

# MIDWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY

Department of Sociology

## SOC 3333: Criminology

Fall 2026 | Fully Online (Asynchronous)

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Instructor:</b>    | Nicholas Membrez-Weiler, PhD                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Email:</b>         | nicholas.membrez@msutexas.edu                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Office:</b>        | O'Donohoe Hall (PY), Room O134                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Office Hours:</b>  | Monday 12:30–1:30 and 3:30–4:30; Tuesday 10:00–12:00; Wednesday 8:45–9:45 and 12:30–1:30; Thursday and Friday by appointment. Office hours are available virtually or in person. |
| <b>Course Format:</b> | Fully online, asynchronous. All course activity takes place in D2L.                                                                                                              |
| <b>Dates:</b>         | 8/24/2026-12/12/2026                                                                                                                                                             |

## COURSE PREREQUISITE

SOC 1133 or PSY 1103

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the field of criminology, providing an overview of the issues involved in defining, measuring, and explaining crime. Students will learn about the field of criminology, examine general characteristics, definitions, and perspectives on crime and criminals, review classic and contemporary theories that attempt to explain criminal behavior, and discuss crime in the modern world. This course offers an overview of psychological, economic, and sociobiological accounts of crime, but the central perspective (as is the case with most contemporary criminology) is sociological.

Because this is a fully online course, your learning happens through structured weekly engagement: careful reading of the textbook, weekly discussion forums where you interact with your peers, and a semester-long scaffolded research project in which you become the resident expert on a type of criminal offending of your choosing. Treat each week like a class meeting: log in early, post thoughtfully, and stay on schedule.

| THE WEEKLY RHYTHM                     |                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Monday</b>                         | The new week opens in D2L. Start the chapter and open that week's interactive data activity. |
| <b>Wednesday, 11:59 PM</b>            | Forum initial post due (forum weeks).                                                        |
| <b>Friday, 11:59 PM</b>               | Two peer replies due (forum weeks). Term paper parts are also due on Fridays.                |
| <b>Friday 5 PM to Sunday 11:59 PM</b> | Exam window (exam weeks only). No forum those weeks.                                         |

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

After this course, students should be able to:

- Recognize and explain different definitions of crime
- Explain and critique a multitude of theoretical explanations for crime

- Explain how crime is studied scientifically along multiple dimensions
- Locate, evaluate, and synthesize scholarly research using university library resources
- Review literature on a criminological topic and communicate that review effectively in writing
- Engage in constructive, evidence-based discussion of crime and justice issues with peers

## REQUIRED TEXT

Zito, Rena C. *Engaged Criminology: An Introduction*. 1st edition. SAGE Publications.

Additional readings and materials may be posted to D2L up to two weeks prior to their assigned week.

## GRADING

### Grade Distribution

| Component                                         | Points     | % of Grade  |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Weekly Discussion Forums (10 of 11 count)         | 100        | 25%         |
| Exams (4 exams, 40 pts each, final is cumulative) | 160        | 40%         |
| Scaffolded Term Paper (5 parts)                   | 140        | 35%         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                      | <b>400</b> | <b>100%</b> |

### Grading Scale

|            |           |           |           |              |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| A: 90–100% | B: 80–89% | C: 70–79% | D: 60–69% | F: Below 60% |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|

## WEEKLY DISCUSSION FORUMS (100 PTS • 25%)

Discussion forums are the participation backbone of this online course. They replace the in-class discussion you would have in a face-to-face section. There are 11 graded forums across the semester (there are no forums during exam weeks, Thanksgiving break, or finals week). Your 10 highest forum scores count toward your grade, and the lowest is dropped. Each forum is worth 10 points:

- **Initial post (6 pts):** Due Wednesday by 11:59 PM. A substantive response to that week's prompt (roughly 250–300 words) that engages directly with the assigned chapter. Cite specific concepts, use the vocabulary, and go beyond opinion.
- **Two peer replies (2 pts each):** Due Friday by 11:59 PM. High-quality replies extend, complicate, or respectfully challenge a classmate's post using course material. "Great post, I agree!" earns no credit.

Most weekly prompts are built around a short interactive data activity linked in that week's module. Open the activity before you write. Your initial post should engage with what you found there as well as with the chapter.

Because the lowest score is dropped, there are no make-ups or extensions for forums. Holiday weeks are already built into the schedule.

## EXAMS (160 PTS • 40%)

There are four exams, each worth 40 points, administered online through D2L. Exams may include multiple choice, true/false, matching, short answer, and essay questions (not all categories will always be included). Exams 1–3 open Friday at 5:00 PM and close Sunday at 11:59 PM of their scheduled week.

| Exam              | Coverage                                                                                   | Window                                    |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| <b>Exam 1</b>     | Chapters 1–5 (Foundations: defining, researching, and describing crime)                    | Fri Sep 25 – Sun Sep 27                   |
| <b>Exam 2</b>     | Chapters 6–9 (Origins of criminology and the contemporary, control, and learning theories) | Fri Oct 23 – Sun Oct 25                   |
| <b>Exam 3</b>     | Chapters 10–12 (Strain, labeling, and victimology)                                         | Fri Nov 13 – Sun Nov 15                   |
| <b>Final Exam</b> | Cumulative, with emphasis on Chapters 13–14 (punishment and crime prevention)              | Finals week, window set per the registrar |

Make-up exams are available only with a documented excused absence and require communication with the instructor before the exam window closes. Do not wait until after the window has passed to reach out.

## SCAFFOLDED TERM PAPER (140 PTS • 35%)

Over the semester you will complete a five-part research project on a type of criminal offending of your choosing (e.g., intimate partner violence, burglary, identity theft, robbery, drug distribution, corporate fraud, hate crime). Parts 1–4 are short papers (2–3 pages each, double-spaced, plus a works cited page) that each tackle one dimension of your offense type. Part 5 combines and revises the first four into a cohesive mini-literature review: a narrative account of what criminology knows about your chosen type of offending.

You will use the university library's databases to locate scholarly sources throughout. Detailed instructions and a rubric for each part will be posted to D2L at least two weeks before its due date. Every part must include a works cited page with appropriately formatted references, and must be submitted to D2L as a .PDF or .DOC/.DOCX file. Other formats will not receive credit. No late submissions are accepted.

**Required office hours meetings:** Three one-on-one office hours meetings with me (virtual or in person) are a required part of this project: one before Part 1 is due (Fri Sep 11), one before Part 3 is due (Fri Oct 30), and one before Part 5 is due (Fri Dec 4). We will use these meetings to talk through your topic, your sources, and your progress. Meetings are scheduled by appointment, and you are welcome to come to office hours any other time you feel like you need help with the paper.

**AI tools and this paper:** Each part of the paper will come with specific instructions for how AI tools may and may not be used on that part. Using AI outside those stated boundaries is a violation of academic integrity. See the Academic Integrity policy below.

| Part          | Pts | Description                                                                                                                                                                           | Due Date          |
|---------------|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Part 1</b> | 25  | Topic selection: choose your offense type, state a preliminary research question, and locate 3 peer-reviewed sources through the university library with a brief annotation for each. | <b>Fri Sep 11</b> |
| <b>Part 2</b> | 25  | Defining and measuring: how is your offense legally and conceptually defined, how is it measured (UCR/NIBRS, NCVS, self-report), and what do prevalence and trend data show?          | <b>Fri Oct 9</b>  |
| <b>Part 3</b> | 25  | Patterns and correlates: who offends, who is victimized, and where and when does your offense occur? Engage demographic, geographic, and situational patterns in the research.        | <b>Fri Oct 30</b> |
| <b>Part 4</b> | 25  | Theoretical explanations: apply at least two theories from this course to explain your offense type, and evaluate which explanation the empirical evidence best supports.             | <b>Fri Nov 20</b> |
| <b>Part 5</b> | 40  | Mini-literature review: combine Parts 1–4 (revised per feedback) into one cohesive narrative review (8–10 pages) of                                                                   | <b>Fri Dec 4</b>  |

| Part | Pts | Description                                                                              | Due Date |
|------|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
|      |     | what we know about the criminology of your offense type, including gaps in the research. |          |

## COURSE POLICIES

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### Late Work

Late assignments are not accepted without prior arrangement and appropriate documentation. Please communicate early. Do not wait until after a deadline has passed.

### Academic Integrity

All submitted work must be your own. This includes putting written work into your own words and citing your sources appropriately to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism and academic dishonesty will result in a zero on the assignment and may be referred to the university for further action.

Use of AI tools to generate submitted work is not permitted, with one exception: the scaffolded term paper. Each part of the paper will include specific instructions for how AI tools may be used on that part. Going outside those stated boundaries constitutes a violation of academic integrity and will be treated as academic dishonesty. When in doubt, cite your sources and ask me first.

### Netiquette & the Online Environment

This course covers real social phenomena: violence, victimization, inequality, punishment. These topics matter, and they can be uncomfortable. I expect all students to engage with course material and with each other with intellectual curiosity and mutual respect, especially in the forums, where tone is easy to misread. Debate and disagreement are welcome. Disrespect is not.

### Technology & Getting Help

You will need reliable internet access and a computer capable of running D2L in a current browser. Plan ahead for exam windows: do not start an exam on a connection you do not trust. If you have a technical problem during an exam or right before a deadline, contact the university IT help desk and email me before the deadline passes, not after. The library's databases are fully accessible online and are the expected source base for the term paper. If you are struggling with the course material itself, office hours (virtual or in person) are the fastest way to get unstuck.

### Americans with Disabilities Act (Accommodations)

If a student has an established disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADAAA) and would like to request accommodation, please contact me as soon as possible. Any student requesting accommodations should first contact Disability Support Services at 940-397-4140, Clark Student Center room 168, to document and coordinate reasonable accommodations if they have not already done so. I am committed to ensuring full participation for all students.

### Religious Observance

Students who must miss a deadline due to religious observance should notify the instructor at least one week in advance. Reasonable accommodations will be made without penalty.

### Communication

I will reply to emails within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends. Please include the course number (SOC 3333) in your subject line. For anything complex or time-sensitive, office hours (virtual or in person) are a better option than email.

### Recorded and Posted Course Materials

All course materials, including any recorded lectures, posted videos, activities, and exam content, are for the personal use of students enrolled in this course and may not be uploaded to the internet or otherwise shared, transmitted, or published without the professor's prior consent. Students requiring recordings or alternative formats as a disability accommodation should coordinate with Disability Support Services.

### Title IX: Obligation to Report Sex Discrimination

Midwestern State University is committed to providing and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from sex discrimination of any kind. State and federal law require University employees to report sex discrimination and sexual misconduct to the University's Office of Title IX. As a faculty member, I am required to report to the Title IX Coordinator any allegations, personally observed behavior, or other direct or indirect knowledge of conduct that reasonably may constitute sex discrimination or sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence, or stalking, involving a student or employee. After a report is made, the Office of Title IX will reach out to the affected student or employee in an effort to connect them with resources and options for addressing the allegations in the report. You are also encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Title IX directly.

Contact: Laura Hetrick, Title IX Coordinator, Sunwatcher Village Clubhouse, 940-397-4213, [laura.hetrick@msutexas.edu](mailto:laura.hetrick@msutexas.edu). You may also file an online report 24/7 at [https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?MSUTexas&layout\\_id=6](https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?MSUTexas&layout_id=6). Should you wish to speak with someone about your experience in confidence, you may contact the MSU Counseling Center at 940-397-4618. For more information on the University's policy on Title IX or sexual misconduct, visit <https://msutexas.edu/titleix/>.

### Campus Carry

Senate Bill 11, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature, allows licensed handgun holders to carry concealed handguns on campus, effective August 1, 2016. Areas excluded from concealed carry are appropriately marked, in accordance with state law. For more information regarding campus carry, please refer to the University's Campus Carry webpage.

### Emergency Aid Resources for Basic Needs

Unexpected life circumstances can affect anyone. If you are experiencing challenges meeting basic needs, such as housing, utilities, food, transportation, healthcare, technology, or textbooks, resources may be available to help. Visit the Student Emergency Support and Resources webpage at <https://msutexas.edu/student-life/dean/student-emergency-support-and-resources.php> to learn more and explore emergency support opportunities through MSU. For additional information, contact the Office of Student Affairs: Clark Student Center 108, (940) 397-7500, [student.affairs@msutexas.edu](mailto:student.affairs@msutexas.edu).

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Each week runs Monday through Sunday in D2L. Readings should be completed early in the week, before your forum post. ★ indicates a deadline or exam. Forum initial posts are due Wednesday 11:59 PM. Two peer replies are due Friday 11:59 PM. This schedule is subject to change with two weeks' notice via D2L.

| Week                       | Topic, Readings & Assignments                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>WEEK 1 Aug 24-28</b>    | <b>What Is Criminology?</b><br>Course introduction, the syllabus, and Ch. 1: What Is Criminology?<br>Forum 1: Introductions + Ch. 1 prompt (post Wed Aug 26 · replies Fri Aug 28)                                                                       |
| <b>WEEK 2 Aug 31-Sep 4</b> | <b>Researching Crime</b><br>Ch. 2: Researching Crime<br>Forum 2 (post Wed Sep 2 · replies Fri Sep 4)   <b>Term Paper Part 1 introduced</b><br><i>Schedule your first required paper meeting (virtual or in person, before Part 1 is due Fri Sep 11)</i> |

| Week                       | Topic, Readings & Assignments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>WEEK 3 Sep 7–11</b>     | <b>Common Crime Typologies</b><br>Ch. 3: Violent, Property, and Public-Order Crimes (Mon Sep 7 is Labor Day)<br>Forum 3 (post Wed Sep 9 • replies Fri Sep 11)<br><b>★ Term Paper Part 1 Due: Fri Sep 11 • Topic + question + 3 library sources</b>                                |
| <b>WEEK 4 Sep 14–18</b>    | <b>Beyond Street Crime</b><br>Ch. 4: White-Collar Crime, Organized Crime, Cybercrime, Hate Crime, and Terrorism<br>Forum 4 (post Wed Sep 16 • replies Fri Sep 18)                                                                                                                 |
| <b>WEEK 5 Sep 21–25</b>    | <b>Patterns in Crime + EXAM 1</b><br>Ch. 5: Patterns in Crime   No forum this week. Review for the exam.<br><b>★ EXAM 1 (Ch. 1–5): opens Fri Sep 25, 5:00 PM, closes Sun Sep 27, 11:59 PM</b>                                                                                     |
| <b>WEEK 6 Sep 28–Oct 2</b> | <b>Origins of Criminology</b><br>Ch. 6: Origins of Criminology<br>Forum 5 (post Wed Sep 30 • replies Fri Oct 2)   <b>Term Paper Part 2 introduced</b>                                                                                                                             |
| <b>WEEK 7 Oct 5–9</b>      | <b>Contemporary Schools of Thought</b><br>Ch. 7: Contemporary Schools of Thought<br>Forum 6 (post Wed Oct 7 • replies Fri Oct 9)<br><b>★ Term Paper Part 2 Due: Fri Oct 9 • Defining and measuring your offense</b>                                                               |
| <b>WEEK 8 Oct 12–16</b>    | <b>Control Perspectives</b><br>Ch. 8: Control Perspectives<br>Forum 7 (post Wed Oct 14 • replies Fri Oct 16)<br><i>Schedule your second required paper meeting (before Part 3 is due Fri Oct 30)</i>                                                                              |
| <b>WEEK 9 Oct 19–23</b>    | <b>Learning &amp; Subcultural Perspectives + EXAM 2</b><br>Ch. 9: Learning and Subcultural Perspectives   No forum this week.<br><b>★ EXAM 2 (Ch. 6–9): opens Fri Oct 23, 5:00 PM, closes Sun Oct 25, 11:59 PM</b>                                                                |
| <b>WEEK 10 Oct 26–30</b>   | <b>Strain Perspectives</b><br>Ch. 10: Strain Perspectives<br>Forum 8 (post Wed Oct 28 • replies Fri Oct 30)<br><b>★ Term Paper Part 3 Due: Fri Oct 30 • Patterns and correlates</b>                                                                                               |
| <b>WEEK 11 Nov 2–6</b>     | <b>Labeling and Defiance</b><br>Ch. 11: Labeling and Defiance<br>Forum 9 (post Wed Nov 4 • replies Fri Nov 6)   <b>Term Paper Part 4 introduced</b>                                                                                                                               |
| <b>WEEK 12 Nov 9–13</b>    | <b>Victimology + EXAM 3</b><br>Ch. 12: What Is Victimology?   No forum this week.<br><b>★ EXAM 3 (Ch. 10–12): opens Fri Nov 13, 5:00 PM, closes Sun Nov 15, 11:59 PM</b>                                                                                                          |
| <b>WEEK 13 Nov 16–20</b>   | <b>Theories of Punishment</b><br>Ch. 13: Theories of Punishment<br>Forum 10 (post Wed Nov 18 • replies Fri Nov 20)<br><b>★ Term Paper Part 4 Due: Fri Nov 20 • Theoretical explanations</b><br><i>Schedule your third required paper meeting (before Part 5 is due Fri Dec 4)</i> |
| <b>WEEK 14 Nov 23–27</b>   | <b>THANKSGIVING BREAK</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

| Week                        | Topic, Readings & Assignments                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                             | No forum, no readings. Recommended: use this week to draft Part 5 (the mini-literature review).                                                                                                                          |
| <b>WEEK 15 Nov 30–Dec 4</b> | <b>Place-Based Prevention &amp; Wrap-Up</b><br>Ch. 14: Place-Based Approaches to Preventing Crime<br>Forum 11 (post Wed Dec 2 · replies Fri Dec 4)<br><b>★ Term Paper Part 5 Due: Fri Dec 4 · Mini-literature review</b> |
| <b>FINALS WEEK</b>          | <b>Final Exam</b><br><b>★ FINAL EXAM · Cumulative, emphasis on Ch. 13–14. Exam window set per the registrar. Details posted to D2L.</b>                                                                                  |

*This syllabus is a living document. Any changes will be announced and posted to D2L.*