

CRMJ 254
Introduction to Criminal Justice
Fall 2025

Contact Information

Instructor Name: Dr. Michelle Manasse

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Course Meeting Location/Time: Liberal Arts 1201 - Tues/Thurs, 9.30am-10.45am

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 12.30-2pm & by appointment!

Course Overview: This course will provide a broad overview of the purposes, processes and issues of the American criminal justice system. The class will be divided into four main sections: Law; Police; Courts; Corrections.

In the first section of the course, we will examine how laws in the United States come into existence and the rules by which those laws are applied. The next section will focus on how those laws are enforced, with special emphasis on the day-to-day experiences of American police and the issues of police misconduct. The unit on courts will provide a look at the structure/function of American courts as well as how bail/plea bargaining processes work and how sentences are determined. Finally, the last section of the course will address methods of punishment and control in the United States and the way the correctional facilities today attempt to deal with offenders.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

After completing this course students will be able to:

- Identify and describe the primary functions of the three branches of the criminal justice system: policing, courts, and corrections
- Describe the ways in which offenders and victims interact with the various agencies and institutions within the criminal justice system
- Describe the roles of actors involved in the CJ system such as police officers, prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, correctional officers, and probation officers
- Analyze and critically evaluate the way we generate knowledge about the criminal justice system and how that knowledge informs criminal justice policies and practices
- Identify and analyze sources of inequality within the criminal justice system

The *required* text for this course is:

- ◆ Criminal Justice: The Essentials, 6th edition, edited by Steven Lab & colleagues. 2021. Oxford University Press.
- ◆ There are also multiple reserve readings/media for this course. You can easily access these readings/media ONLINE through the Blackboard course site.

YOUR FINAL GRADE DEPENDS UPON THESE COURSE COMPONENTS:

(1) Quizzes: There will be **WEEKLY** timed quizzes (13 total) during the semester. The due date for each quiz is marked on the syllabus and posted on the course Blackboard site; all quizzes will be due on a Sunday, by midnight/end of day. The quizzes will be open note/book and will consist of multiple-choice questions. **Reading/watching the assigned course materials, attending class, and taking strong notes will prepare you for these quizzes.** Each quiz will consist of five 2-point questions and will be worth 10 points.

(2) Reflection Papers: There will be **THREE** topical reflection papers due during the semester (out of **FOUR** reflection paper assignments). *You are only required to complete 3 out of the 4 assignments; however, you DO have the option to complete all four, in which case your lowest grade will be dropped.* The due date for each reflection is marked on the syllabus and posted on the course Blackboard site; all papers will be due on a Sunday, by midnight/end of day. Reflection papers should be about 3-4 pages and will require you to respond to a specific prompt related to recent course topic(s) and/or readings. These assignments will be personal reflections, so there is no “correct” answer; however, your responses MUST explicitly reflect course material/assigned readings on that topic. Your grade will therefore be based BOTH on completion of the assignment and level of engagement with the course material. **ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE SUBMITTED IN WORD OR PDF FORMAT.** Each topical reflection paper will be worth 40 points.

(3) Examinations: There will be **TWO** exams in this course: one midterm (Thursday, October 9th) and one final (Thursday, December 11th). Each exam will consist of both a) an online multiple-choice component, worth 50 total points and b) 5 short answer questions (completed in-class), worth 50 total points, equaling 100 total points for each exam.

***NOTE: all short answer questions will be drawn from in-class discussion of course concepts/material!**

HOW THE FINAL GRADE WILL BE DETERMINED:

Midterm Exam= 50 points multiple-choice questions & 50 points short answer questions (100 points total)

Final Exam= 50 points multiple-choice questions & 50 points short answer questions (100 points total)

Quizzes= 10 points each (13x10 points = 130 points)

Topical Reflections= 40 points each (3x40 points = 120 points)
= 450 total points

Grading System

A = 418+ points

A- = 405-417 points

B+ = 391-404 points

B = 373-390 points

B- = 360-372 points

C+ = 347-359 points

C = 315-346 points

D+ = 301-314 points

D = 270-300 points

F = 269 points and below

My Responsibilities as Professor:

- (1)** ALL assignments and due dates are clearly listed both on the syllabus and in the week-by-week folders posted within the course Blackboard site. Additional assignments WILL NOT be added during the semester. Due dates will ONLY be changed in the event that they are extended (i.e., pushed to a later date) due to unexpected circumstances, and any such changes would be communicated both in class AND through the 'Announcements' section of the Blackboard site.
- (2)** Coursework will be graded promptly, with comments posted/viewable directly on the Blackboard site. Barring unforeseen circumstances (e.g., professor illness), grades will be posted no later than two weeks after submission.
- (3)** My job is to help you understand course material and support you in completing assignments! Therefore, in addition to posted office hours, I am happy to provide additional meeting times in person or via Zoom for questions/discussions on course material and assignments. Students are welcome to stop by during office hours OR request these one-on-one sessions at any time to discuss any questions or concerns.
- (4)** If/when tech problems arise...stay calm, let me know, and I will address them ASAP. Your grade WILL NOT be negatively affected by technical problems.
- (5)** I recognize that being a student can be difficult and stressful, and each of you has a unique set of life circumstances (jobs! kids! broken laptops!) that may add to your struggles from time to time. We are all human, and we are all in this together. Please ask for accommodation when you need it, and we will work together to ensure you have every opportunity to succeed in this course.

Your Responsibilities as a Student:

- (1)** Students are responsible for a) familiarizing yourself w/ the syllabus and all course requirements; b) reading ALL posts on the course Blackboard site; and c) keeping up with all Blackboard 'Announcements,' which will be used to communicate course updates and reminders.
- (2)** Prior to completing weekly quizzes, students are expected to read/view ALL assigned readings/videos and to attend all class sessions.
- (3)** Students are expected to keep track of due dates for quizzes/papers/exams and turn work in on time. To support this, ALL assignments (excluding the midterm & final exams, which will occur in class/person) will be due the Sunday after the material is covered in class, by the end of the day (midnight).
- (4)** If you are experiencing any kind of hardship that interferes with your ability to complete assigned coursework, please request accommodation so we can work together to ensure you have equal opportunity to succeed in the course.
Please note: students are **never required** to share personal information or health details with me, even to request accommodation. You are, however, welcome to do so, and any personal details that you choose to share will be kept confidential.
- (5)** Please understand that missing assignments and/or unexcused late work will negatively affect your final grade. If you are experiencing a hardship, please request accommodation. **If you do not do so, missing work will be counted as a zero and late work will receive the penalty of a half letter grade for every day it is late.**

Disability and Support Services

Students who have, or suspect that they may have, a disability should seek services through Accessibility and Disability Services [ADS]. Students must be registered with ADS and receive written authorization to obtain disability-related accommodation. If you require accommodation due to a disability, please visit ADS for guidance. I am happy to provide any/all accommodation authorized by ADS.

Academic Integrity

The faculty of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Criminal Justice expects students to demonstrate academic integrity at all times. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, any form of cheating or unapproved help on an exam or academic exercise, copying someone else's written work without citation, presenting fabricated information as legitimate, any unauthorized collaboration among students, or assisting someone to cheat in any way. Penalties for academic dishonesty are determined by the individual faculty member. **The *minimum* penalty for academic dishonesty in this class is a zero on the applicable assignment.** Students who are charged with academic dishonesty must remain enrolled in the course and cannot withdraw. Instructors will file a report of academic dishonesty with the Office of the Student Conduct and Civility Education, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, and to the Chair's Office in the department. For more information on academic integrity, see the TU Student Academic Integrity Policy (<http://catalog.towson.edu/undergraduate/appendices/appendix-f-code-student-conduct/>) and the College of Liberal Arts' Academic Integrity and Appeals Information, (<http://www.towson.edu/cla/resources/academic.html>). We also encourage students to make use of campus resources to learn more about academic integrity and how to avoid academic dishonesty, such as the resources provided by Cook Library and the Writing Center (<http://www.towson.edu/writingcenter>).

Mask Requirement

At the time of writing, TU does not have a mask requirement; students (and faculty!) will be expected to abide by any/all health-related policy TU might enact as the semester progresses.

Emergency Statement

In the event of a university-wide emergency, please note that course requirements, deadlines, and grading schemes are subject to changes that may include alternative delivery methods, alternative methods of interaction with the instructor and/or class materials, and a revised semester calendar and/or grading scheme. In the case of a university-wide emergency, please refer to the course Blackboard website and your TOWSON e-mail to learn about changes in this course. For general information about any emergency situation, please refer to the following:

1. Towson Web Site: www.towson.edu
2. TU Text Alert System: This is a service designed to alert the Towson University community via text messages to cell phones when situations arise on campus that affect the ability of the campus to function normally.

<http://www.towson.edu/adminfinance/facilities/police/campusemergency/>

** On the following pages is a schedule of the readings and/or media required for the course. **It is important to read/watch the assigned material prior to attending class!!** ANY/ALL articles or videos beyond the course text (Criminal Justice: The Essentials [CJTE]) will be available on the course Blackboard website. **

Course Schedule (Subject to revision)

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION + WHAT IS CRIME/JUSTICE?

Tuesday, August 26 & Thursday, August 28

1) CJTE, Chapter 1: Crime, Criminal Justice, and Policy, pp. 1-24

DUE Sunday, August 31st, end of day: QUIZ

WEEK 2: WHAT DOES THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM (ACTUALLY) DO? + PHILOSOPHIES OF PUNISHMENT

Tuesday, September 2 & Thursday, September 4

1) *RESERVE READING* Packer, “Two Models of the Criminal Process” in Criminal Justice: A Sociological Perspective

2) *RESERVE READING* Miethe & Lu, “Punishment Philosophies and Types of Sanctions” in Punishment: A Comparative Historical Perspective

DUE Sunday, September 7th, end of day: QUIZ + Reflection Paper #1

WEEK 3: BASICS OF U.S. CRIMINAL LAW & CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

Tuesday, September 9 & Thursday, September 11

1) CJTE, Chapter 2: Issues of Law, pp. 25-52

2) *RESERVE READING* “U.S. Constitution – Constitutional Amendments” (TAMU School of Law)

3) *RESERVE READING* Freivogel, “How Police Use Civil Asset Forfeiture” (Pulitzer Center & St. Louis Public Radio)

DUE Sunday, September 14th, end of day: QUIZ

WEEK 4: ROLES & FUNCTIONS OF POLICE

Tuesday, September 16 & Thursday, September 18

1) CJTE, Chapter 3: Policing and Law Enforcement, pp. 53-81

2) *RESERVE READING* Waxman, “How the US Got Its Police Force” (Time Magazine)

DUE Sunday, September 21st, end of day: QUIZ

WEEK 5: POLICE & THE LAW

Tuesday, September 23 & Thursday, September 25

1) *RESERVE READING* Friedman & Kerr, “Common Interpretation: 4th Amendment, Search & Seizure” (Interactive Constitution, by National Constitution Center)

2) *RESERVE READING* Bergner, “Is Stop and Frisk Worth It?” in The Atlantic

DUE Sunday, September 28th, end of day: QUIZ + Reflection Paper #2

WEEK 6: ISSUES & CHALLENGES IN POLICING

Tuesday, September 30 & Thursday, October 2

1) *RESERVE READING* Lopez, "American Policing is Broken: How to Fix It" (Vox)

2) *RESERVE READING* "Qualified Immunity" (Equal Justice Initiative)

DUE Sunday, October 5th, end of day: QUIZ

WEEK 7: EXAM WEEK

Tuesday, October 7: Catch up & exam review

Thursday, October 9: MIDTERM!!

WEEK 8: THE U.S. COURT SYSTEM & TRIAL PROCESS

Tuesday, October 14 & Thursday, October 16

1) CJTE, Chapter 4: The Court System, pp. 82-115

DUE Sunday, October 19th, end of day: QUIZ

WEEK 9: BAIL & PLEA BARGAINING

Tuesday, October 21 & Thursday, October 23

1) *RESERVE READING* "The Ins & Outs of Bail" (The Marshall Project)

2) *RESERVE READING* Guidorizzi, "Should We Really 'Ban' Plea Bargaining?: Core Concerns of Plea Bargaining Critics" in Criminal Justice: A Sociological Perspective

DUE Sunday, October 26th, end of day: QUIZ + Reflection Paper #3

WEEK 10: ISSUES & CHALLENGES IN U.S. COURTS

Tuesday, October 28 & Thursday, October 30

1) *RESERVE READING* Ghandnoosh et al., "One in Five: Racial Disparity in Imprisonment – Causes & Remedies" (The Sentencing Project)

2) *RESERVE READING* Nellis, "Still Life: America's Increasing Use of Life and Long-Term Sentences" (The Sentencing Project)

DUE Sunday, November 2nd, end of day: QUIZ

WEEK 11: COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS, PROBATION & PAROLE

Tuesday, November 4 & Thursday, November 6

1) CJTE, Chapter 6: Community Corrections, pp. 152-183

2) *RESERVE READING* "Probation & Parole Systems: Issue Brief" (The Pew Charitable Trusts)

DUE Sunday, November 9th, end of day: QUIZ

WEEK 12: STRUCTURE & FUNCTION OF U.S. JAILS/PRISONS

Tuesday, November 11

1) CJTE, Chapter 5: Institutional Corrections, pp. 116-151

2) *RESERVE READING* Sawyer & Wagner, "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie" (2025) from the Prison Policy Initiative

****NO IN-CLASS MEETING on Thursday, November 13****

DUE Sunday, November 16th, end of day: QUIZ

WEEK 13: ISSUES & CHALLENGES IN U.S. CORRECTIONS

Tuesday, November 18 & Thursday, November 20

- 1) *RESERVE READING* Wang, "Chronic Punishment: The unmet health needs of people in state prisons" by the Prison Policy Initiative
- 2) *RESERVE READING* Wykstra, "The Case Against Solitary Confinement" in *Vox*
DUE Sunday, November 23rd, end of day: QUIZ + Reflection Paper #4

****WEEK 14: November 25 & 27 – THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS!****

WEEK 15: REENTRY AFTER INCARCERATION

Tuesday, December 2 & Thursday, December 4

- 1) *RESERVE READING* Gudrais, "The Prison Problem" in *Harvard Magazine*
DUE Sunday, December 7th, end of day: QUIZ

****FINAL EXAM will be on THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11th, 8-10am****