

Contemporary Criminological Theory – (CCJS 454:0101)
MW 2 to 3:15 pm, Tydings 2109
Spring 2026

Instructor: Dr. María B. Vélez (she/hers)
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Office Hours: Mondays from 10:45 to 11:45 am; Wednesdays from 11:30 am to 1 pm; and by appointment

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 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. 18 readings from 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 Monday, February 2nd. This assignment is due on Wednesday, April 29th (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: It is your responsibility to make sure that you complete and turn in the assignment. *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.*

Make-up policy. See point #3 under classroom business.

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.

COURSE GRADE

Grades will be determined as follows:

		Grade	% of total points	Grade	% of total points
Exam 1	10 %	A+	100-97	C	76-73
Exam 2	15 %	A	96-93	C-	72-70
Exam 3	20 %	A-	92-90	D+	69-67
Exam 4	25 %	B+	89-87	D	66-63
Writing Assign.	30 %	B	86-83	D-	62-60
Total	100%	B-	82-80	F	Below 60
		C+	79-77		

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.

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 the 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. 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.

5. 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 (1/26-1/30) Monday SNOW DAY: familiarize yourself with the syllabus and work on your readings for this week (Read: Snipes et al. Chapters 1 & 2; Adler, <i>RI</i>)	Wednesday Quick Introduction of the Course; Theoretical Foundations; Nature and Extent of Crime
WEEK 2 (2/2-2/6) Monday Theoretical Foundations; Nature and Extent of Crime <u>Writing Assignment handout</u> (Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 3 & 4; Carlisi et al., <i>R2</i>)	Wednesday Criminological Sources of Data & Methods

<p>WEEK 3 (2/9-2/13)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Foundations of Criminological Theory: Classical and Positive Schools</p> <p>(Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 13; Lopez and Rosenfeld, <i>R3</i>)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p><i>Discussion Day</i></p>
<p>WEEK 4 (2/16-2/20)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>NO CLASS DUE TO DR. VÉLEZ TRAVELING TO A CONFERENCE</p> <p>(Read: Winter and Sampson, <i>R4</i>)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>Classical and Positive Schools</p>
<p>WEEK 5 (2/23-2/27)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>EXAM 1</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>Anomie/Strain Theories</p> <p>(Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 5 & 6; Schleimer et al, <i>R5</i>; Broidy, <i>R6</i>)</p>
<p>WEEK 6 (3/2-3/6)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Cultural Deviance Theories</p> <p>(Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 8; Cao et al., <i>R7</i>; Lantz and Wenger, <i>R8</i>)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p><i>Discussion Day</i></p>
<p>WEEK 7 (3/9-3/13)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Social Learning Theories</p> <p>(Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 9; Copp et al., <i>R9</i>)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>Social Control Theories</p>
<p>WEEK 8 (3/16-3/20)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p><u>Spring Break</u></p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p><u>Spring Break</u></p>

<p>WEEK 9 (3/23-3/27)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Social Control Theory</p> <p>(Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 14; Semenza et al., R10)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>EXAM 2</p>
<p>WEEK 10 (3/30-4/3)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Social Disorganization Theory</p> <p>(Read: Snipes et al. Chapter 7; Shaw and McKay, R11; Sampson et al., R12)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>Social Disorganization Theory</p>
<p>WEEK 11 (4/6-4/10)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Social Disorganization Theory</p> <p>(Read: Chapter 15.5 in Snipes et al. (p. 430 – 437); Vélez, R13; Bersani et al., R14)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>Structural Dislocations</p>
<p>WEEK 12 (4/13-4/17)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Structural Dislocations</p> <p>(Read: Wilson, R15)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>EXAM 3</p>
<p>WEEK 13 (4/20-4/24)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Multi-Level Theories & Theoretical Integration; Introduce Goyal's <i>Live to See the Day</i></p> <p>(Read most of Goyal's <i>Live to See the Day</i>)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p>

<p>WEEK 14 (4/27-5/1)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>The Intersections of Race, Place and Crime (Finish reading Goyal's <i>Live to See the Day</i>; Snipes et al. Chapters 12, 10 & 11)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>The Intersections of Race, Place and Crime</p> <p><i>WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE</i></p>
<p>WEEK 15 (5/4-5/8)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Gender and Crime (Bernburg et al., <i>R16</i>; Chambliss, <i>R17</i>; Moyer et al., <i>R18</i>)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>Conflict and Labeling Theories; Last Day of class</p>
<p>EXAM 4 (FINAL)</p> <p>Thursday, May 14th from 4 to 6pm in our classroom</p>	