

Research Methods I: Research Design

Criminology 860/ Fall 2026

The Professor

Your instructor is Dr. Ted Palys. If you need to get in touch to arrange an appointment, the best way to do so is by sending an e-mail from your SFU account to palys@sfu.ca (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](#).

The Course (as described by the person teaching it)

Although the calendar description assumes that people who join our program are conversant with a range of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches, that is not my experience. In a class like 860, where we have people from different disciplines, universities and countries, people's methodological backgrounds are diverse and range from limited to extensive. Accordingly, the text provides a background resource to fill in any gaps in your qualitative/quantitative/mixed methods background, while other readings will typically offer examples or do a deeper dive into a related topic of interest. Both are resources for the projects you will be doing this semester, while the course as a whole provides each of you with a broad procedural and epistemological foundation for the techniques and approaches you will encounter in our department.

Office Hours

My official **office hours** for the Fall semester are Mondays from 3:00 to 4:00 PM and Fridays from 1:30 to 2:30 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). Links to further readings are posted 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. I sometimes will start by giving you a pitch on the week's topic. Other times we may simply dive in to discuss readings and any questions/issues you raise. This will help ensure your understanding of the material as well as provide a growing resource for you to use in the research project you will be doing over the semester. Please do the readings, be ready to discuss them, and bring your comments and questions.
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. It also means introducing you to the unique challenges and issues that people who do criminological work encounter and deal with when using the range of methods we talk about in this course. Our guests are colleagues happy to share their insights and experiences.

Participation & Mini-Assignments

A significant portion of your grade (40%) 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

Small 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) or show that you have

achieved a required accreditation (e.g., completing the ethics tutorial). Some will be little more than checkboxes you knock off as we work through the semester (e.g., completing the TCPS ethics tutorial), while others will be a bit more involved (e.g., asking you to do a thematic analysis of a source I provide).

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 **60%** to your final grade in the course – this includes (1) 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 09 October; and (2) 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/create new data rather than utilize an existing data base; and (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. For reasons that I will explain in class, I strongly encourage you to consider doing your project using publicly available archival sources – online chat groups, political speeches, films or serialized shows, music lyrics, terms of service, judicial decisions – unless you have access to some equally trouble-free human sample to ensure you are able to finish the project in one semester.

Proposal and Ethics Review

According to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) on research involving humans, all research done at SFU involving human participants must receive prior ethics review, and familiarity with basic principles of research ethics is important regardless of what sorts of data sources you end up working with. 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. In the case of more interactive techniques where you need to secure consent, you also should include a copy of an “information sheet” showing what you will say to or send to people to engage their consent.

Prior approval is not required until formal “data collection” begins. If your first proposal is not approved, you will need to revise and resubmit until it is. When I say that you cannot begin formal data collection, this does not preclude you checking feasibility, checking on participants’ preferences regarding various issues, anticipating organizational matters. If your research is exempt from ethics review (according to SFU Policy [R20.01](#)), I nonetheless need you to submit a proposal and explain why you believe the exemption applies to your research. You are also welcome in any case to comment on any ethics issues you do see involved in your research even if it is not a matter that the REB considers relevant to ethics review. Your proposal should be sent to me electronically at palys@sfu.ca.

If you are engaging human participants, 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).

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, but not appendices).

A final version of your written report is due on the Monday after our last class, i.e., December 7th, so that you have a few days to incorporate any useful feedback that arises from your presentation on the 4th. 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.

Don't Be a Reverse Centaur

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 to using it to evaluate proposals 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 AI can help the centaurs among us do their 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 will be doing many things for me in Crim 860 this semester. I believe any work you complete in my classes is yours. I will do as much as possible to bring out the best in you and your work this semester, but I see that as simply 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. That said, I do enjoy collaborating with students, will encourage those who produce work I think is potentially publishable to do so, and am open to working 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	All Semester	40%
Accepted Proposal	09 October	05%
Project Presentation	04 December	15%
Project Report	07 December	40%
Total		100%