



**Programme Specification for  
MSc in Criminology and Criminal Justice  
(Research Methods)**  
**2007/2008**

<b>1. Awarding institution/body</b>	<b>University of Oxford</b>
<b>2. Teaching institution</b>	<b>University of Oxford</b>
<b>3. Programme accredited by</b>	<b>ESRC</b>
<b>4. Final award</b>	<b>MSc</b>
<b>5. Programme</b>	<b>Criminology and Criminal Justice (Research Methods)</b>
<b>6. UCAS code</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>7. Relevant subject benchmark statement</b>	<b>Draft British Society of Criminology Benchmarks for U-G Criminology degrees</b>
<b>8. Date of programme specification</b>	<b>July 2007</b>

## **9. Educational aims of the programme**

To provide students with the ability to:

- evaluate classic and contemporary theoretical debates in criminology and understand and investigate issues in crime, criminal justice and social control;
- apprehend the theoretical and practical aspects of a broad range of quantitative and qualitative methods and methodologies;
- utilize the research and generic skills required to be professional social science researchers.

## **10. Programme outcomes**

On completing the degree satisfactorily, students should

*Through the criminological theory/criminal justice courses and two options:*

- have a systematic understanding of the key theories and debates, and a critical awareness of current problems and new insights, at the forefront of criminology and criminal justice;
- be well equipped for critical analysis of crime, criminal justice and the development of criminal justice policy.

They will in particular, understand:

- historical, sociological and philosophical perspectives on criminal justice and punishment;
- the main problems, questions and conceptual dualisms that have shaped modern criminological thought and different theoretical perspectives on deviance, crime and criminal justice;
- the social, cultural and political contexts that condition the emergence, development and effects of different perspectives within criminology, and the capacity of modern criminology to explain developments in crime and social control under conditions of late modernity.

- the role of the state/criminal justice system in the regulation of human behaviour;
- the nature of 'understanding' and 'explanation' within criminology.

*Through the criminological theory and research methods courses:*

- understand the alternative philosophical positions that underpin social science research, and the nature of explanation and understanding in criminology;
- have a critical grasp of the theoretical and substantive issues involved in formulating, undertaking and making judgments upon social scientific research;
- be able to design and implement social scientific research using appropriate methodologies and methods, and analyze and present the material such research generates;
- be able to put to practical use a range of acquired skills pertaining to the practice, governance and dissemination of research.

*Through the criminological research workshop and dissertation:*

- have demonstrated originality in the application of criminological and criminal justice knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how the established techniques of criminological and criminal justice research and enquiry can be deployed to create and interpret knowledge about offenders, offending, and the criminal justice response;
- have learnt how to produce substantial pieces of written work after researching particular topics for their options and for their dissertation.

## **Teaching/learning methods**

The primary method of teaching is through seminars at which all students are expected to contribute. While the courses involve some formal lecturing by staff, they generally take the form of seminars, workshops, presentations and practical exercises that demand preparation in advance by students and their active participation in class. These are supplemented by optional lectures and seminars with invited guest speakers, which make no requirement for students to conduct preparatory work or contribute.

The 'core' courses on 'Explanation and Understanding in Criminology' and 'Understanding Criminal Justice' run through the first six weeks of the first two terms respectively (Michaelmas and Hilary). The weekly ninety-minute classes, taught generally by Professor Loader and Professor Roberts, are compulsory and students are expected to come prepared to contribute to each class. Preparation for classes is directed by detailed reading lists distributed to students during week 0 of Michaelmas term at the latest. In these classes, students should acquire the knowledge detailed above (points 1 to 4) through their own reading in preparation for classes (reading the required and suggested materials, digesting them and making preparatory notes should take approximately 20 hours a week), and through discussing the readings with the core course teacher and their fellow students. Student learning is then consolidated through revision in preparation for the final assessment by unseen written examination.

Students also take two research methods modules in each of the first two terms and one in the third (Trinity term), for the first six weeks of each term. 'Methods I: Research Design and Data Collection' and 'Basic Principles of Statistical Inference and Statistical Models' are taught in Michaelmas; ' Methods II: Social Explanation and Data Analysis' and 'Qualitative Methods' in Hilary. They must also attend the 'Criminological Research Workshop' in Trinity. These take the form of either ninety-minute weekly workshops ('Methods I: Research Design And Data Collection'; 'Methods II: Social Explanation And Data Analysis', 'Qualitative Methods' and 'Criminological Research Workshop'); or an integrated series of two-hour lectures and two-hour practical workshops ('Basic Principles of Statistical Inference and Statistical Models'). Attendance at the weekly classes is compulsory and students are expected to be well prepared so as to be able to contribute fully to the discussion. Preparation for classes is directed by detailed reading lists distributed to students, at the latest, during week 0 of the term (but more usually before the end of the previous term). During these courses, students develop a detailed knowledge of the theoretical and practical aspects of a full range of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, including the design, collection and analysis of data. Students will through these courses acquire the methods-specific learning outcomes detailed above. Student learning is consolidated by weekly assignments and formal assessments for the four methods courses, and by a dissertation proposal for the 'Criminological Research Workshop' (see below).

'Basic Principles of Statistical Inference and Statistical Models' comprises a series of lectures delivered by staff in the Department of Politics and International Relations' Centre for Research Methods in the Social Sciences, coupled with an integrated series of practical workshops taught by staff in the Department of Sociology.

In Trinity term students choose two options on substantive criminological topics. Again, attendance at the weekly ninety-minute classes (which run for the first six weeks of the term) is compulsory and students are expected to be well prepared so as to be able to contribute fully to the discussion. Preparation for classes is directed by detailed reading lists distributed to students, at the latest, during week 0 of the term (but more usually before the end of the previous term). In these classes, students should develop a detailed knowledge and understanding of their chosen option through their own reading in preparation for classes (reading the required and suggested materials, digesting them and making preparatory notes should take approximately 10 hours a week for each option), and through discussing the readings with the course teacher and their fellow students on that option. Student learning is then consolidated through the preparation of an assessed essay in relation to each of their chosen options (see below).

Students also participate in the Criminological Research Workshop which runs over six lunchtimes in Trinity term and aims to assist students in translating the theoretical and methodological knowledge they have gained on the course into coherent and 'do-able' research projects. The seminar will comprise a mix of: i) students presenting to each other and to Criminology staff outline research proposals for their dissertations; and ii) academics, contract research staff and current DPhil students from the Centre and elsewhere offering practice-based reflections on various dimensions of the criminological research process.

In Trinity term and over the summer students research and write a dissertation on a topic of their own choice, subject to the agreement of the MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice Board of Studies. The aim of the dissertation is to enable students to expand and deepen the knowledge of research design and process, modes of data generation and data analysis techniques acquired during the course. It affords them, in particular, the opportunity to develop their methodological skills in the context of a specific area of substantive research and, to this extent, provides a bridge between the taught MSc and the research component of their doctoral programme. To this end, students will be expected to pursue dissertations along one of the following lines: i) an extended research design for a doctoral study; ii) a critical literature

review of conceptual, methodological and/or substantive issues relevant to their emerging research topic; iii) a small empirical study that might serve as a pilot for later doctoral work. Students are expected to carry out the research independently, with such guidance from their dissertation supervisor as is necessary. In order to ensure that students achieve a rough equality of access to supervision, a guideline of ten hours supervision time has been stipulated, which should only be exceeded in exceptional cases. This time is to include both contact with the supervisor and time taken to read through and comment on a draft. The dissertation must not exceed 15,000 words and should not normally be less than 13,000 words, and is submitted in September.

The submission deadline for the dissertation is later than that set for the MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice due to i) its greater length, and ii) the expectation that students may do original empirical research.

## **Assessment**

### *Summative Assessment*

Summative assessment is conducted by the following means:

- completion of a 3-hour unseen written examination jointly based on the 'Explanation and Understanding in Criminology' and 'Understanding Criminal Justice' courses. Students are required to answer three questions under strict examination conditions;
- three written assignments (one each for 'Methods I: Research Design And Data Analysis', 'Methods II: Social Explanation and Data Analysis' and 'Qualitative Methods');
- a closed-book class test and take-home data analysis test for 'Basic Principles of Statistical Inference and Statistical Models';
- two essays (one for each substantive option) written unsupervised and unaided during the last three weeks of Trinity term;
- a dissertation.

The degree of MSc is awarded to any candidate who achieves a mark of at least 50 per cent for each of its four components: (1) the unseen exam, (2) the written assignments, data analysis test and practical exercise for the methods courses, (3) the option essays and (4) the dissertation. For this purpose, the individual marks of the methods assignments and the options essays are aggregated and two average marks awarded for components 2 and 3 of the degree. The examiners award a distinction to any candidate who achieves marks of at least 70 per cent on the dissertation, and at least two out of the other three components of the degree.

*Component 1:* The joint examination for 'Explanation and Understanding in Criminology' and 'Understanding Criminal Justice' typically includes questions on all of the topics covered in these courses throughout the first two terms. Examiners set papers in line with the content of the course. Some questions cut across topics to assess the extent to which students have understood how, for example, criminological theories inform criminal justice practice, or how practices in one area of the criminal process impact on those in another.

*Component 2: 'Methods I: Research Design And Data Analysis', 'Methods II: Social Explanation And Data Analysis' and 'Qualitative Methods'* operate with two methods of assessment, and all candidates must satisfactorily complete both. First, each candidate will be required to complete a series of practical assignments (subject to the course tutor's discretion; this could be weekly) that are marked on a pass/fail basis. A candidate who fails may be required to re-submit the assignment, normally within 7 days. Secondly, at the end of each of the two terms each candidate will be required to submit an essay of 2,500 to 3,000 words. In each case, a choice of 3 titles will be offered.

'Basic Principles of Statistical Inference and Statistical Models' is assessed by a 2-hour closed book in-class test and a take-home data analysis test.

*Component 3:* The options are examined by means of an assessed essay of 3,500–5,000 words, for which time is set aside during the last three weeks of Trinity term.

*Component 4:* The dissertation must be between 13,000 and 15,000 words long on a topic of the student's choice, subject to the agreement of the MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice Board of Studies. The dissertation is carried out independently, with such guidance from a dissertation supervisor as is necessary. This expands and deepens the knowledge of research design and process, modes of data generation and data analysis techniques acquired during the course. It is designed to test the student's ability to work independently, to design research, to collect and interpret primary data and/or research and analyze relevant sources of secondary empirical or theoretical evidence, and to produce a high-quality extended piece of written work. The required format for this dissertation is the common format prescribed for all law theses, which is printed in the Faculty of Law's Graduate Students' Handbook.

All assessments are 'double blind' marked internally by two examiners, or an examiner and an assessor. A sample of scripts from those marked as pass and distinction, as well as any failed or borderline papers, is also reviewed by an external examiner.

#### *Formative Assessment*

Formative assessment includes feedback through termly sessions for each student with their academic supervisor and feedback from dissertation supervisors. In addition, early in the first term the students attend a seminar on writing techniques at which advice is given on the expectations of the examiners and feedback provided to the students regarding their ideas about effective essay writing skills. A similar session takes place in Hilary term in relation to the task of writing a dissertation. The opportunity to write practice assessed essays may be available.

There is an unseen two-hour, two-question mock examination for the 'Explanation and Understanding in Criminology' course (based only on the topics covered in Michaelmas term), taken in Week 0 of Hilary term at the Examination Schools. Students are required to answer two questions under strict examination conditions. This both provides an incentive for students to engage in early revision for the final examination and gives them the opportunity to practice their examination technique (this is particularly useful for students who have been out of formal education for a while). The result of this examination does not affect a student's final assessment for the MSc. Its purpose is to provide teachers with the opportunity to monitor the student's progress, identify areas of strength and weakness, and provide constructive feedback. Whilst the mock exam is not compulsory, students are strongly encouraged to take it.

The practical assignments for 'Methods I: Research Design And Data Analysis' , 'Methods II: Social Explanation And Data Analysis' and 'Qualitative Methods' (while forming part of the formal assessment

process in that they must be passed) also enable the tutor to monitor the process of the students throughout the course. Students are also required to produce non-assessed weekly assignments for the 'Basic Principles of Statistical Inference and Statistical Models' course in Michaelmas term. The assignments will involve analysing data independently and writing up the results in a formal manner.

As part of the 'Criminological Research Workshop' students are required to write and submit a 2,000 word dissertation research proposal at the end of Trinity term. This will not be formally assessed, but dissertation supervisors will offer feedback and guidance on it.

The skills that students are expected to acquire on the degree, and their links with the teaching methods and forms of assessment, are set out more fully in the following section.

## **Skills and other attributes**

Students will have the opportunity to develop the following skills during the course:

### **I. Intellectual skills**

1. The ability critically to analyse and to deal systematically and creatively with complex theoretical and empirical work.
2. The ability to present, in a concise manner, their understanding of complex theoretical issues or sophisticated empirical evidence and the ability to communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences.
3. The ability to draw together ideas from different disciplines and to synthesise them coherently.
4. The ability to demonstrate self-direction and originality in their application of knowledge and in tackling and solving problems.
5. The ability to demonstrate creativity and originality in applying their knowledge to new research questions (through their dissertation research).

### *Teaching/learning methods and strategies*

The main learning method is directed, private, library-based study in preparation for seminars in which students are expected to contribute fully to group discussion about the key issues and discuss different interpretations with one another. The dialogic character of argument in seminars is designed to encourage students to clarify and refine their ideas and responses to their preparatory reading. Students are encouraged to challenge each other and their tutors so that debates develop during class time. Supervision of dissertations helps students to refine their thinking and consider competing perspectives on their topic.

*Assessment:* On-going formative assessment and feedback in classes and supervision sessions. The opportunity to write practice assessed essays may be available. Summative assessment through unseen core course examination, assessed essays on theoretical, methodological and substantive topics, take-home data analysis test and practical exercise, and dissertation.

## **II. Research skills**

1. The ability to understand and operationalize the principles of research design, and to appreciate the competing philosophical positions underpinning them.
2. The ability to classify and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different research designs (specifically the 'fit' among the methods, data, and argument) of criminological research, as published in refereed journals and official documents, and as represented in policy/political debates in the popular press.
3. The ability to understand and use a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data collection methodologies, and to interpret and write up the results of empirical quantitative and qualitative enquiry.
4. The ability to understand the context in which research takes place and is disseminated, and to appreciate the significance of key dilemmas and concepts in research ethics.

*Teaching/learning methods and strategies*

Formal lectures, seminars and workshops, student presentations, teacher and fellow student feedback sessions, practical 'hands-on' work which includes the use of specialized software for data analysis.

*Assessment:* weekly assignments, class and take home data analysis tests, practical research exercises, written essays and dissertation.

## **III. Practical skills**

1. Strong written skills through preparing for formal assessments.
2. Good time management and the ability to keep to deadlines.
3. Practical research skills.

*Teaching/learning methods and strategies*

1. Preparing for formal assessments enhances written skills.
2. Good time management and the ability to keep to deadlines are encouraged through the demanding nature of the course with assessments taking place at the end of each of the three terms.
3. Good research skills, particularly through researching the dissertation.

*Assessment:* On going formative assessment and feedback in classes. Summative assessment through methods and option assignments. Dissertation.

#### **IV. Generic skills**

1. Essential skills of writing and presentation (including organising a dissertation, using references and appendices, making citations).
2. Development of autonomous learning, showing responsibility and initiative.
3. Development of critical analysis.
4. Management of research (including managing their time, timetable, relationship with their supervisor).
5. The identification of library resources and how to use them (including searches on the Internet and research using other electronic resources, such as on-line journals and archived data sets – e.g., ESRC data archive).
6. Improvement of their general information and communication technology competence.
7. The independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.
8. Team working skills.

#### *Teaching/learning methods and strategies*

1. Seminars for which students need to prepare in the expectation that they will contribute fully to group discussion about the key issues and discuss different interpretations with one another.
2. Advice given by the Academic Supervisor at termly supervision sessions, by dissertation supervisors in Trinity term and over the summer, and in the detailed Course Book.
3. Basic library training offered during weeks -1 and 0 of the academic year (induction weeks).
4. Seminar on essay writing skills provided during week 0 of the academic year (induction week).
5. Seminar on the skills needed to complete a dissertation provided at the beginning of Week 7 of Hilary term.

*Assessment:* On-going formative assessment and feedback in classes and supervision sessions. Summative assessment through assessed essays, practical exercise, dissertation and unseen core course examination.

### **11. Programme Structures and Features**

#### **Induction programme**

A two-week induction programme is run in weeks -1 and 0 of Michaelmas term. This introduces students to computing services and training at Oxford, including the use of relevant bibliographical, legal and social science databases. Students are also offered introductory lectures on writing skills/plagiarism and an introduction to the 'Structure of the English Criminal Justice System' for those with no legal background. Two introductory lectures for the 'Explanation and Understanding in Criminology' course are also offered in week 0.

## **Michaelmas Term**

### **Core Course: Explanation and Understanding in Criminology**

This course develops a contextual understanding of the organizing categories and central claims of a range of modern criminological perspectives of crime and social control. In so doing, it equips students to recognize the principal problems, questions and conceptual dualisms that have shaped modern criminological thought, and to understand the nature of 'theory' and 'explanation' within criminology. Attention is also paid to the challenges to modern criminological theorizing presented by the (altered) crime and control landscape of a globalized late modernity. The course is organized along the following lines:

#### **Introductory lectures:**

1. The Field of Criminology
2. Explanation and Understanding in Criminology

#### **Seminars:**

1. Crime, Modernity and the Urban Experience
2. Crime, Conformity and Sources of Control
3. Crime and Everyday Life: Rational Choice, Routine Activities and Emotional Life
4. Crime, Inequality and Opportunity: Crime in Market Societies
5. Constructing and Reacting to Crime: Labelling, Moral Panics and the State
6. Criminology, Crime and Control in Late Modernity

This weekly ninety- minute class is compulsory. The discussions that take place in the classes are invaluable for assisting students with the final examination. Students are expected to come prepared to contribute to each class.

### **Methods I: Research Design and Data Collection**

How can social scientists be sure that the data used in research are valid and reliable? This course is focused on the challenges and the opportunities that different methods of data collection have for validity and reliability of data. Such methods include experiments and quasi-experiments; questionnaires and survey research; field research, and the collection of written documents. Ethical concerns are given special emphasis. Social mechanisms will also be discussed alongside methods of data collection. This course will provide students with a knowledge base from which to choose appropriate ways to collect valid and reliable data given a particular research question, and opportunities to practice basic data exploration using SPSS for Windows. It will also help students assess the weight that can be placed on the findings of published research in the field of criminology.

### **Basic Principles of Statistical Inference and Statistical Models**

This course aims to develop the foundations of statistical thinking and to introduce the most important statistical models used in social science research. Topics covered normally include: ideas of sampling and probability models, basic methods for inference about a population from a sample, and the use and interpretation of some common types of statistical model, including linear regression, logistic regression and

log-linear models. The course is taught through an integrated series of lectures. These are supplemented by 'hands on' practical classes that cover the basic statistical procedures and data manipulation techniques (multivariate analysis as well as descriptive statistics), and aim to give students the skills to undertake quantitative data analysis using SPSS for Windows.

This course comprises a series of lectures delivered by staff in the Department of Politics and International Relations' 'Centre for Research Methods in the Social Sciences', coupled with an integrated series of practical workshops taught by staff in the Department of Sociology.

### **Hilary Term**

#### **Core Course: Understanding Criminal Justice**

This course offers students a thorough grounding in the criminological/social-legal understanding of criminal justice/penal institutions and processes. The core themes of classic research on these processes are introduced, before students are introduced to contemporary issues and controversies in criminal justice and punishment. The course introduces students to competing theoretical perspectives on the criminal justice process and in so doing encourages them to think seriously about the role of the state/criminal law in the regulation of human behaviour and the place and limitations of criminal justice interventions in producing safe societies.

#### **Seminars:**

1. Public opinion and criminal justice
2. Models of criminal justice
3. Responding to anti-social behaviour
4. Racism and criminal justice
5. Sentencing reform
6. Parole

This weekly ninety-minute class is compulsory. The discussions that take place in the classes are invaluable for assisting students with the final examination. Students are expected to come prepared to contribute to each class.

#### **Methods II: Social Explanation and Data Analysis**

This course introduces students to different methods of data analysis and theory testing, and in particular methods for finding the existence of, strength, direction and pattern of association in the data. Special emphasis will be given to methods particularly well suited to the study of criminal groups and large-scale social processes: Regression Analysis, Social Network Analysis and Content Analysis, Comparative Historical Sociology, and basic Game Theory. The course will provide students with a knowledge base from which to choose methods of data analysis best suited to answer their research question.

## **Qualitative Methods**

This course introduces students to different methods of qualitative inquiry, data gathering, analysis and reporting. Special emphasis will be given throughout the course to ethical issues and cross-cultural and comparative practices. Students will study examples of research techniques and carry out applied practice themselves. They will also gain practical experience of computer-assisted mechanisms of qualitative data collection and analysis such as CAPI (computer-assisted personal interviewing) and NVivo (qualitative data analysis). This option will be compulsory for those students taking the MSc in Criminology and Criminal Justice (Research Methods), and, as such, has been designed to be compliant with the ESRC requirements for methods training, and optional for all others on the MSc in Criminology and Criminal Justice. It will complement the other research methods courses run by the Centre, namely *Methods I: Research Design and Data Collection* and *Methods II: Social Explanation and Data Analysis*.

## **Trinity Term**

### **Substantive options**

Students on the degree will choose two from a range of substantive options designed to provide them with a detailed knowledge of current criminological debates and public policy developments in specific fields of policing, punishment and social control. The courses will pay particular attention both to introducing students to cutting-edge thinking in criminology and socio-legal studies, and to questions of how to conduct research in the relevant fields. Attendance throughout the weekly ninety minute classes is compulsory and students are expected to be well prepared so as to contribute fully to discussion.

Students will select from a range of five options being offered in 2007-2008 as follows:

### **Race and Gender**

Too often issues around race and gender are paid only lip service in criminological research and teaching. Despite empirical data and theoretical writings providing evidence that both victims' and offenders' experiences of crime and criminal justice are significantly influenced by their race and gender, many mainstream criminology courses provide only one class on these topics. This course provides a systematic examination of the impact of race and gender on criminological theory and the administration of criminal justice in the UK and beyond, looking not only at these variables separately but also at ways in which they intersect. It will examine the causes of crime, trends in offending and victimisation and the criminal justice response from the perspectives of race and gender. Furthermore, it will consider challenges to criminology and criminal justice posed by contemporary patterns of offending, fears and threats to social order.

### **Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice is a term of unsettled meaning but can be seen as encompassing a diverse and developing set of values, processes and aims which share an orientation towards repairing the harm caused by crime. The most well-known restorative processes involve victims and offenders coming face-to-face to discuss the offence, the harm it caused, and how this might be put right. This course considers various models of restorative justice across the world. It examines the role of victims, offenders and communities, integrating theoretical and empirical knowledge and sociological critiques of different restorative approaches. It also tackles such difficult philosophical questions as whether restorative justice can be an appropriate substitute or supplement to formal state-administered justice, and whether it can operate satisfactorily when power

imbalances between offenders and victims are great, as in cases of domestic violence and in post-conflict societies.

### **Risk, Security and Criminal Justice**

A key feature of contemporary crime control is the rise of risk management and the pursuit of security. In the 'risk society' suspects are viewed less as bearers of rights than as carriers of risk that need to be managed. This option will analyze the ways in which risk and security are transforming criminal justice thinking and practices. It will explore the costs and benefits of these developments and examine the implications of security policies for justice and individual liberties. The seminar topics are:

- Week 1: Risk, Actuarial Justice, and the pursuit of Security
- Week 2: Policing and Risk
- Week 3: Crime Prevention and Community Safety
- Week 4: Security and the War on Terror
- Week 5: The Practices and Burdens of seeking Security
- Week 6: Risk, Security, and Justice

### **Sentencing**

The aim of this option is to explore some of the legal, theoretical and empirical issues of sentencing, largely by reference to England and Wales. As well as analysing decisions on the use of imprisonment, the course examines the arguments about previous convictions and sentencing, and the justifications for allowing certain factors to mitigate sentence.

### **Sociology of Punishment**

This course explores the extensive body of sociological and criminological literature on punishment. Particular attention is paid to the work of Michel Foucault and David Garland. Issues that will be addressed include the relationship between punishment and welfare, race and gender, and popular punitivism. Students should emerge from this course with a clear sense of the competing explanations of punishment and with an understanding of the differential impact such ideas have on women and ethnic minorities.

### **Criminological Research Workshop**

This seminar is run over 6 lunchtimes in Trinity term and aims to assist students in translating the theoretical and methodological knowledge they have gained on the course into coherent and 'do-able' research projects. Particular attention is given to the ethical dimensions of the students' proposed work and how these issues may be addressed. The seminar will comprise a mix of: i) students presenting to each other and to Criminology staff outline research proposals for their dissertations; and ii) academics, contract research staff and current DPhil students from the Centre and beyond offering practice-based reflections on various dimensions of the criminological research process.

## **Dissertation**

The aim of the dissertation is to enable students to expand and deepen the knowledge of research design and process, modes of data generation and data analysis techniques acquired during the course. It affords them, in particular, the opportunity to develop their methodological skills in the context of a specific area of substantive research and, to this extent, provides a bridge between the taught MSc and the research component of their doctoral programme. To this end, students will be expected to pursue dissertations along one of the following lines: i) an extended research design for a doctoral study; ii) a critical literature review of conceptual, methodological and/or substantive issues relevant to their emerging research topic; and iii) a small empirical study that might serve as a pilot for later doctoral work. The dissertation must be between 13-15,000 words in length, and is submitted in September. The required format for this dissertation is the common format prescribed for all law theses, which is printed in the Faculty of Law's Graduate Students' Handbook.

## **12. Support for Students and their learning**

Students receive support on any non-academic matters from their college advisors, and can discuss with these advisors their academic progress.

The Centre appoints each student an Academic Supervisor. Whilst specifically concerned with their academic progress, academic supervisors can also offer support on a range of welfare matters. Students are expected to meet their academic supervisors at the beginning and end of the first term (Michaelmas term), and at the end of the second and third terms, although students can contact their supervisor at any time during term if they have problems or concerns which they feel cannot wait until the next scheduled meeting. Likewise, supervisors might proactively arrange additional meetings during term if they have pressing concerns about a student's progress. The Academic Supervisor is required to write a report on each student's academic progress each term and the contents of this report are communicated to the student, the student's college, and the Graduate Studies Office.

In addition, students can receive support from college or department specialist advisors, such as the Welfare Officer or Harassment Officer, Advisor to Women Students, or the Head of Department. Many colleges have extensive 'Welfare Teams' of fellow students, academic and other staff (for example, nurse, doctor, and chaplain).

If students experience personal problems that they would prefer not to discuss with their academic or college supervisor, they can contact the University Counselling Service. In addition, in induction week a seminar will be held on student mental health. This seminar, and the handout which accompanies it, explains the many pressures and challenges students might face during their studies and outlines some of the common problems and mental illnesses that can affect students, ways of dealing with them, and available sources of help. It also includes a detailed list of all sources of help, within the University, locally within Oxford, and nationally, to help students cope with the more minor and the more serious problems. The list explains the work of different support agencies and provides complete contact details.

All MSc students have access to a wide range of resources and facilities offered by the Law Faculty and the Centre for Criminology. The Faculty provides workstations exclusively for law graduate students in the St Cross Building. Each study space is equipped with an Ethernet socket providing access to the University computer network. There is also an adjoining sitting area, with a drinks machine, and a separate locker room containing 150 lockers where law graduate students may store their personal effects if they wish.

Students also have access to college and University computing equipment. IT support is provided by the University, and by each of the colleges or halls.

Students have access to the Social Science Library which houses an extensive criminology collection. Unlike many libraries in Oxford, this library, located on the ground floor of the Social Sciences Building in Manor Road, has lending (as well as reference only) copies of key books. The library has ample graduate workspace and state-of-the-art computing facilities. It is located next to the St Cross Building. The Centre for Criminology is situated on the top floor of the Manor Road Building.

The Bodleian Law Library is an extremely useful reference library for MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice students as it holds the Bodleian's main collection on this subject, and it receives material by legal deposit. It also purchases items of academic merit from other countries. Series of relevant government papers are held. It therefore has an extensive collection of UK and Irish law, including subsidiary jurisdictions, and has one of the largest holdings of UK statutes and law reports. It provides students with access to a book and journal collection which should cover most, if not all, of their academic needs, almost all on open-shelves. It also provides access to extensive online legal databases and web resources. In term time the library remains open into the late evening on weekdays and during the day at weekends. It also remains open during the day until 7pm during the vacations. The library staff provide induction tours for new students as well as on-going support.

The Centre for Criminology holds regular research seminars which all graduate students are expected to attend, and which attract distinguished speakers from the international academic community, government and criminal justice agencies. The Centre's research staff can also help with teaching and are available to advise students on their academic plans. In particular, students in receipt of the ESRC 1+3 quota awards, as well as those who have expressed a strong interest in continuing their studies via the MPhil, MSt or D Phil route, will be invited to attend regular Graduate Research meetings convened by the Graduate Research Coordinator.

The University provides numerous services to help all of its students. Those most relevant to postgraduates in criminology include:

- The Careers Service, which provides comprehensive information and impartial guidance to students and graduates of Oxford University at all stages of the career decision making process.
- The Computing Service, which provides high quality, low cost, IT support for all students from those just beginning to become familiar with computers to those who need advice about very advanced computer programmes. It also provides access to workstations at its site, computing courses, site-licensed software and email and web space accounts for all.
- The International Office, which is responsible for administering the University's scholarship and bursary schemes for international students. It also runs an annual Orientation Programme for new international students, and provides advice about funding and other issues particularly affecting international students, including immigration questions.
- The Language Centre, which provides resources and services for members of the University who need foreign languages for their study, research or personal interest.

### 13. Criteria for Admission

Candidates for admission would normally possess (or be predicted to obtain) a first class or high upper second class (or its equivalent) degree in law, sociology, politics, economics, social policy, psychology, history, or another subject relevant to criminology. A high upper second class degree is defined as one in which an average mark of 65% or above is attained in courses counting towards the final undergraduate degree classification. Extensive employment experience within the field of criminal justice may be regarded by the selection panel as compensating for a lack of an undergraduate degree to the required standard.

*Competence in English Language:* A good command of written English is essential for success in the MSc in Criminology and we make it a precondition of admission. If English is not your native language, you are required to achieve a score of at least 630 (or 267 in the computer-based test) in TOEFL (together with a score of at least 5 in the TOEFL Test of Written English, TWE); or one of at least 7.5 in IELTS, with at least 7.0 in each component. Applicants who have taken the new Internet-based TOEFL test must achieve an overall score of 109. Applicants taking the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) must have at least Grade B. Our own preference is for IELTS. You must supply your test result with your application.

Students are not normally interviewed (as this can unfairly discriminate against overseas students who cannot so easily be available for interview). However, the Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology is happy to talk with students considering applying for the Course to describe the content, teaching, assessment, and to answer any questions.

As with the other departments and colleges in the University, the Admissions Panel, comprising the Director or Assistant Director of the Centre for Criminology, and one other member of the MSc core teaching staff, selects students for admission solely on the individual merits of each candidate and the application of the relevant selection criteria. To these ends, students submit a statement of why they wish to be accepted for the course and two samples of their written work. Three academic references are also taken into consideration.

As each year there is a target for the number of MSc students admitted onto the two versions of the MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice (currently 30). The Centre anticipates that five of these places will be reserved for the 'Research' version of the degree, though this number can be altered in the light of applications received. We cannot therefore commit to offer a place to every student who meets our criteria. In recognition of this, we seek to review applications in a gathered field as this enables us to offer places to the best-qualified and most suitable students. Applicants who are thought able but do not at the time of application meet all of the selection criteria may be offered a conditional place. Conditions usually relate to the obtaining of the required standard of undergraduate degree or ability in the English language. Once students have notified us of their results, they will be informed as to whether or not they are fully accepted.

In reviewing applicants the following qualitative admissions criteria are employed (applicants and their referees are encouraged to address these criteria specifically):

*Application:* exceptional academic motivation; capacity for sustained and intense work; developed ability to organise time and set own agenda for study; intrepid attitude towards investigation and learning.

*Knowledge:* Applicants will normally have a broad, deep, advanced, and integrated understanding of a subject relevant to criminology such as sociology, economics, politics, psychology, social policy, history or other discipline from the social sciences. Preference may be given to those who have studied some criminology, criminal justice, penology, criminal law or the sociology of deviance.

*Reasoning ability:* outstanding analytical abilities, the ability speedily to separate the relevant from the irrelevant, and the ability to develop and sustain complex arguments under pressure; capacities for accurate observation and insightful criticism, including willingness and ability to engage with other social science disciplines; originality and creativity of thought, open-mindedness, and capacity for lateral thinking; excellent powers of synthesis and economy of thought.

*Research proposal:* students applying to the course in conjunction with an application for an ESRC 1+3 studentship, or with a stated preference for proceeding after it to the D Phil, will be expected to provide a short outline of their proposed D Phil topic, which would set out the reasons for their interest in the topic, the research questions they propose to ask, and how they will seek to answer them.

*Communication:* willingness and ability to express highly complex ideas clearly and effectively in English, with a particular eye to finesse and economy and an aspiration to professional standards of style and organisation in scholarly writing.

#### **14. Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of teaching and learning**

##### *Student Feedback*

This has a number of objectives. The Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology and teachers are committed to making a thorough evaluation to assess whether the aims and objectives of the course are being achieved and to improve the course by identifying its strengths and weaknesses. There are various methods by which we seek to obtain feedback from students about their experiences. There are informal means by which students can communicate their experiences of this course: through their meetings with their Academic Supervisor and through direct communication with the course teachers. Rather more formal is the role of the **Student Representative**. Students have the opportunity to elect a representative amongst their cohort in week 0 of Michaelmas Term. This person attends termly meetings with the MSc Criminology Board of Studies to represent the students' needs and interests. Apart from this, there is a more structured method for conducting course evaluation, namely the use of anonymous questionnaires administered in week 6 of each term.

The questionnaires covers the following areas:

- criminological theory/criminal justice courses (content, methods of teaching);
- research methods courses (content, methods of teaching);
- options (content, methods of teaching);
- department and university facilities and resources;
- dissertation supervision;
- student assessment process.

The questionnaires are administered by the Graduate Studies Administrator and no teaching member of staff is present while students fill in the questionnaire. The feedback is then collated, the quantitative data are coded into an SPSS file and the findings presented to the MSc Board of Studies.

The Board of Studies feeds back to the students, via the Student Representative, their responses to students' comments and concerns. The Board makes clear which of the suggestions for change they feel able to act upon. In some cases change might not be possible until the following academic year.

Subject to the requirements of data protection legislation, the Graduate Studies Administrator maintains a database on its alumni to track how our students fare in the employment or higher education market, to review the appropriateness of the course for certain careers, to help students keep in touch with each other, and to provide new students with ideas about where to seek careers guidance.

#### *Staff appointment, training and appraisal*

- Newly appointed members of academic staff are required to attend a training programme organised by the University's Institute for the Advancement of University Learning that address such topics as lecturing, supervising, teaching in small groups and publishing..
- A senior member of the academic staff is also assigned to each more junior appointee as a mentor, with a brief to provide advice and support pro-actively on teaching matters as well as other aspects of professional development.
- Teaching by recently appointed members of academic staff is witnessed and evaluated by a more senior member of academic staff (not the mentor) before the appointment is confirmed at the five-year-point.
- Teaching assessment and self-assessment also play an important part in the Faculty's system of continuing staff appraisal.

#### *Curriculum Review and Course Management*

Responsibility for the course is vested in the Law Board within the Social Sciences Division. The divisional board has formal responsibility for the maintenance of quality and standards for all courses under its aegis.

Responsibility for the organisation and delivery of the MSc is shared between the Director of Graduate Studies and the MSc Board of Studies. The MSc Board of Studies reports to the Management Committee of the Centre for Criminology (which has representatives from the division outside of Criminology and Law) and to the Law Faculty's Graduate Studies Committee. The Graduate Studies Committee reports to the Law Faculty Board, which reports to the Social Sciences Divisional Board. These Boards take an active interest in major curriculum changes as well as academic appointments.

The role of the Board of Studies is:

Open Business –

1. to ensure that the relevant procedures for MSc students, whether at department or faculty level, are followed appropriately and monitored regularly;
2. to ensure that the department and faculty procedures relating to the MSc operate effectively, and in conformity with the requirements set out in the Examination Regulations;
3. to review students' access to and use of department and faculty equipment, resources and facilities;
4. to review (on an annual basis) the Course programme specification;
5. to review (on a termly basis) the progress of the Course;

6. to monitor the continuing standard of the course, and the results of students on the course, in the light of assessment results and reports from internal and external examiners;
7. to review policies and procedures relating to marketing of the course and admissions to the course (including monitoring admissions in relation to Centre for Criminology and Law Faculty limits on the number of candidates admitted);
8. to review students' needs and interests (as indicated by the student representative, elected each year during induction week, by general student and tutor feedback and by formal course evaluation procedures);
9. to review the continuing appropriateness and effectiveness of the content/syllabus of the course, especially in relation to the aims and learning outcomes identified for the course, in the light of any developments in subject knowledge and practice, and issues highlighted in internal and external examiners' reports and recommend (to the Law Board) changes to the course content or methods of learning;
10. to review (on an annual basis) the range of options offered and amend the list of options accordingly;
11. to review (on an annual basis) staff resources, physical facilities available to support the Course and arrangements for teaching and to cooperate with the Criminal Justice and Penology teaching group regarding needs and available teaching resources;
12. to formulate examination conventions for approval by the social sciences divisional board;
13. to review the continuing appropriateness of examining procedures established by the Board of Examiners;
14. to review (on an annual basis) the assessment methods and to monitor their continued appropriateness for the learning outcomes;

Closed Business –

1. to discuss and review students' progress with a particular focus on 'green flag' students (as indicated by the supervisors' reports reviewed by the Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology);
2. to decide on the appropriate course of action and possible sources of support for a student who needs to be advised that desired academic standards have not yet been, or are unlikely to be, achieved;
3. to seek to identify means whereby support can be provided to the supervisor(s) where serious concerns about a student's ability or application in relation to the satisfactory completion of the course have been raised;
4. to consider all complaints and appeals about the course and to refer them, where appropriate, to the Proctors' office;

5. to recommend to the Faculty's Examinations Committee (on an annual basis) a Chair of Examiners (who reports to the Board of Studies on all examination procedures) and a Board of Examiners and assessors.

To these ends, the Board of Studies meets each term during the seventh week and comprises the Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology, the Board of Examiners, the Director or Assistant Director of the Centre for Criminology and the Student Representative (for open business only).

#### *Review beyond the Faculty*

- The report of external examiners is a major source of insight into the MSc's strengths and weaknesses.
- The Social Science Divisional Board and the University's Educational Policy and Standards Committee issue guidance and provide general supervision.
- The Law Faculty is subject to six-yearly reviews by the University as well as the currently prevailing review systems of the Quality Assurance Agency.
- The Centre for Criminology Committee of Management, which meets termly, reviews the progress of the course, including, as appropriate, reports from the Chair of Examiners, the External Examiner and the Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology.
- PGT courses are reviewed by the Social Sciences Division after their first five years of operation.

### **15. Regulation of assessment**

All examinations for the MSc (including assessed essays and dissertations) are regulated by the University's Examination Regulations, and compliance with these is supervised by the University Proctors (a judicial authority appointed independently of the administration). In addition, the University and the Social Sciences Division have general policy guidelines relating to the examination process. Examination conventions specific to this programme, governing matters not dealt with in the Regulations, are agreed by the MSc Board of Examiners and then approved initially by the Board of Studies and then by the Faculty's Examinations Committee, reporting to the Faculty Board. The Examinations Committee also appoints the Board of Examiners and Assessors and supervises the conduct of examinations. The Nominating Committee recommends to the Vice Chancellor the name of the External Examiner, who usually serves for three years.

The Board of Examiners is responsible for the setting of papers and for the marking of scripts. University Regulations permit the Board to be assisted in setting and marking by Assessors, and a few members of academic staff in the Centre for Criminology and the wider Law Faculty serve as Assessors for the MSc.

Questions for the assessed assignments are set by the option tutor and approved by the Board of Examiners, and finally by the External Examiner. Each assignment is then double-blind marked by the two assessors for each option. Any fails or borderlines are reviewed by the External Examiner.

Dissertation titles are approved by the Board of Studies (closed business) during Hilary term. Dissertations are double blind marked by two assessors appointed by the Board of Examiners (the supervisor for the dissertation, appointed by the Board of Studies, has no responsibility for marking the dissertation). Any fails or borderlines are reviewed by the External Examiner.

Co-assessors whose individual marks are very close (within three marks) usually agree to 'meet half way' and where 'half way' falls between two grades they choose the higher of the two. If there is a wider discrepancy between the marks they discuss their decisions and one or both might agree to re-read the paper and re-consider their grade. Where they cannot agree, the paper is sent to the External Examiner. Agreed marks are sent to the External Examiner whose job it is to review the marking, but not to 'third mark' assignments.

The unseen core course exam is set by two of the examiners, approved by the Board of Examiners and the External Examiner, and double-blind marked by the two examiners who set the paper. It is customary for these two examiners to consult those who taught the criminological theory/criminal justice course about the questions which should be set in the examination.

### **Arrangements for Reassessments**

*Core Course: 'Explanation and Understanding Criminology and Understanding Criminal Justice':* Candidates who fail the joint unseen examination may re-sit the examination in the Trinity term of the following academic year. Candidates who have completed successfully any of the other three components may carry forward the marks gained for the successfully completed parts of the degree.

*Research methods courses:* Candidates who fail to obtain an aggregate average mark of 50 per cent for their assessed assignments in Michaelmas and Hilary terms may resubmit those essays in which they have received a mark of 49 per cent or less to the Clerk of the Schools according to the standard timetable for submitting essays in the following academic year. Candidates in this situation who have obtained a mark of 49 percent for the take home test may re-sit the test at the first available opportunity provided by the standard re-sit timetable. Candidates who have completed successfully all or part of any of the other three components may carry forward the marks gained for the successfully completed parts of the degree.

*Options:* Candidates who fail to obtain an aggregate average mark of 50 per cent for their assessed essays in Trinity term may resubmit those essays in which they have received a mark of 49 per cent or less to the Clerk of the Schools according to the standard timetable for submitting essays in the following academic year. Candidates who have completed successfully all or part of any of the other three components may carry forward the marks gained for the successfully completed parts of the degree.

*Dissertation:* Candidates who fail the dissertation may resubmit the dissertation by the required date in the Trinity term of the following academic year. Such candidates who have completed successfully all or part of any of the other three components may carry forward the marks gained for the successfully completed parts of the degree.

No-one may gain the degree of MSc in Criminology and Criminal Justice (Research Methods) without having attained pass marks in all four components of the degree, namely the criminological theory/criminal justice course, the research methods courses, the options, and the dissertation.

### **The Role of Examiners**

Internal and external examiners are required to produce reports after the examinations for consideration by the Centre's Management Committee, the Social Sciences Board and the EPSC. The External Examiner who reports to the Vice-Chancellor each year in which they act comments on whether the standards are appropriate to the award, in part by comparisons with the standards of comparable institutions, and whether the assessment procedures and the regulations governing them, are fair and appropriate. The

External Examiner is also required to report on whether the conduct of the examination and the determination of awards have been fairly conducted, and whether individual student performance has been judged in accordance with the regulations and conventions of the Examining Board. Specifically, External Examiners' reports are expected to cover the following points:

- the standards demonstrated by the students;
- the extent to which standards are appropriate for the award;
- the design, structure and marking of assessments;
- the procedures for assessment and examinations;
- whether or not external examiners have had sufficient access to, and the power to call upon, any material necessary to make the required judgements;
- students' performance in relation to their peers in comparable courses;
- the coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and their consonances with the explicit roles required of them;
- the basis and rationale for any comparisons made;
- the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort;
- the quality of learning which may be indicated by student performance.

The Report is addressed to the Vice-Chancellor, and will be considered by the Faculty of Law, the Social Science Division Board, the Educational Policy and Standards Committee, and the Centre for Criminology Committee of Management. It is also circulated to all MSc Course tutors.

## **Marking Scale**

The degree of MSc is awarded to any candidate who achieves a mark of at least 50 per cent for each of its four components: (1) the unseen exam, (2) the written assignments, data analysis test and practical exercise for the methods courses, (3) the option essays and 4) the dissertation. For this purpose, the individual marks of the methods assignments and the options essays are aggregated and two average marks awarded for components 2 and 3 of the degree. The examiners award a distinction to any candidate who achieves marks of at least 70 per cent on the dissertation, and at least two out of the other three components of the degree.

### **70-100: Distinction level**

Papers which are awarded a distinction will be well structured, well argued and comprehensive. They will be analytical, rather than merely descriptive and will go beyond the most obvious sources of knowledge. The candidate will have demonstrated an unusually clear grasp of most of the issues (including all the more important ones), used an unusually wide range of material, and displayed very good skills in evaluating the material and using it to construct arguments which deal with the issues.

80-100: Superb work showing fine command of intellectual debates and making a creative contribution to them.

75-79: Excellent work, intellectually stimulating argument.

70-74: Fine work showing powerful analysis, a distinctive argument, and full awareness of the secondary literature and critical engagement with it.

50-69: Pass

Papers which are awarded a pass mark will demonstrate a competent grasp of most of the more important issues, a familiarity with and understanding of a reasonable range of relevant materials, and good skills in evaluating the material and using it to construct arguments which deal with the issues.

65-69: Strong pass: strong and well-developed analysis with some indication of distinction potential; no significant errors of fact or interpretation.

55-64: Good pass: sound analytical standard with most points developed rather than stated.

50-54: Pass: basic analytical skills apparent from identification of intellectual problems with some structured discussion of them

0-49: Fail

An unsatisfactory piece of work. At best, the answer will simply describe the most relevant research and debates but will not demonstrate any skill at analysis or argumentation. It is likely that this candidate will not have clearly demonstrated much understanding of the question or the issues it raises. Some of the most relevant material is likely to have been ignored and irrelevant material included.

45-49: Marginal fail: inadequate development of points made.

0-44: Outright fail: inadequate coverage and inadequate analysis.

**16. Academic integrity: good practice in citation, and the avoidance of plagiarism**

The Board of Studies place strong emphasis on the avoidance of plagiarism, academic integrity and good practice in citation. To this end, the Director of Graduate Studies leads a seminar on plagiarism and writing skills during Induction, and students are welcome to seek further guidance from their course tutors, dissertation supervisor and the Director of Graduate Studies. The course handbook contains a section devoted to academic integrity, which refers to the EPSC guidance.

**17. Indicators of quality and standards**

Issues of quality and standards are however addressed in both internal and external examiners' reports and other forms of course evaluation (see 14 above) on an annual basis.

The Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology makes the External Examiner's report available to all course tutors and puts in place mechanisms designed to ensure that all of those involved in the Course can build on the strengths identified. Professor Andrew Rutherford (Southampton University) was the first External Examiner for the course and his reports for the first three years were extremely positive. He commented in 2002 that he had been "very much inspired from his involvement in the MSc on procedural and substantive grounds", in 2003 that "the teaching and learning methods are of a very high order indeed"

and in 2004 that the course "has set very high standards and enjoys an unusual scope in topics addressed". At the end of the 2003/2004 academic year the Law Faculty appointed Professor Andrew Sanders (Manchester University) as the external examiner for the MSc. He served until the end of 2006 and has been replaced by Professor Dick Hobbs (London School of Economics) who will serve from 2006/2007 until 2009/2010. The Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology gives feedback on all aspects of the Course and is accountable to the Centre for Criminology Management Committee.

The Course is under the aegis of the Faculty of Law that achieved a rating of 5+ in the RAE2001. It is organised by the Centre for Criminology that received a very favourable review in 2001 from the Social Sciences Division of the University. Their report noted, in relation to the MSc, that "The committee recognises the value of this course in allowing the centre's expertise to be put to wider educational use ..." We have evidence that our graduates are successful in admission to doctoral programmes and in the job market. Members of the Department of Sociology and Department of Politics and International Relations, which respectively were awarded 5 and 5+ in the RAE2001, will also teach on the degree.