

Contemporary Criminological Theory – (CCJS 454:0101)
MW 3:30 to 4:45 pm, Tydings 2106
Fall 2026

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 12 to 12:45; 2:10 to 3:10 pm; and by appointment

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this course is for students to *understand* and *apply* criminological theories (i.e., explanations) to the distribution of crime at the individual and macro levels. To do so, we will pay particular attention to each theory's assumptions about human nature, the social order of society, locus of criminality and criminal motivation. Given that criminology has longstanding sociological underpinnings, we will spend a significant amount of time learning about theories of crime causation that highlight the roles of social structure, the environment, and inter-personal relationships (i.e, parents, peers). An additional goal is for students to understand the nature and scope of crime. In this course, we will discuss a wide array of criminological theories as well as address a variety of topics pertinent to the study of crime such as the divergent definitions of crime, the various correlates of crime, and crime trends. This course provides opportunities for students to discuss and write about crime-related issues. To that end, about every other Wednesday we allocate class time ("discussion days") so that we can work in small groups on specific issues such as the writing assignment.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students successfully completing this course will be able to: (1) connect criminological theory to the problem of crime, (2) specify the strategies that professional criminologists employ to study crime, (3) specify the correlates of offending and crime, (4) understand strengths and weaknesses of major sources of crime data, (5) communicate (written and verbal) about crime and the theories that seek to explain crime, and (6) understand the nature and scope of crime and crime trends.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Snipes, Jeffrey B., Thomas J. Bernard, and Rick Trinkner. 2024. *Vold's Theoretical Criminology*. New York: Oxford University Press. Ninth edition. Be able to answer discussion questions at the end of each assigned chapter.

2. Goyal, Nikhil. 2023. *Live to See the Day: Coming of Age in American Poverty*. Metropolitan Books.

3. 17 readings from the ELMS course website. These readings are on ELMS and noted by a *R#* along with author information; access these readings through the “modules” tab. You should be able to answer questions from the document titled “questions for Readings” for all of these readings. Document found at the bottom of “readings” tab in ELMS. THESE READINGS ARE REQUIRED.

- Students should download the readings as soon as possible. Waiting until the day before the test to download articles is strongly discouraged
- Students are encouraged to put all the readings in a three-ring binder

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Writing Assignment.

Connecting Theory to the Real World Issue of Crime. A primary goal of this course is to facilitate students’ evaluation and application of theories to the “real world” of crime. In this assignment, students are required to write up theoretically guided explanations to explain some crime rate patterns between two cities: Austin (TX) and St. Louis (MO). Further information about this project will be provided in a detailed handout on Wednesday, September 9th. This assignment is due on Wednesday, December 2nd (week 14). Students MUST provide me a physical copy of the writing assignment at the beginning of class. Students are required to also submit the assignment via ELMS and it will be reviewed by Turnitin.

NOTE: *Assignments that are not turned into me at the beginning of class on their due date will be considered one day late. Late assignments will be penalized 5 percentage points for each 24-hour period that they are late.*

2. Exams

There will be **four** exams. Tests will cover material from lectures, class discussions, videos, and readings. The final exam (exam 4) is partly cumulative. You are responsible for all assigned readings, even if they are not discussed in class; *exams will not be curved.* Exams are not returned to students; students who wish to review their exam should arrange to meet Dr. Vélez in her office during office hours. For the *make-up policy* refer to point #3 under classroom business.

COURSE GRADE (If earning a particular grade is important to you, please speak with me at the beginning of the semester so that I can offer some helpful suggestions for achieving your goal.)

Grades will be determined as follows:

Exam 1	10 %
Exam 2	15 %
Exam 3	20 %
Exam 4	25 %
Writing Assign.	30 %
Total	100%

Grades are based on the following scale:

Grade	% of total points	Grade	% of total points
A+	100-97	C	76-73
A	96-93	C-	72-70
A-	92-90	D+	69-67
B+	89-87	D	66-63
B	86-83	D-	62-60
B-	82-80	F	Below 60
C+	79-77		

CLASSROOM BUSINESS

1. ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance to class is highly encouraged by Dr. Vélez as it is a key way to do well in the course. Class sessions are designed with activities that connect with your weekly readings, lecture slides and writing assignment.

2. UMD COURSE RELATED POLICIES WEBSITE

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- Academic integrity
- Student and instructor conduct
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Attendance and excused absences
- Grades and appeals
- Copyright and intellectual property

Please visit <https://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html> for the Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with me if you have questions.

3. MAKEUP EXAM POLICY/EXCUSED ABSENCES

All students can miss one exam. No documentation is necessary. It is the responsibility of the student to make this exam up; ideally within two weeks of the initially scheduled exam. I will follow UMD's policy on excused absences when determining the eligibility to make up any other exam. All scheduled makeup exams must be taken by the last day of class. You are responsible for scheduling the makeup exams with Dr. Vélez.

4. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

The use of AI tools (ChatGPT, TerpAI, Gemini, Grammarly, etc.) is **prohibited** for any part of the assignment process in this class, including brainstorming, writing, and editing. Spelling and simple grammar checks are acceptable. This policy aims to foster your ability to develop original ideas and a unique voice, both core skills of this class. Any use of AI-generated work to outline, write, create, or edit your assignments will be considered an academic integrity violation and will be subject to a referral to the Office of Student Conduct. If you have any questions about this policy, please contact Dr. Vélez.

5. ELMS

I use ELMS to post materials related to our course such as the syllabus, readings, PPT slides, grades, and handouts. Go to <http://elms.umd.edu> and log in with your Directory ID (logon ID) and password to use this feature. I will send announcements via ELMS. **Grades listed on ELMS are raw scores (percentages) and have not been weighted to calculate your final grade. Please do not rely on the Assignments or Total column to determine your final grade.** Graduating seniors are graded on the same scale as all other students.

6. USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Students will be allowed to use their personal computers to take class notes. If a student is found to be using personal technology devices in any way that is not related to taking class notes, the student will lose the privilege of using any personal technology device for the duration of the semester. **I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand. Research is mounting on the benefits of taking notes by hand than typing them on a computer for effective learning.** All cell phones need to be silent when class begins. NO EXCEPTIONS!

Below is the course outline; note that it is subject to modification. All non-book readings are available on ELMS and denoted by *R#*

WEEK 1 (8/31-9/4) Monday Introduction of the Course (Read: Snipes et al. Chapters 1 & 2; Adler, <i>R1</i>)	Wednesday Theoretical Foundations; Nature and Extent of Crime
WEEK 2 (9/7-9/11) Monday <u>LABOR DAY – NO CLASS</u>	Wednesday <i>Discussion Day</i> <u>Writing Assignment handout</u> (Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 3 & 4; Carlisi et al., <i>R2</i>)
WEEK 3 (9/14-9/18) Monday Theoretical Foundations; Nature and Extent of Crime (Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 13; Lopez and Rosenfeld, <i>R3</i>)	Wednesday Foundations of Criminological Theory: Classical and Positive Schools
WEEK 4 (9/21-9/25) Monday Classical and Positive Schools (Read: Winter and Sampson, <i>R4</i>)	Wednesday Classical and Positive Schools

WEEK 5 (9/28-10/2) Monday EXAM 1	Wednesday Anomie/Strain Theories (Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 5 & 6; Schleimer et al, <i>R5</i> ; Broidy, <i>R6</i>)
WEEK 6 (10/5-10/9) Monday Cultural Deviance Theories (Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 8; Cao et al., <i>R7</i> ; Lantz and Wenger, <i>R8</i>)	Wednesday <i>Discussion Day</i>
WEEK 7 (10/12-10/16) Monday <u>FALL BREAK – NO CLASS</u>	Wednesday Social Learning Theories (Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 9; Copp et al., <i>R9</i>)
WEEK 8 (10/19-10/23) Monday Social Control Theory (Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 14; Semenza et al., <i>R10</i>)	Wednesday Social Control Theory and a General Theory of Crime
WEEK 9 (10/26-10/30) Monday EXAM 2	Wednesday Social Disorganization Theory
WEEK 10 (11/2-11/6) Monday Social Disorganization Theory (Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 7; Shaw and McKay, <i>R11</i> ; Sampson et al., <i>R12</i>)	Wednesday Social Disorganization Theory

WEEK 11 (11/9-11/13) Monday Social Disorganization Theory; Community General Strain Theory (Read: Chapter 15.5 in Snipes et al. (p. 430 – 437); Vélez, <i>R13</i>; Bersani et al., <i>R14</i>)	Wednesday Structural Dislocations
WEEK 12 (11/16-11/20) Monday Structural Dislocations (Read: Wilson, <i>R15</i>; Moyer et al., <i>R16</i>)	Wednesday EXAM 3
WEEK 13 (11/23-27) Monday Multi-Level Theories & Theoretical Integration; Introduce Goyal's <i>Live to See the Day</i> (Read most of Goyal's <i>Live to See the Day</i>)	Wednesday THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS
WEEK 14 (11/30-12/4) Monday The Intersections of Race, Place and Crime (Finish reading Goyal's <i>Live to See the Day</i>; Snipes et al. Chapters 10 & 11)	Wednesday The Intersections of Race, Place and Crime <i>WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE</i>
WEEK 15 (12/7-12/11) Monday Gender and Crime (Snipes et al. Chapter 12; Bernburg et al., <i>R17</i>)	Wednesday Conflict and Labeling Theories; Last Day of class
EXAM 4 (FINAL) Wednesday December 16th from 4 to 6 pm in our classroom* *Based on Registrar's list of standard timeslots; this exam time could change so I will make sure students know of any changes (which is rare)	