

Research Methods I: Research Design

Criminology 860

Fall 2024

The Professor

Your instructor is Dr. Ted Palys. If you need to get in touch to arrange an appointment, ask a question, or other important matter, you can:

- Send an e-mail to palys@sfu.ca (typically the best alternative);
- Leave an urgent message with the secretaries in the Criminology General Office, at 778-782-3213;

The easiest and most reliable way of getting in touch is via email. However, email should be limited to arranging an appointment or making queries that can be answered in a couple of sentences or less. Beyond that, a Zoom or office hour meeting would be better. Note also that, for privacy reasons, I am not allowed to respond to students using anything other than SFU email.

The Course (as described in the SFU calendar)

Research design for criminological problems and foundational techniques for the conduct of research in criminology. The further development of fundamental research skills to be applied in research, including subsequent research methods courses and in the preparation of theses and dissertations. Students enrolling in this course are expected to have a solid background in undergraduate research methods, equivalent to [CRIM 220](#).

Office Hours

Designated **office hours** for the Fall semester are Mondays from 2:30 to 3:30 and Friday afternoons from 1:00 to 2:00. Other times can be arranged by appointment. If possible, let me know ahead of time that you are coming. That will be helpful in allowing me to stagger times if/when multiple people want to see me.

Course Web Page and Email

There are two ways (beyond class) that I will keep in touch with you regarding the course.

- First is via a course web page. This is where you can find the course syllabus, reading lists, what to prepare for next class, and other course-related materials. The direct URL for the course web page (*not* on Canvas) is <https://www.sfu.ca/~palys/crim860.htm>

- Also, a class email allows you and/or me to send an email to everyone registered in the course. The class email address is crim860-g1@sfu.ca; if I send anything there, I will assume that you have received it.

Readings

Your required text for the course is *Research Methods in the Social & Health Sciences* (RMSHS) by Palys & Atchison (2021), which will be supplemented by other readings available on the course web page.

Our Weekly Meeting

We meet every week from 9:30 AM to 12:20 PM each Friday in Saywell Hall Room 10115 (otherwise known as the Grad Teaching Lab). Three activities will happen in most weeks.

1. Discussing the week's readings. This will help ensure your understanding of the material as well as providing a growing resource for you to use in the project you will be doing over the semester. Your job is to do the readings and be ready to discuss them.
2. Discussing your term research projects. We will devote time every week to discussing your progress and issues that arise as you design and implement your project.
3. "Professional issues." Part of grad school is socializing/introducing you to the practice of doing research at SFU, succeeding in the grad program, identifying and introducing you to some of the many resources that exist in Criminology and at the university more broadly, and introducing you to some of the challenges and issues that members of the profession – by which I mean especially but not exclusively criminology professors – encounter and deal with when using the range of methods we talk about in this course. On several occasions this will involve guests; on other occasions it may involve simply shifting the discussion.

Participation

A portion of your grade (30%) will involve “participation” in the activities of the course. These are relatively small activities/assignments that are based on readings and can be done in a relatively short period of time.

Contributing to Discussion

Grad school is the time to start putting any residual shyness of speaking you might have aside. Academe is all about exchanging ideas and perspectives, learning to offer and receive criticism from peers and mentors, sometimes going solo but often also working collaboratively. The expectation each week is that you will have done the readings and are ready to talk.

Assignments

A series of brief assignments will give you opportunities to practice skills and employ techniques that we learn about through readings and class activities. The main

objective of these assignments will be for you to demonstrate a particular skill (e.g., coding in NVivo, putting together a data matrix in SPSS; encrypting your data) or that you have achieved a required accreditation (e.g., completing the ethics tutorial). These are essentially checkboxes you knock off as we work through the semester, i.e., either you can demonstrate the skill or not.

One-Pagers

In most weeks when we have readings, I will ask you to take any one of those readings and write a single page reaction to it. The key word here is “reaction” and not “summary.” It might be a critique, an aspect you found interesting, a connection you made between the article/chapter and your own work, an implication you would like to pursue. The only “wrong” answer here would be you summarizing the article/chapter; no need to do that as I already will have read it as well, i.e., don’t tell me what it *says*; tell me what it *means* to you, if anything. I do not “grade” these; unlike other things you produce in this course where I will expect your best work, this is the place to ask questions, knock around ideas, and use the opportunity to discuss issues directly with me.

You are welcome to write less in weeks when you don't feel you have as much to say; but never exceed one page. It will work out best for both you and me if your submissions to me are spread through the week, but in any event you should endeavour to get the page to me no later than the day before the related class begins (i.e., the day we talk about it), by sending me an electronic version as an attachment. When you do so, please name the file <lastname_firstname_MM_DD.format> where MM = month, DD = date, and format = whatever format your file is in (e.g., docx, pdf).

Term Research Project

Doing a piece of research is the best way to understand the complexities that are involved. You will do one semester-long **mixed methods research project** in this course, which will contribute a total of **65%** of your final grade in the course – this includes (a) a brief proposal you submit as soon as you are able (and must continue re-submitting until it is approved) but definitely no later than 04 October; and (b) a written and presentation version of your final report. More detail will be forthcoming in class, but the basic requirement is for you to (a) gather new data rather than utilize an existing data base; and (b) to undertake a research project that incorporates two different methods that “speak” to each other so that one somehow enriches the other, and/or the two together offer a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon/site/whatever that interests you than could have been achieved through one method alone.

Proposal and Ethics Review

According to the SFU Ethics policy, all research done at SFU must receive prior ethics review. For Crim 860, responsibility for that review has been delegated to me. In order to do this, I require you, before you start *formally* collecting data, to submit a brief (1-2-page) **proposal** that identifies as much as you are able your topic area, the ethically relevant procedures you will follow, the sample this will involve, and any ethics issues you have considered in the

formulation of your proposal. When I say that you cannot “formally” begin collecting data, this does not preclude you checking feasibility, checking on participants’ preferences regarding various issues, and so on.

Note that, according to the SFU ethics policy, ***you cannot begin the formal data-gathering process until you have received ethics approval.*** Thus, if your first proposal is not approved, you will need to revise and resubmit and continue in that manner until you submit a proposal that is approved. In the event your research is of a type that is exempt from ethics review (according to SFU Policy [R20.01](#)), you nonetheless must submit a proposal and outline the reason(s) you believe the exemption applies to your research. Your proposal should be sent to me electronically according to *instructions* you will find on the course web page.

Approval of your proposal will be contingent on you showing that you understand how criminology's professional standards with respect to research ethics apply to your area of research, and that your research is consistent with those principles as well as SFU’s ethics policy. In most cases, this will involve you explaining what you will do to ensure **informed consent**, that **confidentiality** is protected, and that you have identified and addressed any **unique issues** that arise in the context of your particular research (e.g., conflict of interest; freedom of choice). In the case of more interactive techniques where you need to secure consent, you also should include a copy of the information sheet where you outline what participation would involve if they were to do so.

The Final Research Report

Two versions of your final report should be prepared by the end of semester: (1) a 15-20 minute presentation version that will be delivered conference-style in a class symposium we will organize for the end of semester; and (2) a written research report that will be no more than **8000** words (including abstract, body, references, footnotes).

A final version of your written report is due at the end of semester, ideally no later than 06 December (a week after our last class). However, I understand that most of you have responsibilities as TAs and that some will have responsibilities earlier and some later in the exam period, so I will be flexible with due dates for you. I prefer to really get into your papers and do detailed comments, but the later it comes, the less time I will have to do that deeper dive. Your final paper should be sent to me electronically according to instructions that will be posted on the course web page.

Exams

There are no formal exams in this course.

ChatGPT and other AI Software

It seems AI is everywhere these days, and the research world is no exception. Different researchers and others involved in the research process (e.g., researchers, granting agencies, publication outlets) are out there testing out AI at every stage from generating ideas to start a project through to writing up and disseminating the final product. It was interesting to see how much of the preliminary discussion of AI at universities involved concern about how students might use it to “cheat” in one way or another. And while that is indeed a possibility (although sometimes it begs the question of what we call “cheating”), it should not preclude us from considering the legitimate ways that it can

help us do research. Integrity is maintained by being up front about how and when we use it, which is what I will expect from you. We will no doubt talk about it much more in class.

Intellectual Property (IP)

You all will be doing research projects as well as other written and creative work in Crim 860 this semester. I am someone who believes any work you complete in my classes is yours, period. I will do as much as possible to bring out the best in you and your work this semester, but I see that simply as my job in the course context; there is no obligation for you to include me as a co-author for anything you conclude in the course if you present it at a conference or get it published.

I encourage you to check out university policies regarding intellectual property as part of educating yourself about your rights and responsibilities as a student. On this matter, check out the following:

<https://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/research/r30-03.html>

<https://www.sfu.ca/gradstudies/graduate-students/your-role/student-responsibilities.html#ip>

More broadly, I recommend you check out the following:

<https://www.sfu.ca/students/calendar/2024/fall/fees-and-regulations/student-contract/student-declaration.html>

Evaluation Summary

Your course requirements include the following:

Element	Due Date	Contribution to Grade
Participation, Assignments, One-Pagers	All Semester	30%
Accepted Proposal	04 October	5%
Project Presentation	29 November	25%
Project Report	06 December-ish	40%
Total		100%