

CRIM 3335: Crime & Justice in Popular Culture

Semester: Spring 2026

Credits: 3

CRN: 24886

Instructor: Dr. Sarah L. Harper

Preferred Title: Dr. Harper, Professor Harper

Email address: sarah.harper@tamusa.edu

Office Hours: 11A-1PM Tuesday/Thursday, virtually via Teams call or by appointment

Meetings: Tue/Thu 9:30–10:45 a.m.

Note: some class meetings may occur during that timeframe via Zoom or lecture content may be provided via recordings. The Professor will provide at least 24 hour notice when class will be held online synchronous.

Learning Outcomes

By term's end, you will:

- analyze crime and justice portrayals using social constructionism, media-effects, and/or cultural-studies perspectives;
- distinguish news values from entertainment logics across formats (news, docu-series, true-crime podcasts, procedurals, music, short-form video, etc.) and explain how platform incentives and production choices influence accuracy and salience;
- identify recurring myths (e.g., omniscient forensics, “stranger danger,” super-predators), test them against current evidence, and communicate your findings for non-specialist audiences;
- trace how frames and genre conventions shape public beliefs about risk, responsibility, and remedy across history to the present;
- evaluate downstream effects on cooperation with the justice system, institutional legitimacy, and policy preferences;
- conduct a brief content- or framing-analysis study (clear sampling, stated coding rules, concise interpretation, and ethical reflection) and explain what the patterns imply for stakeholders;
- and formulate practical, professional recommendations for consuming, producing, and teaching crime-related media that can improve system interactions and civic behavior.

What You Need for the Course

There is not a textbook assigned for this course. Readings will be provided to you as hard copies or via Blackboard/Perusall, and there may be some you need to retrieve from the library. You should have access to a laptop or tablet for use in class—these can be borrowed from the university library if you need one or yours is defective. You will need reliable access to the

internet, which you can use on campus. There are public libraries with WiFi, and those may even loan out wireless hotspots for internet access. You will need to keep track of your notes, both handwritten and digitized. You will need access to at least one streaming service subscription, but this will be discussed in class. You will also need to be familiar with basic university programs, including Blackboard, MS Office Suite (Outlook email, for example, is the only way to message me), Zoom, and the Library login.

Assessments & Points

- Bookends: $2 \times 25 = 50$ points
 - Syllabus Review & End of Semester Reflection
- Quizzes: $12 \times 20 = 240$ points
 - Applying concepts and checking takeaways from readings and lecture
- Deep Readings & Discussion: $5 \times 50 = 250$ points
 - Notes from readings, building on prior skill mastery, critically engaging with content
- Writing Responses: $8 \times 25 = 200$ points
 - In-class (generally), 10-15 minute pen & paper writing sessions in response to a prompt provided in class.
- Project: $1 \times 110 = 110$ points
 - Applying concepts and tools developed throughout semester to topic of student's interest, delivered in specific format
- Attendance & Participation: 25 (3 "flex" cushion) $\times 10$ points = 250 points
 - There are 28 class meeting times or online sessions planned across the semester, so this allows the flexibility of missing 3 and still retaining "perfect" attendance. If there is a professor-initiated cancellation, you are not penalized. Check-in will be conducted via *Perusall*.
- Total: 1100 points

The due dates for these assignments will be provided in Blackboard and in class, but expect to have classwork and homework assignments at least weekly. You will have ample time to complete assignments. For example, deep readings will be introduced two weeks in advance of deadline, quizzes may be given following any reading. Notes will be important, and I will teach you how to mark up an article so these kinds of assignments are way easier. You will need to have a writing utensil and paper each class session.

Key Spring 2026 Dates

- First class day: Tuesday, January 20, 2026
- Census date: Wednesday, February 04, 2026
- Spring Break: March 09–14, 2026 (No classes)
- Drop with "W": Friday, April 17, 2026
- Withdraw: Friday, May 01, 2026
- Finals window: May 06–12, 2026

ACJS Week

No in-person meeting Mar 3–7; asynchronous Blackboard activity on Tue and Thu.

Course Agenda and Sequence

Module	Content	Skills and Tools
Orientation + Lens Lab	Why popular culture matters; lens based appraisal; perspective lenses and theories we will use during this course; awareness of other audiences/perspectives not equating to adopting their view.	Lens naming; frame/production identification; practicing nuance in critique and description; audience factor awareness.
Lens Lab, Part II	How audience factors relate to expectations with system actors; translating literature to real world implications; how tropes and portrayals can impact audiences.	Describing an alternate reading; articulating caveats; mapping a portrayal to a likely expectation.
Foundations Workshop — Reading Academic Articles (Journal Article Lab)	Anatomy of an article; claim–evidence–takeaway; synthesis and critique.	BLUF notes; short synthesis table; critical appraisal and “interaction” with readings.
Foundations Workshop — Search & Data Playtime	Databases, repositories, official reports; search skills and data literacy.	Information literacy and tool proficiency; dataset/metadata basics; communication about data (also known as public criminology).
Methods Inside Meaning: Murder, Mayhem, and Facing the Music	Crime/justice themes in music; working definitions for attributes (narrative perspective; tone; genre; market exposure; audience reception); exposure to content analysis through quick “rounds” of coding, team resolution of coding differences, and a class wide data log; describing patterns to different audiences; a minimal statutes/punishment step; art compared to official data; brainstorming a feasible mixed methods follow up.	Conceptualization vs operationalization; drafting hypotheses; identifying ambiguous variables; concise data logging; interpreting a snapshot cautiously; communicating to public vs practitioner audiences; basic navigation of statute and punishment code; proposing a next study design with likely limitations.

Effects, Ethics, & Civics: Implications for Creator and Audience	How frames shape beliefs about risk, responsibility, and remedy; when repeated exposure can shift fear or punitive preferences; links between portrayals and cooperation with the justice system, institutional legitimacy, and civic behaviors (jury service, reporting, reform/protest); communicating clearly with officials, creators, and public audiences.	Identifying sensational claims that could be fact checked; tracing moral panic origins and policy effects; mapping plausible downstream effects without overclaiming; drafting data supported memos that inform without alarm and name uncertainty.
Genres & Media Types	True crime and docu series (storytelling ethics; wrongful conviction arcs; tone/structure and perceived remedies); procedurals and the CSI family of claims (evidence certainty, pacing, closure; juror expectations vs practice); news packages and platform incentives (selection, sourcing, visuals; what becomes “reasonable”); children’s media; comedy; memes.	Identifying narrative perspective and tone; distinguishing entertainment logics from news values; comparing TV, newspaper, social media, and documentary coverage of similar incidents; weighing possible harms/benefits to victims, secondary victims, witnesses, and publics.
System Touchpoints	Policing portrayals (investigations, surveillance, accountability) and connections to cooperation and legitimacy; courts and courtroom culture (pretrial publicity; juror expectations; courts as theater; role stereotypes/tropes; docudrama vs reporting); corrections and reentry narratives (what is dramatized vs what disappears; support for rehabilitation; understanding collateral consequences; exploitation, entertainment, deterrence, and related ethical considerations).	Mapping a portrayal to a likely public takeaway and a potential real world issue; collecting and reviewing counter examples from research or policy; distinguishing narrative closure from legal resolution; locating examples of professional ethics reprimands, rules of evidence, and juror instructions; balancing public concerns with evidence based cautions; identifying what public audiences should be aware of and how to increase awareness.

Integration — Responsible Media Use	Converting course insight into practice; how to consume, produce, and convey crime related media responsibly; avoiding harm amplification; communicating uncertainty.	Audience aware writing; graphics literacy; concise, defensible recommendations for public and practitioner audiences.
Synthesis and Reflection	Returning to awareness not equating to adoption; where these habits travel next (jury duty, reporting, advocacy, everyday media consumption).	Professional self assessment; application of skills beyond the course.

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 (<https://www.tamusa.edu/Disability-Support-Services/index.html>) or email us at dss@tamusa.edu . Disabilities may include, but are not limited to, attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their academic accommodations 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.

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. <https://www.tamusa.edu/student-resources/support/student-counseling-center/resources/telus.html>

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 about Emergency Operations Plan and the Emergency Action Plan can be found here: <https://www.tamusa.edu/about-us/emergency-management/>. 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 Jaguar Writing Center provides writing 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 Writing Center offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. Students can schedule appointments with the Writing Center 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 (<https://www.tamusa.edu/student-resources/writing-center/index.html>). The Writing Center can also be reached by emailing writingcenter@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 (https://jaguar-my.sharepoint.com/personal/eleyva_tamusa_edu/Documents/Desktop/MATH%20files/MATH1314/Schedules%20and%20syllabi/referral%20%20https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/Student-Rights-and-Responsibilities/file-a-report.html) 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 (<https://www.tamusa.edu/mays/students/generals-store.html>) 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. 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

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university student rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

Students' Responsibilities

- A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty, and administration.

- A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, Student Code of Conduct (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/Student-Rights-and-Responsibilities/documents/student-handbook.pdf>), on our website, and University Catalog, and to comply with them, as well as with federal, state, and local laws.
- A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire University community.
- A student has the responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide a safe environment for learning.
- 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 (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/Student-Rights-and-Responsibilities/documents/student-handbook.pdf>) or visit the resources available in the OSRR website (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-and-responsibilities/academic-integrity.html>)

Important Spring 2026 Dates:

Dates	Event
January 13	Tuition & Fee Payments deadline
January 19	Martin Luther King, Jr. – No Classes
January 20	First day of class
February 4	Census date
February 23–March 6	Midterm grading period
March 9–March 14	Spring Break
April 3	Study Day – No classes
April 17	Last day to drop with an automatic “W”
May 1	Last day to drop a course or withdraw from the University
May 4	Last day of classes
May 5	Study Day – No classes
May 6–May 12	Final exams
May 19	Commencement

The complete academic calendar is available online:

<https://www.tamusa.edu/academics/academic-calendar/index.html>

Generative AI Syllabus Statement (Policy for this course)**No Use of Generative AI Permitted**

CRIM 3335 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 and other LLMs. 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.