) and Charmaz (1995), this intense, multi-phased approach is a highly respected form of qualitative data analysis. Finally, we used coded data to inform the writing of this paper.

Findings

The pre and postsemester quantitative data gathered from students demonstrate an increased understanding regarding the basic elements of the research
and writing processes. Below, we present the substantively significant information from the quantitative data in two tables. Table 1 illustrates students’ increasing awareness of the writing process. We asked students to respond to the following questions: (1) good writing comes easy to me and (2) I have to work to be a good writer. Both questions were presented with a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating completely disagree and 5 indicating completely agree. Over the course of the semester, students shifted their thinking about their own writing and the writing process. Consistent with the qualitative findings presented later, students demonstrated a new appreciation for the effort they should put into writing (Table 1).

Table 2 presents data from categorical, yes/no, questions specific to the research and topic of the course—drug courts. The first two questions demonstrate dramatic self-reported improvements in understanding the basics of research. The final three questions depict remarkable improvement in comprehension of the content of the course. Consistent with the qualitative research presented below, the self-reported surveys suggest that students benefited from their exposure to independent research in the capstone course.

The qualitative data gathered through the survey instrument (at the end of the semester) as well as tutoring and observation notes demonstrate how students benefit from the research process. Three main themes emerged from the data. First, the research process facilitated students’ engagement with the discipline. Students became proficient in the jargon of the discipline as well as the current state of the field and future developments they may encounter in their career. Second, students were reluctant to rely on their data collection or analysis. While students discussed the benefits of experiential learning processes, they were still reluctant to rely on their court observation notes and interview notes as part of the knowledge creation process. Students remained uncomfortable with analyzing their data. Finally, students benefited from the highly structured research experience. While students remained reluctant to rely on their analysis and were wary of the process of research and knowledge creation, they thrived within the iterative process of the class. The course broke the process of scholarship into manageable pieces and provided a clear timeline for students and an expectation of continuous editing and improvement. Overall, the

Table 1 Mean responses for pre and postsurveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey questions</th>
<th>Presurvey (n = 109)</th>
<th>Postsurvey (n = 87)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good writing comes easy to me</td>
<td>3.33 (0.93)</td>
<td>2.97 (1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have to work to be a good writer</td>
<td>3.83 (1.05)</td>
<td>3.97 (0.91)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

4. Here, we rely on pre and postsemester surveys only from the spring semester as we did not yet have human subjects’ approval for presemester surveys in the fall. The fall and spring postsemester surveys were consistent, leading us to rely on the spring semester as representative of the course.
process of inquiry- and research-based learning contributed to the learning objectives of the course—developing students’ writing and critical thinking skills and exposing students to cutting-edge faculty research on current policy developments in the field.

Engaging students as scholars includes a discourse filter process where instructors must interpret and reinterpret the jargon of the field and discipline. While the vast majority of students had never heard of drug courts before the course (68.8%, see Table 2), many ended the course hoping to engage with these types of courts as professionals in the field. Part of the process of learning about these courts was reading current research as well as observing the courts and interviewing current court practitioners. A number of students noted that their observations and the interviews helped them process the readings and new information they were exposed to (over 90% indicated that observations and interviews helped their understanding of the drug court process, see Table 2). The following quote from a post-semester survey is representative of a number of comments students provided, “The interviews and visiting a drug court and drug court team members made the research easier. Visually seeing the process and being able to ask questions, it helped me understand what the readings were talking about.”

While students noted that they enjoyed the observations and interviews, and these contributed to their understanding of the subject, many were still reluctant to see their data as a contribution to scholarly discourse. One of the main struggles students faced was synthesizing and analyzing information into academic arguments. They were used to reading and regurgitating arguments, but did not regularly engage with a critical thinking process or consider how the academic information they read translated into current policy implementation. Rather than engaging with the academic dialog of the current state of research, students were more comfortable just “saying what the article said.” Students were hesitant to consider their collected data as data or evidence that could speak to their research question. The following quote from the

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Presurvey (n=109)</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand how to write a literature review</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>82.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have used qualitative (interviews/observations) data I collected to write a research paper</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>89.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a full understanding of what a problem solving court does/is</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>97.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a full understanding of what a drug court does/is</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>98.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have witnessed a drug court</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have spoken with members of a drug court work team</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>92.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Percent responses for pre and post surveys
The qualitative portion of the post-semester survey is representative of many other students’ views on this, “The finding section was hard to do. It was hard to understand what kind of content from the courtroom observations and guest speakers should be used and to what extent.”

Additionally, there was confusion throughout the semester about the difference between a literature review and findings section. The writing fellow observed the following during the research-writing lab section,

Prior to the class students didn’t know what distinguished arguments from evidence or how to build arguments, by the end of the class they had a better idea, but would likely still need intense structure to move forward with additional research.

The writing fellow noted that students basically understood the difference between analyzing evidence and developing a review of the literature by the end of the semester, but they still struggled to see how each process fit into the overall process of research and knowledge creation.

Students spent the most space in post-course assessment commenting on the structure of the course. The three following quotes are representative of these many comments:

I liked how it [the paper] was split up into two main sections and then reviewed by both peer reviewers and the professor. This helped us as a revision for us and by splitting it up it made it also so we couldn’t worry about a gigantic paper come finals [time].

I like how there were checkpoints throughout the semester. This helped me focus on certain parts of my paper individually instead of trying to do the whole at once.

We were given help on finding sources, shown examples of good research journals. I liked how we wrote it [the paper] piece by piece, a peer review than submit, for each section. It made it not so overwhelming.

There were practical reasons that contributed to the students’ positive assessment of the structure of the course. The iterative process ensured that students would not become overwhelmed at any particular point in the course. It also meant that they had the vast majority of their final paper drafted well before the end of the semester. There were also pedagogical reasons for the structure of the course. Students acculturated to the editing process. Students served as peer-reviewers for each section of other students’ papers and received peer-review feedback on their own paper. They also received feedback on drafts of the literature review and findings sections from the professors and teaching assistants. The literature review and findings sections were each edited at least three times before students submitted a final paper. Each iteration of the paper resembled more closely a traditional empirical scholarly article. Observation notes taken throughout the course indicate that students
demonstrated an increasing knowledge of the research process with each iteration of their paper.

Overall students reflected positively on the course, and the experiential and research-based components.

This was the best class ever. Not because it's easy, but because it made me a better student. I learned much more because of the hands-on experiences than I would have by just reading about them.

The experience [observation] is interesting when recalling it and writing about it—drawing conclusions from it. It was pretty boring while I was in the courtroom actually observing.

While the students acknowledged their growth in specific content knowledge, most of the skills they noted developing involved writing. Many discussed translating their hands-on or experiential piece into their written work. They also discussed the process of writing through revision and the importance of revision as part of the writing process.

The experiential piece of the course appeared to significantly contribute to students’ understanding of drug courts. By the end of the course, students had observed and gathered data about drug courts. While they were still hesitant to analyze their own data, they did develop substantive arguments about the drug court movement through their written work. The students were also able to engage with the faculty teaching the course around their current research agendas. Students developed a better understanding of how faculty at a research university spend their time and connected research experiences into the classroom environment. Through the iterative writing process, students came more in line with the jargon and writing norms of the discipline. They also became more experienced in developing an academic argument. Overall, the inquiry- and research-based elements of the course contributed to knowledge development and the general pedagogy of the course.

Discussion and Conclusion

Engaging undergraduate students as scholars is by no means a new notion. It is arguably a goal of many teaching approaches including more traditional lecture methods (passive) and more contemporary, active-style classroom environments where facilitated discussions and collaborative projects assist different types of learners with information gathering and critical thinking. However, making the leap from active, in-classroom learning into courses that train and facilitate undergraduate involvement in real-life data collection and scholarly inquiry provides another possible option for university professors interested in developing scholars, not just simply teaching students. In this regard, our redesign of the Capstone Course in Criminology, Law & Society follows the
developing shift in higher education towards an inquiry- and research-based pedagogy. Further, experiences with students in a course designed to facilitate experiential and synthesis learning yield positive findings among students that include more than just assisting students with learning key course concepts and theories. Instead, in our course, students honed their writing and social inquiry skills while also learning to analyze and present data in a systematic and scholarly way.

There are, of course, limitations with the data presented in this paper. This was the first time the course was taught and we are unsure how much students would acknowledge many of the same patterns in knowledge and writing skill growth under a more traditional class format. While we know that many of the students in the course are nearing the end of their undergraduate careers, we did not gather detailed background information on the students enrolled in these eight course sections. It may be that students’ background effects how well they engage in the research process. As with all grounded theory work, our bias as researchers may frame some of the findings from our interpretation of our data. As we continue to develop the course, we will continue to gather data on the process our students participate in and the outcomes they achieve. In future semesters, we hope to analyze how students’ educational background or expectations about research frame their experiences in the course. We are also interested in exploring how the structure of the course works with other research topics. Regardless of the limitations of the data presented in this particular paper, and the need for additional future scholarship on the topic, there is support for integrating inquiry- and research-based pedagogy into undergraduate curriculum.

In addition to the potential academic value of “learning by doing” (Takata & Lieting, 1987), the course has several other benefits. For students, these include real-life, job-appropriate experiences that can help them learn about broader criminal justice system issues and network with potential employers. As prior research has noted (Bartholomae, 1986), one of the benefits of engaging students in the research process is bringing them into the discipline. Students must process the jargon and discourses of the field while working through the traditional research processes. It also provides an opportunity to reach beyond learning about criminal justice organizations by providing experiences for students to confront these organizations and learn about their processes and practices first-hand. The importance of this aspect of undergraduate scholarly research cannot be understated. With the litany of recent reports in news media about the unpreparedness of college graduates for “real world” jobs, independent scholarship and an iterative writing process serve these practical needs well. Students sharpened critical thinking, engaged in listening and effective communication skills throughout the out-of-classroom experiences with data collection (interview and observation), peer-reviewed writing, and thoughtful analyses (See also Arum and Roksa’s (2011) book Academically Adrift, the National Survey of Student Engagement [yearly since 2000] and various New York Times and National Public Radio stories).
For the junior faculty, as in our case, charged with teaching these courses it presents an opportunity to bridge the difficult divide between classroom and research time. Under the newly designed model, faculty are partnered with graduate teaching assistants. We were able to design the course around our current research and lecture on content once a week, while graduate students lead a research-writing lab once a week in smaller sections. Faculty members have less contact hours in the classroom, but engage students more directly through supervision of their research.

Peter Drucker (1968) underscored the importance of allowing faculty (particularly pretenure) to fulfill departmental teaching requirements while also attending to their own research agenda. A course designed to facilitate both student learning and faculty research is a win–win for all involved. Additionally, this blending of research and teaching ensures a level of faculty interest and a newness of experience that prevents rehashing course material semester after semester and helps avoid issues of student plagiarism. That is, when the research project is evolving with each semester, it is impossible for any two sections of the same course to contain exactly the same experiences, materials, and lessons for students.

Perhaps, in this argument, we are reviving old ways of thinking. For example, noted educational psychologist and professor Jerome Bruner (1966, p. 95) states: "... the best approach [to teaching students] is through mastering the art of getting and using information-learning what is involved in going beyond the information given and what makes it possible to take such leaps." Designing courses where students are trained, treated, and facilitated as scholars is a first step in achieving the lifelong learning paradigm that so many colleges and universities desire. Redesigning all courses to reflect this model may not be practical, but finding ways of including original data collection, in-depth analyses, and intensive, iterative, writing processes is invaluable.

References


Appendix A: Course Syllabus
Criminology, Law & Society 495
Capstone in Criminology, Law & Society: Drug Courts

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GTA Office Hours:

Course Description and Objectives

This course provides in-depth examination of the historical and contemporary use of drug courts in the USA. The course focuses on the philosophies, practices, and procedures of drug and other problem solving courts and the people treated by and working within them. An important premise of the course is that social conditions both effect and are effected by societal choices regarding what is right and wrong, moral and immoral, good and bad, and worthy of punishment or not. We will cover many topic areas related to drug courts paying particular attention to the organizational, legal, political, and social contexts surrounding these courts. We will delve into the research in this area using scholarly articles and book chapters, documentaries, guest speaker(s), and courtroom observation. Critical thinking and open discussion is a necessary and required component of the course.

Graduate Teaching Assistant

Lincoln Sloas and Kirsten Hutzell will serve as the graduate teaching assistants and will teach the recitation section of this course. Recitations will provide opportunities to review key concepts from the main lectures. However, Criminology, Law & Society (CRIM) 495 is a synthesis course and the main objective of the recitation is to enhance students’ social science writing skills. Your final papers are worth 35% of your final grade and it is important that students compose well thought-out and articulate final drafts. Throughout the semester, students will be given several assignments designed to extend their knowledge of the research and writing process. As we will see, writing well is a journey; it takes patience, practice, persistence, and willingness to improve in order to produce quality work. I encourage all students to utilize the Mason’s excellent and, most importantly, free writing services, http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/.
Suggested (optional) reading:

Synthesis Course

The purpose of the synthesis course is to provide students with the opportunity to synthesize the knowledge, skills, and values gained from the general education curriculum. Synthesis courses strive to expand students’ ability to master new content, think critically, and develop lifelong learning skills across the disciplines. CRIM 495 is a general education synthesis course. Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Communicate effectively in both oral and written forms, applying appropriate rhetorical standards (e.g. audience adaptation, language, argument, organization, evidence, etc.).
2. Connect issues in a given field to wider intellectual, community, or societal concerns using perspectives from two or more disciplines.
3. Apply critical thinking skills to:
   (a) evaluate the quality, credibility, and limitations of an argument or a solution using appropriate evidence or resources and
   (b) judge the quality or value of an idea, work, or principle based on appropriate analytics and standards.

Writing

This course fulfills the WI requirement in the Criminology, Law & Society (formerly Administration of Justice) major. It does so through the 12-page paper on drug courts due by midnight on Monday 7 May. The paper is combined with additional writing exercises/assignments throughout the semester. The paper will be completed through a draft/feedback/revision process.

Research and Scholarship Designation

This class is designated as a research and scholarship intensive course, which means that students are given the opportunity to actively participate in the process of scholarship and will make a significant contribution to the creation of a disciplinary-appropriate product. The course serves as the culminating course in the major and, with a fluid topic based on current faculty research, is meant to expose students to current topics and policies of interest in the
field. The course has an experiential component where students experience some aspect, outside of a classroom setting, of the criminal justice system.

**Research and Scholarship (RS) Student Learning Outcomes:** In this RS course, students will:

- Create an original scholarly or creative project.
- Communicate knowledge from an original scholarly or creative project.
- Engage in scholarly inquiry by:
  1. articulating and refining a scholarly question;
  2. gathering evidence appropriate to the question; and
  3. situating the scholarly inquiry within a broader context.

**Course Readings**

The readings complement and supplement the lecture material and serve as the basis for discussions. Therefore, you should complete the readings before the assigned class session, in order to gain maximum benefit from the lectures. There are two sources of required readings: the Mackinem & Higgins book and a series of scholarly readings available in PDF format via blackboard.

**Books**

The following reading is available in the George Mason University (GMU) (Fairfax Campus) Bookstore.


**Additional Readings in PDF Format**

In addition to the text, there are required readings assembled on the course blackboard page. To access these readings, go to our blackboard page and scroll down until you see the course readings section. All readings are in PDF format requiring you to have Adobe Acrobat Reader on your computer. You can read the readings on the screen or you can print them out. We note these readings below by marking them in the PDF.

**Course Schedule**

Week 1: Introduction to the Course (1/23)

*Readings*

NONE
Week 2: Historical Developments, Purpose, & Court Types (1/30)

Readings

Week 3: Research Note Taking and Argument Development (2/6)

Readings

Week 4: No Class: Courtroom Observations (2/13)

Readings

A list of possible court choices with locations and instructions is available on Blackboard

Week 5: Legal Developments & Therapeutic Jurisprudence (2/20)

Readings
- Machinem and Higgins Chapter 1.

Week 6: Guest Speaker(s) (2/27): Mark Sherman, Federal Judicial Center

Readings
Week 7: Treatment Providers & Probation (3/5)

Readings

- National Association of Drug Court Professionals “Defining Drug Courts: The Key Components.”

Week 8: No Class Spring Break (3/12)

Week 9: Guest Speaker PW Drug Court Prosecutor: Brad Marshall (3/19)

Readings

- Faris, Jeralyn, Miller, JoAnn and the Honorable Donald Johnson. Words, words, words: Distinctions and differences. In Miller & Johnson’s (Eds.), *Problem solving courts: A measure of justice* (pp. 119–124).

Week 10: Clients in Drug Courts (3/26)

Readings

- Machinem and Higgins Chapters 3–5.

Week 11: Judges (4/2)

Readings

Week 12: Public Defenders & Prosecutors in Drug Courts (4/9)

Readings
- National Association of Criminal Defense Attorneys “America’s Problem Solving Courts: The Criminal Costs of Treatment and the Case for Reform”.

Week 13: Problem-Solving Courts (4/16)

Readings
- Client Contracts for CARE and GRIP.

Week 14: No Class Professor Giving Vision Series Lecture (4/23)

Week 15: Course Wrap-Up (whew!) (4/30)

Readings
NONE
We Will Not Meet During Final Exams Week

Writing Lab (Recitation Section and Assignment Due Dates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>Topic areas and activities</th>
<th>Assignment due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Introduction to writing lab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Reading academic articles and note-taking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Data collection, academic writing, and research questions</td>
<td>Choose research question in lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Video; Red Hook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Writing literature reviews (building an argument)</td>
<td>Court observation fieldnotes due via blackboard by noon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Writing literature reviews continued (building an argument)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Technology and research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Peer reviews of literature review section</td>
<td>Guest speaker interview notes due via blackboard at noon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bring draft of literature review to lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Writing findings section</td>
<td>Literature review due via blackboard at noon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Writing introductions and conclusions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 12</td>
<td>Peer reviews of findings section</td>
<td>Bring draft of findings section to lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Peer reviews of final paper (optional)</td>
<td>Findings section due via blackboard at noon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>No lab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 15</td>
<td>No lab</td>
<td>Final paper due midnight Monday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lectures

**You are strongly encouraged to attend all lectures:** The material covered is different from assigned readings and is not distributed outside class.
Grading

Your final grade will be calculated as follows (total 100%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading questions</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in writing lab (recitation)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview notes</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation notes</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature review draft</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer reviews (2 x @ 5% each)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings section draft</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grading scale: 96–100 = A+; 86.5–89.9 = B+; 76.5–79.9 = C+; 60–69.9 = D

93–95.9 = A; 83.5–86.4 = B; 73.5–76.4 = C; < 59.9 = F

90–92.9 = A–; 80–83.4 = B– and 70–73.4 = C–.

Academic Integrity

I believe in and am required to uphold and enforce the rules against cheating, dishonest conduct, plagiarism, and collusion. Information regarding GMU’s policy on academic honesty is assessable via GMU’s Honor Code. It is available online at http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/plagiarism.htm. Please note that plagiarism includes directly quoting or taking someone else’s idea and using it as if it were your own ... Even if you did not mean to.

Students with Disabilities

It is the policy of George Mason University to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you are a person with a disability please contact me after class or during office hours and make arrangements to register with the Office of Disability Services by contacting 703-993-2474 or emailing ods@gmu.edu as soon as possible. Registration is needed in order to receive accommodations.

Assignments

Reading Questions

We have eight weeks with assigned readings in this course. In class, each week, I will post reading and discussion questions that are specific to the readings and topics of that week. You are responsible for turning in five of the eight reading questions. The goal of these response questions is to
demonstrate your knowledge of the readings and your consideration of topic. Each question is worth four points and will be turned in during class.

Observation Notes [Your Data]

You are required to observe one problem-solving court session during the first half of the semester; specific courts and instructions are posted on blackboard. There is no page minimum or maximum for this assignment, but the more you write; the more data you will have to analyze for your final paper. Include as much detail as possible. The notes must be typed, with black text in Times New Roman font, double-spaced with 1-inch margins on all sides. These notes are due via blackboard.

Interview Notes [More of Your Data]

During your writing lab, you will be discussing the methods of interviewing individuals/groups and observing social scenes for the purposes of data collection. Subsequently, you will engage in two in-class interviews with individuals with knowledge of drug court processes and procedures. From these interviews, you will develop a set of your own notes that you will use as data for your final paper. In order for you to get credit for participating in these two assignments, you must turn in typed notes for one of the two guest speaker interviews. The notes are due via blackboard. There is no page minimum or maximum for this assignment, but the more you write; the more data you will have to analyze for your final paper. Include as much detail as possible. The notes must be typed, with black text in Times New Roman font, double-spaced with 1-inch margins on all sides.

Final Paper (Including All Parts: Intro, Lit Review, Findings, Conclusion, and References)

Goal

Experiencing the Justice System is designed as a synthesis course, and the final paper assignment is designed to facilitate your analysis and synthesis of the subject of drug courts. Your paper will incorporate independent research as well as interview and observation data from guest speakers and class court visits. The paper is similar to a traditional academic article, including an introduction, review of literature, presentation of original data as findings with discussion and implications for research and practice, and a conclusion. The paper builds off of the smaller assignments throughout the semester, including a literature review and findings section that will be part of your writing lab (recitation course) assignments. All papers must be turned in via blackboard. The due date for these papers is firm—no late papers will be accepted.
Review of literature
Throughout the semester, you will complete readings for class on drug courts, but as part of the final paper you must go beyond the class readings and seek out additional sources. We have provided a file of additional readings on our blackboard site. We also encourage you to look at the works cited in the class readings and use the assigned readings to "snowball" additional sources for your paper. You should also consult the library for Criminology, Law & Society research databases and sources. Draft due via blackboard.

Findings
The findings section of your paper should incorporate your analysis of the guest speakers and courtroom observation done as part of the class. You will turn this section in prior to the final paper and review it prior to the final paper. But, the most polished and final version should be incorporated as part of your final paper. Draft due via blackboard.

Peer reviews
Students will review each other’s papers and provide feedback and guidance as part of the writing lab. There are two peer reviews built into class time, one for the literature review and one for the findings section, but we encourage you to seek out additional opportunities for review, proof reading, and editing. Bring hard copy of lit review to Lab and hard copy of findings section to lab.

Formatting and Stylistic Requirements
- 12 typed, double-spaced pages with 1-inch margins on all sides.
- Times New Roman, 12-point black font, numbered pages.
- In-text citation format (please consult the writing center and honor code if you have any questions about citation, we must report all incidents of plagiarism, even if they are unintentional).

Final Paper Grading Scale
A Well-organized, clear, and precise. Contains insights that go beyond the basic facts. Analyzes and provides a synthesis of information in new, original ways. Judgments are critical and reflect an awareness of alternatives, social relations, and historical perspective.
B Well-organized, coherent, technically sound, but provides little insight beyond basic data.
C To the point, content is perhaps relevant, but loosely organized. Not much detail. Imprecise. May have factual errors. Meets some, but not all, requirements.
D Provides some relevant material, but is generally weak in organization and understanding of ideas. Does not meet all requirements.
F May have some relevant material, but is weak in organization and understanding of ideas. Many errors, omissions, and coherence problems. Does not meet requirements.
Writing Resources

These are helpful places that you can consult for input and assistance with your paper.

- The Department of Criminology, Law & Society has a writing guide available at: http://classweb.gmu.edu/WAC/adjguide/.
- The GMU Writing Center. Very helpful and friendly people staff the writing center, and they can assist you at any stage of this assignment. There is online as well as walk-in help available. www.writingcenter.gmu.edu.
- There are also numerous style guides at the library and online.
- Your instructor, TA, and writing fellow are more than willing to meet with you and discuss drafts of your work; however, we will not fully type-edit your papers in hard copy or via email.

Criminology, Law & Society Scoring Sheet for Writing Assessment

Purpose

Addresses the assignment question/issue
introduction: provides clear sense of content/topic
introduction engages reader (has a hook)
Clear statement of position
Engages reader’s interest
Appropriate to audience
Presentation (form/genre) is appropriate
Appropriate voice/tone

Highly Competent []  Competent []  Emerging Competence []  Not Competent []

Structure of Argument

Logical flow of introduction with purpose explicit somewhere in the introduction
Has a consistent and logical argument
Organization: well-organized flow, repetition of key words, topic sentences, transitions between paragraphs
Conceptual sophistication/style reflects complexity of thought
Accurate use of headings as appropriate

Highly Competent []  Competent []  Emerging Competence []  Not Competent []
Support of Argument

Demonstrates knowledge of material
Sources used appropriately to support points
Sources integrated into arguments
Includes empirical/reality-based evidence (quantitative or qualitative) as appropriate
Balanced treatment of ideas/issues

Highly Competent []  Competent []  Emerging Competence []  Not Competent []

Writing Mechanics

Documentation and citation: sufficient and consistent, including one style of citation used adequately and correctly throughout the paper; adequate number of sources referenced; paraphrases and quotations used appropriately and fully cited. Correct incorporation of citation at the sentence level.
Understands how to construct sentences/paragraphs
Word choice, syntax, grammar, spelling, and punctuation
Uses consistent voice and tone
Appropriate use of first person
Uses active voice
Avoids contractions, slang, vague pronouns

Highly Competent []  Competent []  Emerging Competence []  Not Competent []

Independent Thought

Develops own line of reasoning and/or applies knowledge
Synthesizes knowledge, not just regurgitation or summary
Provides interesting/valuable insights

Highly Competent []  Competent []  Emerging Competence []  Not Competent []

Overall score

Highly Competent []  Competent []  Emerging Competence []  Not Competent []
Appendix B: Research Questions

Directions: **Please choose one of the following research questions as the topic of your CRIM 495 research paper.**

1. How do drug court team members perceive the court’s role in reducing recidivism? [Think about: What role does recidivism reduction have in the way the court team members’ make client-related decisions?]

2. What are the roles, power, or ethical standards of drug court officials (i.e. judge, prosecutor, and defense) and how do court team members think these things matter within the court environment? (you can choose one or more members) (you can choose roles, power, ethical standards solo or in some combination with each other)

3. How do drug court work team members understand the courts contribution to competing goals of community safety and rehabilitation? [Think about: it is hard to balance punishment/safety with treatment/rehabilitation ... how do the court teams do this and what does the way they do this mean to the courts’ processes and outcomes?]

4. What role does funding OR legitimacy play in how the court does its business (choose only one)? How would court work team members change how their court is currently funded OR perceived? [Think about: How does funding or external perception/legitimacy impact the way the court teams make decisions, do the courts’ business, handle clients, etc.]

5. How do members of the drug court workgroup perceive the participants entering and graduating from their program? [Think about: why and how does perception of participants/clients matter for the way the court does its business and for the outcomes it generates?]

The above questions may be adapted to another type of problem-solving court (i.e. mental health, veteran, and gang). However, this may be difficult since the guest speakers will more than likely not be able to provide answers to questions pertaining to other problem-solving courts.
Appendix C: Post Semester Survey  
CRIM 495: Experiencing the Criminal Justice System Post-Evaluation Questionnaire (Spring 2011)

Part I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1 Strongly disagree</th>
<th>3 Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>4 Somewhat agree</th>
<th>5 Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My writing skills have improved in my years in college.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My writing skills improved in this course.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good writing comes easy to me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have to work to be a good writer.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1 Never</th>
<th>3 Do not recall</th>
<th>4 Sometimes</th>
<th>5 Regularly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I write my papers a day or two before they are due for class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I proofread/edit my papers more than 2 times before turning them in for a grade.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have friends or colleagues proofread my papers before I turn them in.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use the campus writing center to help me write/edit my papers for class.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand how to write a literature review.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have written my own research questions before.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have used quantitative (surveys/experiments) data I collected to write a research paper.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have used qualitative (interviews/observations) data I collected to write a research paper.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a full understanding of what a problem solving court does/is.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a full understanding of what a drug court does/is.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have witnessed a drug court.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have spoken with members of a drug court work team.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part II

Directions
Please provide as much information as possible to help us assess the course design and learning processes.

1. What do you think worked well in the research paper process and why?

2. What parts of the research paper process can and should be improved and why?

3. Describe your experience with courtroom observation.

4. Describe your experience with the in-class guest speakers (Interviews).

5. Are there skills that you learned in this course that you can translate to other aspects of life? How?

6. Please use the space below to discuss any other comments you have about the course?