

ASPEN COLLEGE SERIES

Criminological and Criminal Justice Research Methods

Wesley G. Jennings

Jennifer M. Reingle



Wolters Kluwer
Law & Business

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CRIMINOLOGICAL AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH METHODS

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PREFACE

We are well aware that the research methods course is usually not eagerly anticipated by the majority of students who are often required to take it as part of their criminology or criminal justice studies. Most students in these programs enroll in the course to prepare for work as police officers, parole officers, or perhaps, after law school, defense or prosecuting attorneys. Such students may see research methods as unnecessary and irrelevant to their future careers. This book was created largely in response to this misperception and to demonstrate that the study of research methods in criminology and criminal justice can be interesting, relevant, and at times even humorous. But although the text is directed toward criminology and criminal justice undergraduates with no particular interest in research methods and no plans to attend graduate school, it also offers additional, more challenging material that may be integrated at the instructor's discretion for use in advanced undergraduate or even graduate-level research methods classes.

This book stands out among the many research methods texts available because it focuses on delivering the essential core materials with a vivid and consistent sense of their practical, real-world application to issues and situations central to practice in criminology and criminal justice. The text offers methods and formats with direct application to situations and issues students will encounter in the field, and it illustrates these using scenarios based on actual conditions and events. This approach not only facilitates student learning and understanding of the research methods studied, but it also helps students envision the utility of the methods and thus, we hope, motivates them to read, retain, and even enjoy the material.

As authors who are both heavily involved in theoretical, methodological, empirical, and practical evaluations and applications of criminology and criminal justice research methods, we bring a range of relevant, current experience to the content, organization, and writing of this text. We were able to identify outmoded, inessential methods that are no longer standard practice or that are impractical or irrelevant in the field. We also place a heavy emphasis on research methods that are in very frequent use among researchers in criminology and criminal justice—such as survey data and secondary analysis—and that produce results widely disseminated among and considered by police, prison, and criminal justice officials and policy makers.

This text includes both classical criminology and criminal justice research methods in continuing use and cutting-edge approaches that are quickly

proving their usefulness in the field. Both are presented clearly and directly, so undergraduate students can easily absorb and build on their understanding of the content as they explore increasingly complex material and learn to put it to practical use. Stand-alone chapters are devoted to such essential topics as ethics, measurement, survey research, secondary data analysis, and sampling. Emerging approaches, such as case-control and longitudinal designs and experiments in criminology and criminal justice settings, are covered as well. Because most criminology and criminal justice agencies have an in-house or contracted analyst, we specifically focus on research design, rather than the nuts and bolts of coding and analysis. This places the emphasis on students' likely future needs as consumers rather than producers of research.

In response to the predilections of a new generation of college students, this text employs innovative pedagogical techniques designed to engage as they instruct. To this end, the textbook approaches its topics like a series of short stories. Each chapter employs its own scenario, based on one or more real-world situations, showing how criminology and criminal justice research methods, terminology, and techniques work in the field to help practitioners analyze developments and resolve problems. By engaging the reader in these stories, the text helps students absorb and retain more of the material in ways that mirror how it is actually put into action.

Our goal was to develop a criminology and criminal justice research methods textbook that used new approaches while remaining true to the important and relevant core material, that did not resort to jargon or overly abstract concepts, and that both undergraduate and graduate students would find accessible and informative. We wanted to attract and keep the attention of the next generation of criminology and criminal justice practitioners so that they are prepared and eager to implement in their agencies evidence-based policies based on sound, up-to-date criminology and criminal justice research methods. We feel that we have succeeded in meeting these goals. We sincerely hope that both instructors and students will agree and will find this text refreshing to use and to be an effective guide to proficiency in criminology and criminal justice research methods.

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—Wesley G. Jennings, Ph.D., and Jennifer Reingle, Ph.D.

CRIMINOLOGICAL
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