

Qualitative Research Methods in Criminology

Criminology 321-3 / Fall 2026

The Professor

Your instructor is Dr. Ted Palys. The best ways to get in touch are to:

- Send an email to palys@sfu.ca
- Come by my office (SWH-10334) during office hours

Designated office hours for the Fall semester are Mondays from 3:00 to 4:00 PM and Fridays from 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM. Other times can be arranged by appointment.

The easiest and most reliable way of getting in touch is via email. However, email should not be used to replace office hours: it should be limited to arranging an appointment or making queries that can be answered in a couple of sentences or fewer. Note that for privacy reasons, you must use your SFU email to contact me, as I can only respond to SFU email.

Teaching Assistants

The TAs for Crim 321 this semester are **Marjan Heirati** and **Alec van de Bovenkamp**. They will inform you about office hours and modes of contact when you meet them in tutorial.

The Course

Crim 321 will begin with consideration of elements that characterize Qualitative approaches to research and the inferential logic they share with more Quantitative approaches. This will be followed by discussion of some of the types of research questions, objectives and relationships that tend to prevail in qualitative research; the unique challenges that Qualitative research poses for both ethics and ethics regulation; and an examination of the major methods that have dominated qualitative social science, including (1) interviews and oral histories; (2) ethnographic and participatory methods; and (3) thematic analysis of video and textual sources.

School of Criminology Learning Objectives:

- Explain the nature and purpose of qualitative research in the field of criminology.
- Formulate research questions and draw connections to theoretical constructs that emerge from the data.
- Recognize and critically evaluate ethical issues and considerations in qualitative criminological and interdisciplinary research and the implications of ethical decisions on participants, researchers and communities.
- Understanding core values of ethics policy (i.e., TCPS2) and the role of ethics regulation (i.e., institutional research ethics boards) specific to qualitative research.

- Demonstrate understanding of theoretical, practical, and critical aspects of qualitative research.
- Identify the wide variety of qualitative research methods, aligning them with research questions the general strengths and shortcomings of each (i.e., interviews, focus groups, ethnography, qualitative content analysis, oral histories, case study methods, community based and participatory action research, and emerging qualitative methods).
- Develop and apply necessary critical literacy skills to qualitative research articles.
- Design and conduct an original qualitative research project (i.e., propose research project, obtain ethics approval, collect and analyze qualitative data, written report that demonstrates understanding of qualitative research processes and presentation of qualitative research findings).

Text/Readings

Your reading resources for the semester include:

- ***Qualitative Research Methods (2nd edition)*** by Monica Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey (2020).
- Readings accessible via the internet through links available in Canvas or via the course web page

You are expected to do the assigned reading(s) ahead of the class/tutorial for which the reading is scheduled to be discussed, and to be ready to ask/answer questions and participate in discussion. The course web page gives an overall schedule and weekly summary is the place to see what readings are required when, while Canvas shows you the readings week-by-week.

Lectures

We meet Mondays from 4:30 PM to 6:20 PM in BLU 9660. Classes will mix lecture, discussion and audiovisual material. It is important that you keep up with the readings in order to be able to ask questions and partake in discussion. Lectures are not recorded.

Tutorials

Tutorials will be devoted to responding to any questions you may have about the course readings, engaging in research “exercises” to develop your research skills, and discussing your term research projects. Ten per cent (10%) of your course grade will be determined by tutorial activities that will be designed to help you along in your projects and will be outlined for you by your TA as the semester progresses.

Canvas

A Canvas page associated with this course gives you access to all course materials. I am a late adopter when it comes to Canvas, preferring normally just to use an open course web page, but it has a number of features that are useful for students, such as providing you with a calendar for assignments and exams, giving you confirmation whenever you submit an assignment, and having access to the gradebook to see how you have done on exams and assignments. The “Modules” menu item is set up to show you activities week by week.

Course Web Page

A course web page will be maintained throughout the semester that contains copies of any handouts, notices of general interest to the class, links related to the course, study questions for text chapters, and anything else that seems useful to place there. Anything on the course web page will be on Canvas as well, but it's more compact and easily accessed from anywhere with any device at <http://www.sfu.ca/~palys/crim321.htm>. You can also link to the course web page from the "Pages" menu option in Canvas.

Term Research Project

Doing a piece of research is the best way to understand the complexities that are involved and to show not only that you have learned the research techniques and general principles that we will cover in this course, but also that you understand how to apply them in the context of a particular study. You will do one semester-long [research project](#) in this course, which will contribute a total of **30%** to your final grade in the course – 5% for completing the TCPS Ethics Tutorial and submitting a research proposal for ethics review that is approved, and 25% for your final report.

Project Specifications

Your project this semester will be to do an oral history with one person on a topic of interest to you, and then to write up the results of that research. You will learn more about oral history and interviewing as the semester progresses, but note for now that your project must be primarily "**qualitative**" as understood within this course and that your core method must involve an **oral history interview**. The topic does not need to be explicitly "criminological;" the important thing is to find someone you can interview at some length and to get started early. You are strongly encouraged to do the project with someone you already know – a family member, someone who has gone through a particular life experience – and about whose life experiences you would like to hear more, and assuming they are willing to share.

Proposal and Ethics Review

All research that is done at SFU that involves human participants must go through ethics review to ensure it is consistent with SFU policy. I have been delegated the responsibility for doing those reviews in Crim 321. *Before* you start *formally* collecting data, you will need to (a) complete the TCPS Ethics tutorial that you can find at <https://tcps2core.ca/welcome> and (b) submit a **1-2 page proposal**, that identifies your topic area, the procedures you will follow, the sample this will involve, and any ethics issues you have considered in the formulation of your proposal. You will submit this to the Canvas site by no later than **7 October**. Submissions in Canvas need to be either MSWord (docx) or Adobe (pdf).

Approval of your proposal will depend 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** considerations have been addressed, and that you have identified and addressed any of the **unique issues** that arise in the context of your particular

research (e.g., conflict of interest; freedom of choice). A template noting issues you should address has been prepared that you can find at <https://www.sfu.ca/~palys/Crim321-TermProjectEthicsProposalGuidelines.pdf>

If your proposal is approved first time you submit, you will receive 5% toward your final grade in the course. If your proposal is not approved, you will have to re-submit the proposal as soon thereafter as you can, and I will return it to you as soon as I can after that. If approved on the second round, you will receive 4% toward your final grade in the course. If not approved, you will have to re-submit a third proposal worth 3%. This pattern will continue until you have submitted a proposal that is approved. Note that, according to the SFU ethics policy, ***you cannot begin formally gathering data until you have received ethics approval.***

The Final Research Report

The research report you submit at the end of the semester will be about **15** pages long -- double-spaced, in 12-pitch font – no more than **5000 words**. This excludes appendices, references, and any figures, tables, pictures or other graphic material. You can use any of ASA, APA or legal/historical style – the three most commonly used in criminology – but once you have chosen a style, use it consistently. Further guidelines will be posted on the course web page later in the semester, and your projects will be a frequent topic for discussion at tutorials.

A hard copy of the final paper is **due** on the day of our last class, **7 December 2024**. We will give you submission instructions later in the semester. Late papers lose 5% per day. You do not need to hand them in to us, but make sure that you keep copies of any field notes, recording tapes and other research materials that you accumulate in the course of doing your study until you have received a final grade in the course, as you may be asked to produce these to verify aspects of your research.

If there is any indication that you have used an AI program (e.g., OpenAI/ChatGPT, Misanthropic/Claude, Mistral/Vibe) to generate your final paper you will receive a grade of zero for your project and be invited to be examined orally on your project.

Exams

There will be two exams — a mid-term (worth 30% of your final grade) and a final (also worth 30% of your final grade). The mid-term will be held during class time on October 26th. The final will be scheduled by SFU/Admin some time after the semester begins. The exam period runs from December 9th to 20th. It will be a 2-hour exam held at a location to be announced, and will deal only with material covered in the second half of the course. Both exams will include material from the text, articles available through course page links, and lecture material.

Exceptional/Unanticipated Circumstances

Receiving the complete course schedule from the outset allows you to plan your time to meet all the course requirements. However, in any given semester, things sometimes happen that none of us could have anticipated, are beyond anyone's control, and preclude some person's ability to follow the course schedule. Exceptions can be made *only* in those unanticipated and exceptional circumstances as long as you: (a) inform me at the earliest possible opportunity

what has happened; (b) provide appropriate and detailed documentation that the professor may require (normally a note from a medical authority) at the earliest possible opportunity that makes it clear the event meets the criteria and clearly precluded your ability to meet the class schedule; and (c) take steps to rectify the omission as soon as possible. Note that this material must be submitted to me directly; the TAs are not authorized to make decisions on those matters.

Evaluation Summary

Requirement	Due Date	Value
TCPS Tutorial + Research Proposal	05 Oct	5%
Mid-Term Exam	26 Oct	30%
Tutorial Activities	Throughout Semester	10%
Term Research Project	07 Dec	25%
Final Exam	TBA	30%
TOTAL		100%

Grading Scale

The following shows the grading scale used in Criminology and how letter grades are connected to both numerical scores and the type and level of understanding that each grade connotes.

Letter Grade	Percent Range	Comments
A+	95 – 100	Outstanding performance. Represents work of exceptional quality. Content, organization and style all at a high comprehension of the subject and use of existing research and literature where appropriate. Also uses sound critical thinking, has innovative ideas on the subject and shows personal engagement with the topic.
A	90 – 94	
A-	85 – 89	
B+	80 – 84	Good performance. Represents work of good quality with no major weaknesses. Writing is clear and explicit and topic coverage and comprehension is more than adequate. Shows some degree of critical thinking and personal involvement in the work. Good use of existing knowledge of the subject.
B	75 – 79	
B-	70 – 74	
C+	65 – 69	Satisfactory performance. Adequate work. Shows fair

C	60 – 64	comprehension of the subject, but has some weakness in content, style and /or organization of the paper. Minimal critical awareness or personal involvement in the work. Adequate use of the literature.
C-	55 – 59	
D	50 - 54	Marginal performance. Minimally adequate work, barely at a passing level. Serious flaws in content, organization and/ or style. Poor comprehension of the subject, and minimal involvement in the paper. Poor use of research and existing literature.
F	0 – 49	Failing work.

***Note for students:** if you choose not to complete all of the course evaluation components, you will not receive a passing grade; you will receive an “N”, which is treated as an “F” in computing your grade-point average. This policy does not mean you must pass every assignment you submit – you must simply complete/submit every assignment.

The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the School of Criminology adhere to SFU policy related to grading practices, grade appeals ([Policy T20.01](#)), and [academic honesty and student conduct](#) (S10.01 and S10.05). It is the responsibility of students to inform themselves of the content of these policies.

Grade Appeals

To appeal a grade on an exam or your final paper, you should first contact the TA who did the grading, who can clarify the basis for the grade. If dissatisfied at that point, please contact the instructor, who will re-grade the exam or paper, and whose decision will be final. Please note that any action on your part should be initiated within 10 days of receiving the grade, as outlined in section 2.4.2 of [SFU Policy Grading and the Reconsideration of Grades](#), they must express concern or seek clarification on grading within 10 days of receiving the grade for an assessment or final grade in the class.