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Course Description

This course introduces you to social science research methods used in criminological and criminal justice research. Through this course, you will learn the steps that a researcher takes to develop an idea from choosing a research question to designing a study using an appropriate method to assess that question.

Objectives

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. **Describe** the scientific process.
2. **Explain** the advantages and disadvantages of multiple research methodologies.
3. **Identify** an appropriate method for a given research question.
4. **Design** a complete research proposal to answer your research question.

Writing Objectives

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. **Describe** the parts of an academic journal article.
2. **Develop** a testable scientific research question
3. **Summarize** three journal articles related to your research in the form of a literature review
4. **Construct** a research proposal that describes how you would answer your research question using a research method.

Academic & Professional Objectives

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. **Write** an informative and professional email.
2. **Identify** key pieces of information in lecture in the form of in-class notes.
3. **Deploy** effective study techniques.
4. **Identify** areas for personal study improvement.

Graded Work

Points for the course are allocated as follows:

In-Class Activities:	30%
Assignments:	10%
Exams:	40%
<u>Final Project:</u>	<u>20%</u>
Total:	100%

In-Class Activities

- There will be multiple in-class activities—usually 1 per week—designed to help you put into practice what we learn in lecture and what you will be expected to do for your final project.
- These activities are designed to be low stakes, but they can *only* be completed in class.

Assignments

- There will be **three (3)** out-of-class assignments: a research question, a literature review, and a methods outline.
- These assignments are designed help you make progress on your final project. Therefore, **you should read and incorporate feedback on these assignments for your final project.**

Exams

- There will be **three (3)** cumulative exams.
- Exams will be administered IN CLASS.
- If you miss an exam, contact me within 24 hours after the exam or as soon as you know you will miss the exam, *whichever is sooner*.
 - Students who will miss an exam for official university-sanctioned activities must let me know **as soon as they know** of the absence to arrange to take the exam early.
 - Students who miss the exam for unforeseen circumstances must also provide clear documentation of the cause of the absence and its unforeseen nature to be eligible for a make-up.
 - Students who do not fall into either of the above scenarios can only make up the exam for **half credit**. *This make-up exam may not be in the same modality as the original.*

Final Project

- In lieu of a final exam, you will submit a final project in the form of a research proposal worth 200 points.

- The research proposal will consist of a short literature review, a hypothesis or research question, a proposed sample, and a proposed method of testing. Further details, along with a rubric, can be found on Blackboard.

Course Policies and Procedures

Grading Policies

Letter Grade Ranges and Descriptions. Graded assignments and final grades are administered on the following scale:

Table 1. Letter grade ranges and descriptions

Letter Grade	Grade Range	Description
A	90-100	Excellent
B	80-89	Good
C	70-79	Average
D	60-69	Passing
F	> 60	Failure
FN	> 60	Failure (Non-Attendance)

Rounding. Final grades are rounded according to normal rounding rules (e.g., a 79.5 [C] would be rounded up to an 80 [B], but a 79.4 would not). Requests for rounding outside of this rule will guarantee no rounding.

Late Work. Late work will not be accepted for any reason outside of official accommodations. Students who need an extension may use one of their “life happens” tokens (see below).

“Life Happens” Tokens. Students are allotted four (4) “life happens” tokens to accommodate common life mishaps. Each token provides the student a 72-hour extension on in-class activities or out-of-class assignments. They cannot be used for exams or the final project. After a student uses up all four tokens, future missed work will earn an automatic 0.

- **To use:** The student must email me to let me know they are using this token *before* the assignment is due. **You do not need to provide a justification to use it or wait for my response.** As long as you have a token available to use, you can assume that you can use it.
- **Note:** Students who need more than 4 make-ups for extreme extenuating circumstances should contact the Dean of Students for help (dos@tamusa.edu or (210) 784-1354).

Contesting grades. Students will have **3 days** to contest grades beginning on the day they are released. Students should only contest grades in a situation where a specific mistake has been made (e.g., a miscalculated grade).

Course & Communication Policies

How I Contact You. Most communication from me will be through Blackboard Announcements. You are responsible for keeping up with Blackboard notifications, so please **check it daily**.

How You Contact Me. Email me at cducate@tamusa.edu. **Please include the course number (CRIM 3370) at the beginning of the subject** of the email and use [proper email etiquette](#). **Do not use Blackboard messages.** I usually check my email twice a day between 10am and 4pm on weekdays and do not check email on the weekends. If I have not responded to your e-mail within 24 hours (excluding Sat and Sun), **please send another e-mail with a reminder.**

Students who do not send professional emails will receive a **form email** in response encouraging them to revise their email to be more appropriate. This is not because I'm a jerk—it is because it is good professional development and makes it easier for me to answer your question quickly. **Well-formatted emails with clear questions will get a much faster answer from me.**

Before you send an email, please see the following checklist. Have you...

- ⇒ Ensured that the answer to your question cannot be found in the syllabus or supporting documents?
- ⇒ Put “CRIM 3370:” followed by a simple summary in the subject line (e.g., **CRIM 3370: Question about Rubric for Final Project**)?
- ⇒ Opened your email with a salutation (e.g., **Hello Dr. Ducate**)?
- ⇒ Begun your opening paragraph on a new line?
- ⇒ Ensured that your question is clear and to the point?
- ⇒ Ended your email with a closing (e.g., **Thank you,**)?
- ⇒ Put your signature (i.e., your name) on the line below the closing?

How to Meet with Me. I hold weekly student (i.e., office) hours to allow students to come ask questions about material they are struggling with. If none of the available times work with your schedule, email me to work out a time. I do my best to work with students to find a time that works for both of us, but it is the student's responsibility to ensure they have some availability during normal working hours (i.e., 8am-5pm).

This is a difficult course, so I encourage you to attend office hours. However, I expect you to come prepared. This means you should come with *clear* questions about the material you do not understand. If you have questions about the assignments, you must have the assignment open and with the work you've already tried available for me to review.

Technology Use. You may not use phones or laptops in this class **except for designated activities and disability accommodations.** This means your phone should be away and on silent—I should not be able to see it. This also means your earbuds need to be out of your ears unless we have discussed your use in advance.

You MAY use tablets so long as you use them to take notes with a stylus in a notetaking app (i.e., if you are using it like digital paper rather than like a mini-laptop).

I know—students hate this policy. But they’re distracting to you and more importantly to me. I promise, you’ll pay more attention and learn more when taking notes via hand (even if you feel like you don’t!).

If you are expecting a phone call (e.g., daycare, sick parent, etc.), keep your phone on vibrate in your pocket and step outside to take the call if necessary. If you want to leave your phone on the desk in such a situation, you must get prior approval from me.

Recordings & Use of Course Materials. The materials in this course are my intellectual property. Students may not make audio or video recordings of the course except as allowed through DSS accommodations. Furthermore, **no student has permission to sell or distribute any recording or material made in the course. This includes Coursera and similar course material exchanges online.** Distribution of materials is a copyright violation, and distribution of recordings violates students’ right to privacy.

Work and Submission Policies

General Assignment Requirements

- Unless otherwise specified, submit work in 12-pt Times New Roman or Garamond font and double-spaced.
- **Whatever you submit on your first attempt is what I will grade.** It is your responsibility to upload the correct document. Be sure to check the document preview BEFORE submitting.

Academic Integrity & AI Use. As a TAMUSA student, I expect you to follow the Student Code of Conduct (see Section 14 of the [Student Handbook](#)). **When you submit an assignment with your name on it, you are signifying that the work contained therein is yours and only yours** unless otherwise cited or referenced. This includes both assignments and exams. This means that **all work submitted by students must be generated by the students themselves**, working individually or in groups (as specified in the assignment).

What is Allowed:

- Using AI technologies, such as ChatGPT, **in the form of a tutor.** In other words, you can use it as a resource the same way you would use me as a resource. You **cannot**, therefore, ask it to answer specific assignment questions for you or submit

any of its answers as your own. If you aren't sure whether you are violating this rule, don't use it.

- Studying with fellow classmates.
- Any assignment where I have explicitly stated you can use it, and only in the capacity I have stated.

What is Not Allowed

- Having another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT. This includes *ideas* as well as *written text*.

To ensure academic honesty, you will be expected to be able to **defend your work**. This means that you need to **maintain a version history** of your work and **be able to explain your submission verbally**. If I suspect plagiarism or cheating of any kind, I reserve the right to question you about your knowledge of your submitted work. When a student is suspected of plagiarism or cheating, they will receive a **temporary 0** on the assignment until they arrange a meeting with the professor to discuss the assignment. Students who cannot demonstrate the origins of their submission either through verbal mastery or clear documentation (e.g., edit history on Google docs) will be considered to have plagiarized.

Consequences

- **Strike one:** Fail the assignment and be reported to the university on the first strike in accordance with TAMUSA policies.
- **Strike two:** Fail the class.

Disability Accommodation. Students with disability accommodations should **set up a one-on-one meeting with me ASAP** to discuss the specifics of their accommodations. Don't worry—you do not need to disclose anything about your disability! I just want to be sure you're getting what you need. What DSS sends me about your accommodations is usually vague, so this meeting ensures that I understand exactly what it is you need. Students who suspect they need accommodations can visit the [DSS website](#) to discuss their options. Students who need extra time can also arrange exam proctoring via that website.

Expectations

Academic Expectations

Independent Problem-Solving. Try to solve problems on your own first. Check the syllabus, check Blackboard, ask classmates, Google it. I am always here if you need me, but ensure you try to find the solution on your own first.

Frustration Tolerance. This is a very demanding course. Often, even the best students struggle at first, but I expect you to not be deterred by the initial discomfort you will inevitably experience. Instead, I expect you to persevere in the face of the discomfort, to wrestle with the

material until it finally makes sense. This may mean revising your study habits or putting in more work than you usually do. That's okay! That's part of learning.

Honesty. I expect my students to be honest with me. This means more than academic integrity. It also means admitting when you are struggling or when you made a mistake that is totally human. I know honesty is vulnerability, and vulnerability is hard, but I promise, I am here to help you if you let me.

Technology Expectations

Tools. You should have the following technological tools:

- A paper notebook & working pen or pencil
- A functional and reliable laptop or tablet
- A web camera (for office hour meetings if using Zoom)
- An email client
- A PDF reader (e.g., Adobe Acrobat)
- The Respondus browser
- Microsoft Office 365 (especially Microsoft Word)
 - Note: TAMUSA students can use MS365 for free. [Log in to their online portal here.](#)

Skills. You are also expected to have the following technological & digital literacy skills:

- Using Blackboard (including viewing rubrics & feedback)
- Using and writing polite (and ideally professional) emails
- Creating and submitting documents using .doc or .docx formats
- Downloading and reading PDFs from Blackboard
- Using web conferencing tools and software (e.g., Zoom)

If you aren't confident in these skills, **visit the Writing Center ASAP** (see [here](#) for how to make an appointment) or visit the library and ask for assistance with creating digital objects.

Technical issues. Technical and logistical problems, such as being unable to access a computer, computer failure, problems with internet connections (such as speed or quality of the connection) or browser, difficulty printing, failure to check that your assignments have properly uploaded, etc., will not result in additional accommodations.

To avoid last minute problems, it is highly recommended that you complete your work as **early as possible** during each module. If you have a question about using Blackboard as a student, **please check the help page first:** <https://tinyurl.com/tamusastudentbbhelp>. If you have difficulty accessing Blackboard or using, please contact IT here: <https://www.tamusa.edu/information-technology-services/index.html>. You can also **call them** at (210) 784-4357.

Course Schedule

This course schedule is tentative and subject to change. All substantive changes will be announced via Blackboard (e.g., changes in due dates).

Readings will be available on Blackboard via Perusall. Both readings and assignments are due Sundays at 11:59pm of the week they are in.

WEEK	DATE	TOPICS	ASSIGNMENTS
1	08.25 - 08.31	Introduction & the Research Process	
2	09.01 - 09.07	Ethics	
3	09.08 - 09.14	Research Questions	Research Question (first draft)
4	09.15 - 09.21	Literature Reviews	
5	09.22 - 09.28	Exam 1	Research Question (respond to feedback)
6	09.29 - 10.05	Surveys	Literature Reviews (submit for peer review)
7	10.06 - 10.12	Measurement	Literature Reviews (peer review)
8	10.13 - 10.19	Sampling	Literature Reviews (respond to review)
9	10.20 - 10.26	Exam 2	
10	10.27 - 11.02	Secondary Data, Causality, & Longitudinal Data	
11	11.03 - 11.09	Experiments	
12	11.10 - 11.16	Qualitative Methods <i>Note: Last day to drop for automatic W is 11/14</i>	Methods Outline
13	11.17 - 11.23	Exam 3	
14	11.24 - 11.30	Thanksgiving Break	
15	12.01 - 12.04	Final Project Design	Final Project due December 4, 2025 at 11:59pm