

**Assessment of Capstone**  
**CRIM 490 (Criminal Justice Senior Capstone)**  
**Spring 2016**

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This assessment of the Department of Sociology and Justice studies course: Criminal Justice Senior Capstone, Crim 490 (N=15), reflects the Criminal Justice Student Learning Outcomes as defined by the departmental student learning outcomes. Departmental Criminal Justice Senior Capstone learning outcome 1 states that students will “*be able to understand and apply various methodological and theoretical approaches for conducting research and evaluation with regards to criminal justice practices and polices.*” To assess this outcome, student capstone portfolio papers were evaluated qualitatively regarding three areas of rigor:

1. A students ability to apply a theory to explain research inquiry which was both a criminological theory and applicable to the topic and the variables chosen for analysis.
2. A students ability to operationalize variables and describe the research procedures.
3. A students ability to analyze variables and present findings in either SPSS results as cross tabulation, multiple regression, or descriptive statistics and/or excel analysis in the form of bar, pie, and trend line graphs.

Area 1, a students’ ability to apply theory was a strong area for this class. The majority students demonstrated an ability to identify and describe a criminological theory and explain how that theory related to their topic (inquiry 1). Students struggled with the aspect of the research paper instructions that requires them to relate the specific assumptions of a theory to the variables they chose to analyze (inquiry 2). These two inquiries were the main aspects of how students earned points for their introduction section. Inquiry 1 was considered to be a benchmark area of a students’ ability to demonstrate core knowledge where as Inquiry 2 was considered “higher order knowledge”, reflecting students who demonstrated and exceptional mastery of criminological theory as applied to research methods.

An analysis of research papers finds that 80% of students demonstrated the ability to identify and describe a criminological theory and explain how that theory related to their topic (inquiry 1), and that 50% demonstrated the ability to relate the theory to the variables they chose. These results are considered excellent by assessment standards as benchmark abilities are demonstrated by the vast majority of the class (inquiry 1). Furthermore, 50% of the class demonstrated abilities consistent with a mastery beyond what is normally expected of undergraduate students by identifying theories where the core assumptions were reflected in specific variables (inquiry 2) included in the analysis section of their research papers. This ability (inquiry 2) is considered to be consistent with benchmark standards of graduate level

students at the masters level. These findings are consistent with our goal to prepare students for both undergraduate success as well as the possibility that some of our students are also bound for graduate school.

Area 2, a students' ability to operationalize variables and describe research procedures was the strongest area for this class. Most students demonstrated an ability to describe research variables (inquiry 3). Additionally, most students demonstrated an ability to describe research procedures (inquiry 4). These two inquiries were the main aspects of how students earned points for their methods section. Inquiry 3 and 4 are both considered to be benchmark area's of a students' ability to demonstrate core knowledge of research methods.

Analysis of research papers reveals that 100% of students were able to describe research variables (inquiry 3), and 70% of students were able to describe research procedures (inquiry 4). These results are considered excellent by assessment standards of benchmark abilities. The reason assessment in the 70-100 percentile are defined as excellent is due to the fact that the secondary analysis method chosen by and number of students involved data transformations. Compared to last years assesement, students in the 2016 where better prepared to transform variables to better match their research questions. Some of these transformations where relatively complex and the tracking of changes where very precise.

Area 3, a students ability to analyze variables and present findings in either SPSS results as cross tabulation, multiple regression, or descriptive statistics and/or excel analysis in the form of bar, pie, and trend line graphs was a particularly strong area for students. This inquiry (5) is of particular importance for students who might later find themselves working at agencies where report writing is a key part of employment. This skill is considered above benchmark standards for students within the criminal justice major.

Analysis of research papers reveal that 85% of students were able to present data on the same metric and deal with complex visualizations and challenging issues of scaling. This is commendable considering the prior data transformations in the methods section helped with scalability as well as metric issues. Thus, the extra effort of the 2016 class in the methods section relative to the 2015 class also positively affected the overall analysis sections visualizations and analysis

This assessment concludes that senior capstone students in Crim 490 Spring 2016 demonstrated fulfillment of learning outcome 1 as defined by the Sociology and Justice Studies Department: *“students will be able to understand and apply various methodological and theoretical approaches for conducting research and evaluation with regards to criminal justice practices and polices.”*