

Thesis I – Research Design & Prospectus Defense

CRIM 5307

Asynchronous, Online

3 Credits

Instructor: Dr. Danielle Fenimore

Email: dfenimore@tamusa.edu

Office: CAB 351D

Phone: 210-784-2274

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is intended for graduate-level students in the MSCCJ program to develop a master's thesis project, and to see it through the prospectus defense. During the first semester of your thesis courses, students will develop their thesis committee and work closely with them to design and focus their research project. By the end of the semester, students will present their proposed research to their committee for approval and apply to the University's IRB to ensure ethical standards in their research. Students will work closely with their thesis chair to identify meeting times (at least one per month), and to create a plan for communication throughout the process of developing their prospectus.

Pre-requisites for CRIM 5307 are CRIM 5304 and CRIM 5305. Students may be co-enrolled with other CRIM courses while completing CRIM 5307. However, while it is acceptable for students to be registered concurrently with other graduate courses, we advise students not to carry more than 6 credit hours while attempting to complete a thesis. Ensure that you are referring to the College of Graduate Studies and the Department of Criminology & Political Science graduate student and thesis handbooks related being enrolled in thesis courses.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course will provide students with the opportunity to conduct original research, specifically focusing on the ability to synthesize the material from their degree program, and will ensure that student are able to:

1. Explain and apply criminological theories of crime.
2. Identify current issues in the criminal justice system (under this learning outcome, students will also demonstrate the ability to identify original research questions).
3. Demonstrate the steps involved in planning a rigorous research design.

SUGGESTED READING MATERIALS

[*Publication Manual \(OFFICIAL\) 7th Edition of the American Psychological Association*](#) by American Psychological Association

[*Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article \(2nd ed\)*](#) by Howard S. Becker

PURPOSE OF THESIS I

The master's thesis is a culminating assessment of student learning in the degree of Master of Science in Criminology and Criminal Justice at Texas A&M University, San Antonio. Like comprehensive exams, this is an assessment of your understanding and ability to apply the concepts that you have learned during your time in the program. While this syllabus serves as a general guide to all thesis projects in the program, each project will be a unique endeavor to contribute to the growing literature-base of the field. Furthermore, each thesis chair reserves the right to make changes in scheduling and approach to mentoring through this process as they see fit.

A thesis serves as original scholarship, and is completed under the guidance and mentorship of graduate faculty in the Department of Criminology & Political Science. Successful prospectus defenses will allow students to advance to the data collection and analysis phase of their project in CRIM 5308: Thesis II.

COMPONENTS OF THESIS I

At the beginning of the course, both the faculty thesis chair and the student should both familiarize themselves with the College of Graduate Studies [Graduate Thesis Manual](#).

Topic Development

Students will be responsible for meeting with their thesis chair to select, polish, and finalize their thesis topic. Some faculty may require a written document for this phase, some may not. Faculty and students must have clear communication for how material will be prepared, monitored, and submitted.

Once a topic has been selected and finalized, students must submit the [Graduate Thesis Form](#). This is a JIRA workflow that tracks the steps of the thesis process for the College of Graduate Studies.

Committee Formation

Students will also be required to officially select their committee members. Thesis committee members must be graduate faculty at Texas A&M University, San Antonio. Faculty do not all have to be from the Department of Criminology & Political Science. If an

expert in the topic is required for the success of the project, external members may be identified and included as a committee member.

The inclusion of external committee members will be included in the three faculty that comprise a student's thesis committee. As is often the case with external committee members, they may need to be nominated as graduate faculty at the University, requiring a separate [Graduate Faculty Nomination Form](#) to be completed.

Draft of Introduction & Literature Review

Students will draft an introduction to their topic, including a well-stated problem statement and a brief overview of their project. Examples of thesis introductions can be provided as needed by faculty advisors to help orient students to academic writing, and what an introduction chapter to a thesis should look like. The draft should be developed according to the standards and requirements of APA formatting, and should meet the submission requirements of the final document, provided in the Graduate Thesis Manual.

Students will also be required to identify relevant literature for their topic. Resources for developing literature reviews will be provided as needed. Literature reviews should thoroughly explain and synthesize the state of the field on the student's chosen topic.

Draft of Planned Research Design

Students will draft a plan for the design and conduct of their proposed research project. This plan will include basic information such as their research question, independent and dependent variables, and hypothesis (or hypotheses). The student will also address more advanced information regarding their proposed project, including: their method(s) of data collection, their sampling technique, their expected sample size, their proposed method of analysis (which should be appropriately based on the intended data), plans for submission to Texas A&M – San Antonio's Institutional Review Board, and any additional items such as drafts of interview schedules or surveys when appropriate.

The draft of planned research design should be both ethically and feasibly possible for the student to complete in the timespans expected by Graduate School and program policy and expectations. Students should work closely with their chosen thesis chair to ensure that their planned research design is viable before finalizing it at the end of the semester. The plan draft should represent a thoroughly researched and meticulously prepared proposal that will be reasonably expected to result in the necessary project and data needed for the student's thesis project.

Prospectus Defense & Approval

Students will be expected to present their research proposal to their faculty committee (either in-person or through Teams/Zoom). During this presentation, students will introduce their topic and research questions, and clearly and concisely present the existing literature and their theoretical framework or conceptual models supporting their project.

Students will also present on their proposed research design and methods, including data collection and data sources, sampling strategies (if necessary), and the type of research they will be conducting. This should be sufficiently detailed to ensure that the student has fully considered the steps it will take to complete their research project. Students should also consider the data that they will collect and provide a preliminary plan for data analysis. They will conclude with their hypothesized findings, and the implications that their research will have for the field.

LATE SUBMISSION POLICY:

Late submissions of a thesis prospectus are subject to University policies. Please review the College of Graduate Studies and the Department of Criminology & Political Science graduate student handbooks.

Students in thesis courses are subject to strict deadlines. As such, it is key for students and their thesis chairs to develop a communication plan to ensure that delays in submission of course deliverables can be discussed and planned for.

Failure to complete the prospectus by the end of the semester in which a student is registered for Thesis I will result in an "In Progress" grade. Students will be required to enroll in a one credit hour course (GRAD 5101) to maintain enrollment at the University and to maintain access to University resources, and will need to complete and submit the course deliverables in the following semester. Students are only allowed on "IP" grade in Thesis I. Failure to complete Thesis I in the second semester while having an IP grade in the course will result in a failure for the course, and students will be required to switch to the comprehensive exam track and register for CRIM 5306 in the following semester.

SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY:

The syllabus is subject to change with reasonable advanced notice as course needs arise. It will and can change based on the instructors' judgment or the evaluation of the class progress throughout the semester. When a change is made in the schedule, you will be notified via Blackboard Announcement tab.

IMPORTANT POLICIES AND RESOURCES

University Email Policy and Course Communications:

All correspondence between professors and students must occur via university email accounts. You must have your Jaguar email account ready and working. If it is not working, contact the help desk at helpdesk@tamusa.edu or at 210-784-HELP (4357). If you don't hear back within 48 hours, contact them again. They have many requests during the first part of the semester, so you may need to follow up with them.

Academic Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities:

Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to providing all students with reasonable access to learning opportunities and accommodations in accordance with The Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, Disability Support Services is located in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210. You can also contact us via phone at (210) 784-1335, visit us at the [website](#) or email us at dss@tamusa.edu. All students are encouraged to discuss their academic accommodation with Disability Support Services and their instructors as soon as possible.

Academic Learning Center:

All currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio can utilize the Academic Learning Center for subject-area tutoring. The Academic Learning Center provides free course-based tutoring to all currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Students wishing to work with a tutor can make appointments through the Brainfuse online tutoring platform. Brainfuse can be accessed in the *Tools* section of Blackboard. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing tutoring@tamusa.edu, calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202. Online tutoring is also available for after hours and weekend assistance.

While tutoring hours may change based on tutor schedules and availability, the current tutoring hours for MATH in the ALC are as follows:

Appointments available MATH Walk in Tutoring – No appointment needed

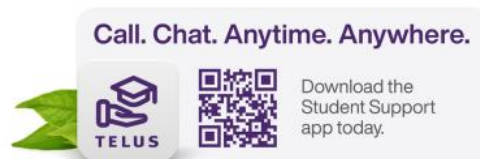
	Appointments available	Walk in Tutoring – No appointment needed
MONDAY	8 am – 6 pm	9 am – 5 pm
TUESDAY	8 am – 6 pm	9 am – 5 pm
WEDNESDAY	8 am – 6 pm	9 am – 5 pm
THURSDAY	8 am – 6 pm	9 am – 5 pm
FRIDAY	8 am – 5 pm	11 am – 4 pm

Counseling/Mental Health Resources:

As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and negatively impact your daily functioning. If you are experiencing emotional difficulties or mental health concerns, support is available to you through the Student Counseling Center (SCC). To schedule an appointment, visit our website, call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120 between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM.

All mental health services provided by the SCC are free and confidential (as the law allows). The Student Counseling Center provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. *Crisis support is available 24/7/365 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331 or through the TELUS student support App.*

The TELUS Student Support App provides a variety of mental health resources to including 24/7/365 support for in the moment distress, crisis support, an anonymous peer-to-peer support network, mental health screenings, podcasts, and articles to improve your mental wellbeing.



Emergency Preparedness:

JagE Alert is Texas A&M University-San Antonio's mass notification system. In the event of an emergency, such as inclement weather, students, staff and faculty, who are registered, will have the option to receive a text message, email with instructions and updates. To register or update your information visit: <https://tamusa.bbcportal.com/>. More information on emergency response may be found at: [Emergency Operations Plan](#) and the [Emergency Action Plan](#). Download the SafeZone App (<https://safezoneapp.com/>) for emergencies or call (210) 784-1911. Non-Emergency (210) 784-1900.

Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance:

According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended by the published Census Date (the first week of class). Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend prior to the published Census Date (the first week of class) will have their aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may also need to return a portion of their federal aid.

Jaguar Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center (WLDCC):

The WLDCC provides support to graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Writing tutors work with students to develop reading skills,

prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Our language tutors support students enrolled in Spanish courses and students composing in Spanish for any assignment. Our digital studio tutors support students working on digital projects such as eportfolios, class presentations, or other digital multimedia projects. The WLDCC offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. Students can schedule appointments with the WLDCC in JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on "Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center" to make your appointment. Students wanting to work in realtime with a tutor can schedule an "Online Appointment." Students wishing to receive asynchronous, written feedback from a tutor can schedule an "eTutoring" appointment. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our [website](#). The WLDCC can also be reached by emailing wldcc@tamusa.edu.

Meeting Basic Needs:

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to submit a [CARE report](#) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to direct you to available resources. A food pantry is available on campus; click [here](#) for hours and contact information.

Military Affairs:

Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to visit the Office of Military Affairs for any question involving federal or state VA Education Benefits. Visit the Patriots' Casa building, room 202, or to contact the Office of Military Affairs with any questions at military.va@tamusa.edu or (210)784-1397.

Religious Observances:

Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the wide variety of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or course work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes.

The Six-Drop Rule:

Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student's GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as "F" grades and will impact the student's GPA.

Statement of Harassment and Discrimination:

Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equal opportunity, and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, A&M-San Antonio encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality and the uniqueness of the individual on our campus and within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees are to be based on applicable law and individual merit. Texas A&M University-San Antonio, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the University's Civil Rights Officer at 210-784-2061 or titleix@tamusa.edu.

Texas A&M University-San Antonio faculty are committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sex discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking based on sex, know that help and support are available. A&M-San Antonio's Title IX Coordinator can support those impacted by such conduct in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The university strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the Title IX Coordinator. Please be aware that all A&M-San Antonio employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors and trained victim advocates) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the university. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment, sexual violence, or other related sex-based misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator (titleix@tamusa.edu, 210-784-2061, CAB 439K). If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting requirement, you can contact the Student Counseling Center at (210) 784-1331 or visit them in Madla 120.

Pregnant/Parenting Students:

Texas A&M-San Antonio does not require a pregnant or parenting student, solely because of that status or issues related to that status, to (1) take a leave of absence or withdraw from their degree or certificate program; (2) limit the student's studies; (3) participate in an alternative program; (4) change the student's major, degree, or certificate program; or (5) refrain from joining or cease participating in any course, activity, or program at the University. The university will provide such reasonable accommodations to pregnant students as would be provided to a student with a temporary medical condition that are related to the health and safety of the student and the student's unborn child. These could include maintaining a safe distance from substances, areas, and activities known to be hazardous to pregnant individuals and their unborn child; excused absences because of

illness or medical appointments; modified due dates for assignments; rescheduled tests/exams; taking a leave of absence; and being provided access to instructional materials and video recordings of lectures for excused absences, if these would be provided to any other student with an excused absence. Pregnant/parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator with any questions or concerns related to their status (titleix@tamusa.edu; 210-784-2061; CAB 439K).

Texas A&M-San Antonio has also designated the Title IX Coordinator as the liaison officer for current or incoming students who are the parent or guardian of a child younger than 18 years of age. The Title IX Coordinator can provide students with information regarding support services and other resources.

Young Jaguars can support parenting students with daycare if students meet this criteria: (1) must be enrolled in classes at Texas A&M-San Antonio in the current semester, (2) must be Pell eligible or a single parent, (3) child(ren) must be aged 3 to 12-years-old, and (4) child(ren) must be enrolled in Pre-K-3 through 6th grade. Hours of operation is Monday-Thursday 3:30pm-9:00pm. For more information, please contact Young Jaguars at youngjaguars@tamusa.edu or call (210) 784-2636.

Students' Rights and Responsibilities:

The following statement of students' rights and responsibilities is intended to reflect the philosophical base upon which University Student Rules are built. This philosophy acknowledges the existence of both rights and responsibilities, which is inherent to an individual not only as a student at Texas A&M University-San Antonio but also as a citizen of this country.

Students' Rights

1. A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no University rule or administrative rule that in any way abridges the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution.
2. Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the University, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, and pregnancy/parenting or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.
3. A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law, and this will be observed by students and University authorities alike.
4. Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university student rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

Students' Responsibilities

1. A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty, and administration.
2. A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, [Student Code of Conduct](#), on our website, and University Catalog, and to comply with them, as well as with federal, state, and local laws.
3. A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire University community.
4. A student has the responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide a safe environment for learning.
5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notifications.

We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, or disability. Conduct that infringes on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

Students are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education. Students engaging in an act that violates the standards of academic integrity will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Academic misconduct is any act, or attempt, which gives an unfair advantage to the student. Additionally, any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion may be considered as academic misconduct. For more information on academic misconduct policies and procedures please review the [Student Code of Conduct](#) or visit the resources available in the [OSRR website](#).

Important Fall 2026 Dates

Dates	Event
August 20	Tuition and Fee Payments deadline
August 24	First Day of Class
September 9	Census Date
October 5-16	Midterm grading period
November 13	Last day to drop with an automatic withdrawal
November 25	Study Day – No classes
November 26-28	Thanksgiving Holiday
November 30	Last day to withdraw from the university
December 4	Last Day of Classes
December 5-11	Final Exams
December 15	Commencement

The complete [Academic Calendar](#) as available on our website.

Artificial Intelligence Policy

Option 1: No Use of Generative AI Permitted CRIM 5307

CRIM 5307 assumes that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have 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. Use of any AI-generated content in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

Expected Chapter-by-Chapter Progression for Thesis I (Course Schedule)

Students should meet with their thesis chair at least once for each component below. However, faculty may deem that fewer or more meetings are required to ensure that the student completes the required sections.

Weeks 1 – 3: Topic selection, committee formation, and research question refinement.

Weeks 4 – 7: Drafting of introduction and literature review (Chapters 1 & 2 of the final document).

Weeks 8 – 10: Drafting of theory/theoretical framework/conceptual models (Chapter 3 of the final document).

Weeks 11 – 13: Drafting of proposed research design and methods (Chapter 4 of the final document).

Weeks 14 – 16: Proposal defense and submission to TAMUSA IRB.*

*Depending on the project, the thesis chair should be discussing a plan for efficient, effective, and feasible data collection in the following semester to ensure that students do not fall behind due to data collection problems.