

Welcome to Criminal Justice Research Methods



Welcome!

Welcome to Criminal Justice Research Methods. The initial course webpages describing the syllabus and your introductory tasks/assignments are now published.

This course is online and asynchronous. All of your work will be completed via the Canvas course pages (and an associated platform called Perusall) and we will not have regular course meetings. Please carefully consider whether or not this format will work for you.

The course readings are free to you but you must purchase a \$15 access code for Perusall. You can purchase this from the [Campus bookstore](#) . **You cannot pass the course without using Perusall.** Be advised that if you select the shipping option, your code will be listed on the paperwork that arrives from the bookstore. You do not need a course code on Perusall to access; you will do so through Canvas directly and your accounts are created via the Canvas roster.

You should begin on the Course Homepage by clicking "Start Here" below. Module 1 is the syllabus and will move you through a series of Canvas pages to learn about the course. Module 1 also includes a short quiz on the syllabus, a short survey to learn about you, and your first reading assignment on Perusall (for practice, this will not be graded). Module 2 includes your first graded Perusall assignment and a Canvas activities related to research ethics.

You must complete Module 1 and Module 2 by September 14th at 11:59PM.

If you have any questions or problems getting started in the course, instructions for how to reach me and the teaching assistant are below.

Welcome!

--Dr. Wakefield



Meet the Instructors

Professor

Dr. Sara Wakefield is Professor and PhD Program Director in the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University, Newark and a Graduate Affiliate Faculty Member in the Department of Sociology at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. She received her Ph.D. from the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota. Her research interests focus on the consequences of mass imprisonment for the family, with an emphasis on childhood wellbeing and racial inequality, culminating in a series of articles and book, [Children of the Prison Boom: Mass Incarceration and the Future of American Inequality](#) (Oxford University Press, with Chris Wildeman). More recently, a series of team-based projects that provide original data on the consequences of contact with the criminal legal system that are not easily captured in available datasets ([PINS](#), [WO-PINS](#), and [FamHIS](#)) and recent demographic analyses estimate [the number of people in the United States with a felony conviction](#) and the [prevalence of termination of parental rights among U.S. children](#). Her current work is focused on sibling overlap in crime, punishment, and the consequences of criminal legal system contact. Dr. Wakefield teaches courses on research design (undergraduate and doctoral), mixed methods (doctoral), and criminal justice and inequality.

Teaching Assistant

Penelope Lowe is a doctoral student in the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University, Newark. She received her BSc from the University of Roehampton (London, UK) in Psychology and Criminal Justice. Penelope's interests include biopsychosocial criminology and justice policy, particularly in the interaction between micro- and macro-factors that impact decision-making within courts and sentencing.

Contact Information/How To Get Help

Email

Click on "Inbox," select the instructor or teaching assistant and we'll reply as soon as we can. Please allow at least 24 hours for a response, in keeping with [SCJ's email policy](#)   [Open this document with ReadSpeaker docReader](#)    .

Drop-In Student Hours

The TA and Instructor will offer drop-in hours at variable times each week. Check the Calendar on Canvas and click "Find An Appointment" for available drop-in hours each week as they will vary by format and location. You can also check the "Syllabus" link on your left and see a list of available drop in hours. Simply sign up and arrive at your appointment on time so all students can be accommodated.

If you sign up for an appointment and cannot make it, PLEASE cancel it. If you don't, you'll be taking up a spot another student could use and your instructor/TA will be sitting on Zoom wondering where you are.

Individual Appointments

If you cannot make available drop-in hours, you may email to request a private virtual meeting. When doing so, please provide a couple of best times or days that would work for you so that we can schedule them quickly.

 [Start Here](#)

 [Syllabus](#)

 [Modules](#)

 [Resources](#)

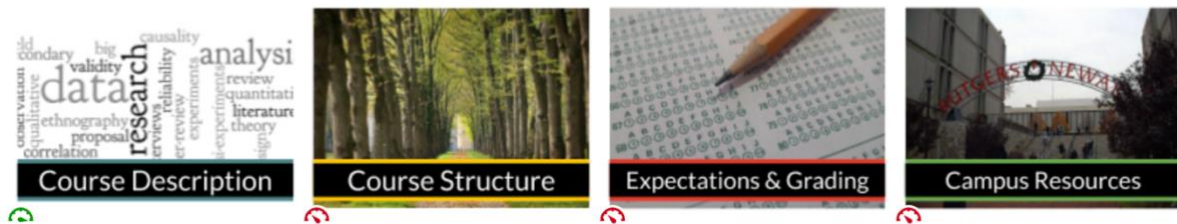
Start Here

Module 1 Syllabus

How the Course Works

The links below provide material included on a traditional syllabus. The 'Course Description' offers a big picture view of the course content and learning objectives. 'Course Structure' tells you how the course is set up. 'Expectations and Grading' will allow you to anticipate how you are doing. 'Campus Resources' offers sources for getting help. You must read all of them before beginning the course modules and return to them from the course home page whenever you need.

To proceed, click "Next" and you will move through all of them in order to complete Module 1. You **MUST** read all of these pages to move on in the course.



Course Description Fall 2025

Module 1 Syllabus

Course Description

Research design shows you how to evaluate what others say and how to answer questions on your own. It helps you argue with evidence, make your own decisions instead of just trusting others, and spot who is arguing honestly. Even if you never become a researcher, you see (and probably do) research every day. Unfortunately, a lot of research is translated badly, so the complexity is lost, weak evidence is used to make big claims, or it's just plain nonsense. This course can help you get better at spotting the nonsense.

Criminal Justice Research Methods is an *introductory* and *intensive* overview of the methods used in our field to answer important questions but the skills you learn here are broadly applicable outside of criminal justice and criminology. You do not need any prior knowledge of research methods to succeed in this course nor will our work require extensive knowledge of statistics.

Learning Objectives

If you actively engage and complete this course, you'll learn:

- to *describe* common methods of social science inquiry,
- to *understand* the link between a research question and the research design,
- to *explore* major debates about research methods, social science, and ethics in research,
- to *analyze* news reports, political rhetoric, and public discussion about the social world and social scientific research to *demonstrate* improved information consumption skills,
- to *critically evaluate* social scientific evidence and research.

Organization of the Course

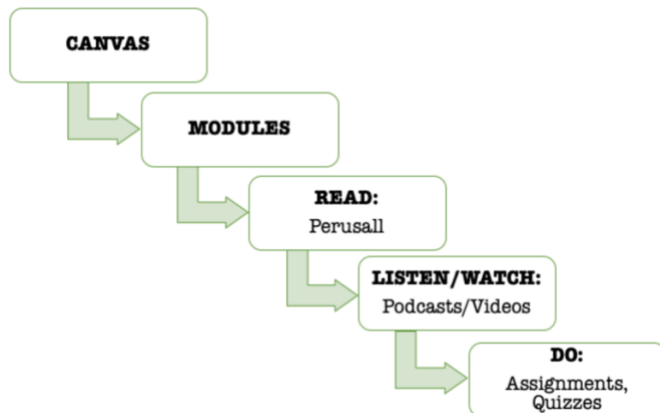
The course is designed as a series of modules, each focused on a different topic, and they build on one another until the end of the course. The first third of the course is a big picture introduction to social science (the process, theory and research, and research ethics), the second third introduces specific research methods (experiments, quasi-experiments, surveys, and fieldwork), and the last third is focused on practical applications of social scientific research.

Course Structure Fall 2025

Module 1 Syllabus

Navigating the Course

Below is a roadmap for this course. Every instructor organizes their course differently. Here's what you need to know for this course.



I. Canvas

Canvas is the learning management system (LMS) for this course. It will be the main resource for this class and you should log in to it before starting any work. You will find announcements, any changes to the course or alerts, feedback from the instructor on prior work, your grades, and links to all material requiring completion. All assignments and activities are clearly laid out within Canvas.

You can configure Canvas in any way that you like (for example, you can have course announcements sent to your email or texted to you) and it is worth spending a few minutes going through a training module on it before you start anything else. If you click on courses (to the left of this screen), you will find a student training module for the Canvas LMS and you may refer to it throughout the course to answer any questions that arise. Additional resources can be found [here](#) .

II. Modules

On course options to your left, you will see a link called "Modules." This will take you to each module for the course.

You will notice that not all the modules are available at once (I will release them roughly two weeks in advance of the course cadence and you'll have about one due per week). You must complete them in order as many of them build on each other.

Each module will include a description of the module content and some combination of the following requirements to 1) **Read and Engage**, 2) **Listen/Watch** for more examples, and 3) **Do**.

- **Read and Engage:** For each module, you will read introductory material using the collective reading platform **Perusall** (see below for more details).
- **Listen/Watch** for more examples: After you have completed initial readings on Perusall for each module, you will access 'real world' examples of the method of interest. This might include mini-lectures, podcasts, or additional activities for further engagement.
- **Do:** After completing the reading on Perusall and engaging real-world examples of research, you will complete an assignment. Assignments will vary but will often include surveys, quizzes, or activities.

III. Read (Perusall)

Perusall is an online social reading platform that 1) ensures students read, 2) encourages good note-taking via annotations, 3) allows students to ask questions and/or teach one another through responses, and 4) eliminates the need for high stakes multiple choice exams that merely test your ability to memorize things.

Reading is important. You can't learn if you don't read. Perusall requires you to and grades you on it so you'll finally get credit for being a responsible student.

Engagement is important. You can't learn if you do it in isolation. Perusall allows students to ask questions, help each other by highlighting important points, and provides a discussion space to engage the course material. It's both a reading platform and a discussion board.

Perusall replaces tests on textbook material because it grades the quality of your engagement with the material. Perusall, rather than a stressful exam, will tell me whether or not you understand the material and have engaged with it throughout the course.

How to Successfully Use Perusall:

- Perusall grades annotations, comments, and responses to peers in terms of quality using an algorithm. The TA and I spot-check the grades throughout the course as well.
- You must complete the minimum number of annotations per reading assignment (it's usually about 7 but varies based on the length of the assignment and will be listed within the assignment) in order to receive a quality score for that assignment. That said, simply saying *something* the required number of times will not yield a high score unless what you say demonstrates deep engagement with the material.
- You must complete the minimum number of contributions (annotations, questions, responses, etc.) in the assignment in order to receive a grade for that reading assignment but you can complete more annotations if you like. Perusall will grade your "best" annotations to come up with your summary score so if you are looking to improve your score, more high-quality questions, responses, and engagements will help.
- Perusall is available to you for a \$15 fee (you must purchase a code from the campus bookstore) and all other readings are open access. Annotations must be completed on Perusall but you may download the readings if you prefer to print them out before you annotate them online.
- **Perusall is not an anonymous forum.** Incivilities, bullying of peers, or other inappropriate comments will harm your grade and are immediately visible to the instructor and attached to your name.
- I anticipate an enrollment of about 60 students in this class. Each student will be placed in a randomly-assigned small group of 20 on Perusall for collective reading assignments.
- Your annotations **MUST BE YOUR OWN REFLECTIONS IN YOUR OWN WORDS. Don't copy and paste material from other sources without attribution.** It prevents you from learning and, when offered without citation, constitutes plagiarism and academic misconduct. We spot-check annotations every week and students who are caught plagiarizing annotations will receive a zero on all assignments and all prior assignments will be reviewed and adjusted accordingly. Instead, provide a source as your sources may be helpful to other students.
- You must access Perusall via Canvas in order to receive credit for your work in the gradebook.

You can learn about Perusall [here](#) or by watching the video posted below to give you a sense of how it works from the instructor's perspective. You can read about how Perusall grading works here: <https://perusall.com/downloads/scoring-details.pdf>



IV. Listen/Watch

Each module may also include a requirement for further engagement. This might involve listening to a podcast, watching a recorded lecture from the instructor or someone else, reading additional material, or engaging in projects with your peers. The goal for these additional activities will be to move from a 'clean' textbook example of a particular method to a 'messy' example of what research looks like in practice.

V. Do (Assignments & Quizzes)

Some modules will require you to complete a version of a method we have learned about, evaluate others who have used the method, or reflect on what you've learned in the READ/WATCH/LISTEN assignments. Some assignments will ask you to 'get your feet wet' with a method and others will ask you to describe the results of a research study. You may also be asked to complete a short quiz. These will vary depending on what we are covering each week.

Expectations and Grading Fall 2025

Module 1 Syllabus

COURSE POLICIES, READING, AND GRADING

I. Policies

Late Assignments/Missed Modules.

- I do not offer extensions.
- I will drop your three lowest grades on module assignments (not including the final assignment, which everyone must complete). If you have an emergency that takes you away from the class for more than two modules, please contact the Professor or TA to discuss a solution.
- All assignments are due on their due date. To receive full credit, you must complete all tasks within each module within a specific time window (modules are typically available for two weeks).

Grading.

- I compute a total point score for each student. I then evaluate students who are just above and just below the cutpoints and make adjustments. This is a form of setting a curve that will only improve your grade.
- Students who complete all assignments and readings adequately and participate actively on Perusall can expect to receive a grade of B- or better.
- I do not respond to requests for grade changes unless they involve a calculation error once the final assignment has been submitted. This is so that grades are not based on who has the courage to approach a professor to ask and who does not. However, if you see a clear error, tell me before the end of the semester.

Respect, Courtesy, and Support

- Behaving inconsiderately or rudely, especially to teaching assistants who work hard, have other obligations, and are paid very little is ill-advised.
- Treat your peers well. You have no idea what anyone else is going through, so let's support one another.
- Our class goal is to forgive mistakes quickly and offer grace and patience to one another.
- You can also expect your instructor and TA to hold themselves to these standards.

Fun?

- I LOVE research methods. It's okay if you don't. I will do my best to make the course interesting, challenging, and transparent.

Plagiarism, Academic Misconduct, and AI-Assistance. Your Perusall annotations and all Canvas assignments must include your own reflections in your own words, with all sources clearly cited. Do not cut and paste responses from outside sources into Perusall without citation (Perusall will flag them). We spot-check annotations for a portion of the class every week and will re-evaluate all assignments from any student who violates this policy.

You are free to use AI tools (ChatGPT, Bard, etc) to aid your research, help you better understand concepts, or brainstorm for paper assignments. What you may not do is ask these tools to complete assignments for you.

- Your responsibility is to disclose fully and clearly every source you used to complete your assignments and submit work that reflects your ideas, regardless of the sources you consult.
- My responsibility is to grade your submissions carefully in light of those disclosures.
- Failure to clearly and fully disclose materials that informed your work will result in a failing grade in the course.

A Specific Warning About AI for Research Methods:

You should be aware that AI tools are still developing and highly prone to error, especially regarding research methods.

Researchers have found that they include many errors, routinely make up fake citations, and mischaracterize research studies. I used ChatGPT to complete the final assignment in this course, and it made the same errors repeatedly. I am thus likely to spot it if you use it without attribution and you should be aware that it makes things up ( [see an annotated example when I asked it to do a lit review for a series of papers I am currently writing](#) ). You should use extreme caution when using AI to analyze research methods as it will often tell you things that aren't right or outright lie.

II. Required Readings

1. PRINCIPLES OF SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY -QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE METHODS (Open-Access)

This is a fairly standard social science methods textbook (they're all pretty much the same). I chose this one because it is available open-access and free to all students.

It has a downside. It references sociology rather than criminology a lot. Sociology (and psychology) have been much better than criminology at building open-access resources for research methods students. I could not find a high-quality social science methods text that is both free to you and grounded in criminology. Happily, it doesn't matter as sociology and criminology use the same methods and research designs. Whenever you read the word "sociology," feel free to insert "criminology" in your head; it will change nothing about the lesson.

While you must complete annotations on Perusall to receive a grade for engaging the readings, you may [download the textbook](#) if you prefer to print it out and add your annotations on Perusall later. Perusall also offers [a variety of settings](#) to curate how you access the book (read-aloud, dyslexia settings, etc.).

2. Additional readings will be provided free of charge on Perusall. These readings will include journal articles and supplementary sources to the text.

III. Grading

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

- *Completion of Learning Modules: 90%*
 - Each module includes some combination of READ, LISTEN/WATCH, and DO components and all of them contribute to your grade for that module. The modules vary in terms of how much work is associated with each component.
 - While some of the DO assignments may include a graded quiz, there will be no midterm or final exams in this course.
 - We'll throw out your three lowest grades on assignments (even if it's a zero) when we calculate your final grade. That means you can miss about one component in any three modules or roughly one entire module without it changing your grade. **This does not apply to the final assignment; everyone must complete the final assignment.**
- *Final Assignment: 10%*
 - Your final assignment will require you to demonstrate competency by engaging with and evaluating a piece of research. We'll release a full description of this assignment later in the course, but you'll have several choices for completing it. The final assignment cannot count as a dropped assignment.
- *Extra Credit*
 - Any extra credit opportunities will be offered to the entire class and I do not typically offer extra credit in my courses. If I offer extra credit opportunities, the work will be used to evaluate students who "just miss" a higher grade and will not replace a module assignment or final paper.

Campus Resources

GETTING HELP

Instructor Commitment to Your Success

Many inequalities in education arise from disabilities, life circumstances, and a host of other factors. Such inequalities have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. My goal, as well as that of Rutgers, is that each and every student has the accommodations they need to be successful. I am always available to discuss how we can better support you in this class, and Rutgers University provides additional sources of support listed below.

Campus Resources



Accommodation and Support Statement

Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students and the University as a whole. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

For Individuals Experiencing Disability: The Office of Disability Services (ODS) works with students with medical, physical, and/or mental conditions who encounter disabling barriers in order to determine reasonable and appropriate accommodations for access. Students who have completed the process with ODS and have approved accommodations are provided a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) specific to each course. To initiate accommodations for their course students must both provide the LOA to and have a conversation with the course instructor about the accommodations. This should occur as early in the semester as possible. More information can be found at the [RU-N ODS website \(ods.newark.rutgers.edu\)](https://ods.newark.rutgers.edu) . Contact ODS at (973) 353-5375 or via email at ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals who are Pregnant: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy. Students may contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance at (973) 353-5063 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Short-term Absence Verification: The Office of the Dean of Students can provide assistance for absences related to religious observance, emergency or unavoidable conflict (illness, personal or family emergency, etc.). Students should refer to [University Policy 10.2.7](#) . Students requesting a letter of verification should submit information using the following link: <https://go.rutgers.edu/Verification> .

For Individuals with temporary conditions/injuries: The Office of the Dean of Students can assist students who are experiencing a temporary condition or injury (broken or sprained limbs, concussions, or recovery from surgery). Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury should submit a request using the following link: <https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu> .

For Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance can assist  students who are experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking. Students can report an incident to the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance by calling (973) 353-1906 or emailing TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. Incidents may also be reported by using the following link: <https://go.rutgers.edu/RUNReportingForm> .

For support related to Interpersonal Violence: The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance (VPVA) can provide any student with confidential support. The office does **not** have a reporting obligation to Title IX. Students can contact the office by calling (973) 353-1918 or emailing run.vpva@rutgers.edu. There is also a confidential text-based helpline available to students; students can text (973) 339-0734 for support. Students do not need to be a victim/survivor of violence; any student can receive services, information and support.

For Crisis and Concerns: The Campus Awareness Response and Education (CARE) Team works with students in crisis to develop a plan of support plan and address personal situations that might impact their academic performance. Connect with the CARE Team by using the following link: <https://go.rutgers.edu/RUNReportingForm>  or emailing careteam@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Psychological Support (Stress, Mood, Family Issues, Substance Use concerns and other personal challenges):

The Rutgers University-Newark Counseling Center provides individual therapy and support groups for students dealing with psychological issues. To schedule an appointment, email counseling@newark.rutgers.edu or call (973) 353-5805. Additional support is available through Uwill services:

- Uhelp: Crisis support at 833-646-1526 (available 24/7/365).
- Urise: Wellness-based video collection with a free account.
- Umatch: Teletherapy with flexible scheduling, starting with a free account.

Access Uwill@RUN at <https://my.rutgers.edu> using your netid. Services are confidential and free.

For emergencies, call 911 or Rutgers University Police Department at (973) 353-5111.

Fall 2025 Tentative Course Schedule

Section 1: Introduction to Research, Theory, and Ethics			
Module	Topic	Tasks	Due Date
1	Course Introduction and Syllabus	Review Course Webpages (Canvas) Complete Syllabus Short quiz (Canvas) “Tell Us About Yourself” Survey (Canvas) Practice Round on Perusall (Perusall)	Sunday, September 14th 11:59pm
2	Science and Social Research	READ: “Theory and Methods: Micro, Meso, Macro” (Perusall) LISTEN/WATCH: “A Social Experiment: Social Science and Ethics” (Canvas) DO: “How Might I Be Wrong?” Reflection (Canvas)	Sunday, September 14th 11:59pm
3	Research Ethics	READ: “Research Ethics” (Perusall) READ: “Research Ethics Case Study” LISTEN: “Academic Misconduct Podcast” (Canvas) DO: “Disciplinary Codes of Ethics” Reflection (Canvas)	Sunday, September 21st 11:59pm
4	Varieties of Research Design	READ: “Beginning a Research Project” (Perusall) LISTEN: “What is Peer Reviewed Research?” (Canvas) DO: “Accessing Research” (Canvas)	Sunday, September 28th 11:59pm
Section 2: The Building Blocks of Social Research			
Module	Topic	Tasks	Due Date
5	Research Designs, Conceptualization and Measurement	READ: “Research Designs Part 1” (Perusall) READ: “Defining and Measuring Concepts Part 2” (Perusall) ENGAGE: Further Examples of Concepts (Canvas) DO: “Concept to Measurement” Quiz (Canvas) DO: “Reliability and Validity” (Canvas)	Sunday, October 5th 11:59pm
6	Sampling and Inference	READ: “Sampling” (Perusall) READ: “Hard to Reach Populations and Study Retention” (Perusall) READ: “Case Study: Recruitment and the Pandemic” (Perusall) LISTEN: “Sampling” (Canvas)	Sunday, October 12th 11:59pm
7	Reading and Understanding Research	READ: “Dr. Rubin’s Reading Guide” (Perusall) READ: “Enns et al” (Perusall) DO: “ChatGPT Assist Part 1”	Sunday, October 19th 11:59pm

Section 3: Research Designs

Module	Topic	Tasks	Due Date
8	Types of Research Designs (Experiments)	LISTEN: “Dr. Khan on Experiments” (Canvas) READ: “Section 12.2: Experiments” (Perusall) LISTEN: “GMAC Podcast, Experiments/Audit Studies” (Canvas) DO: “ChatGPT Assist Part 2”	Sunday, October 26th 11:59pm
9	Types of Research Designs (Surveys)	READ: “Surveys” (Perusall) LISTEN: “GMAC Podcast, Surveys” (Canvas) DO: “ChatGPT Assist Reflection” (Canvas) DO: “Let’s Review Practice Quiz (Canvas)	Sunday, November 2nd 11:59pm
10	Types of Research Designs (Interviews and Ethnography)	READ: “Fieldwork” (Perusall) LISTEN: “Podcasts, Stuart” (Canvas) LISTEN: “GMAC of Your Choice” (Canvas) DO: “Field Research Reflections” (Canvas)	Sunday, November 9th 11:59pm
11	Types of Research Designs (Mixed Methods)	READ: “Mixed Methods” (Perusall) LISTEN: “GMAC Podcast” (Canvas) DO: “Mixed Methods Reflections” (Canvas) DO: “Review and Preparation for Final Assignment”	Sunday, November 16th 11:59pm

Section 4: Evaluating Research

Module	Topic	Tasks	Due Date
12	Additional Readings and Review	READ: “Choose a Perusall Reading Related to Final Assignment Choice” (Perusall) LISTEN: “Mini-Lectures and Other Resources” (Canvas) <i>NOTE: You have two weeks to complete this module to account for the Thanksgiving Break.</i>	Sunday, November 30th 11:59pm
13	Additional Readings and Review	READ: “Citation and Plagiarism”	Sunday, December 7th 11:59pm
Final Assignment	Describe and Evaluate a Piece of Research	Complete and Turn in Final Assignment	Sunday, December 14th 11:59pm