

Research Methods I: Research Design

Criminology 860/ Fall 2025

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 from your SFU account to **palys@sfu.ca**;
- 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 who use 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 qualitative and quantitative research methods, equivalent to [CRIM 220](#).

Office Hours

My designated **office hours** for the Fall semester are Monday and Friday afternoons from 1:00 to 2:00 PM, although grad students are welcome to come by any time I'm around and my office door is open. 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 is <https://www.sfu.ca/~palys/crim860.htm>
- Second, we have a class email that 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 research project you will be doing over the semester. Your job is to do the readings and be ready to discuss them.
2. Discussing the term research projects you will be working on. We will devote some time every week to discussing your progress and issues that arise as you design and implement your project.
3. 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 SFU more broadly, and introducing you to some of the challenges and issues that people who do criminological work – 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 some occasions this will involve guests; on other occasions it may involve simply shifting the discussion.

Participation

A significant portion of your grade (30%) will involve “participation” in the activities of the course. There are several ways you can accumulate these points:

Contributing to Discussion

Grad school is the time to start putting aside any residual shyness you might have about speaking. Academe is all about exchanging ideas and perspectives, learning to offer and receive well-intended 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

Occasional 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, or an implication you consider. Unlike other things you produce in this course where I will expect your best work, this is the place where format doesn’t matter, so ask questions, knock around ideas, and use the opportunity to discuss issues directly with me.

Most weeks include a reading from the text, and it just so happens that Chris Atchison and I are currently in the process of preparing a second edition of the course text for Sage that will go into production next year and be published in 2027. We know we want it to be smaller, but where to cut? And it can always be better. So where to improve? One way you can be very helpful is to give feedback on each chapter as we go through it in terms of what you found useful, what seemed gratuitous and could be cut, what could be explained better, and so on. Here’s your chance for immortality in the acknowledgements of that second edition!

You are also welcome to do your one-pager on any of the articles that are assigned in any given week, to write less than a page in weeks when you don't feel you have as much to say. The only “wrong” way to do your one-pager would be to summarize the article or chapter; no need to do that as I already will have read it as well. In sum, don’t tell me what it *says*; tell me what it *means* to you, or what you like or don’t like about it, if anything. I do not “grade” these; whatever you submit gets you a participation point, as long as you submit something with your name on it. How you make use of the opportunity is up to you.

It will work out best for both you and me if the class’s 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 file 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%** to 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 03 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; (b) propose 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; and (c) conclude at least one of those methods during this semester.

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. 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 until it is. If your research is exempt from ethics review (according to SFU Policy [R20.01](#)), you nonetheless must submit a proposal and explain why 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 project, 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 5-10 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 05 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. 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 GAI Software

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 testing out AI at every stage from generating ideas to start a project through to writing up and disseminating the final product. 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, 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 talk about it much more in class.

Intellectual Property (IP)

You all will be doing many things for me in Crim 860 this semester. I believe 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 doing 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 do enjoy collaborating with students, will encourage those who produce work I think is potentially publishable to do so, and am open to doing so with you after the course ends, as happens with a few students each year. But whether you do so and who you do it with is completely up to you.

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	03 October	05%
Project Presentation	29 November	25%
Project Report	05-ish December	40%
Total		100%