



**LAW AND SOCIETY (CI)**

Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Anthropology  
 SOC 4420, Broadcast Section, Spring 2018, CRN 23-304/305/306/307/308/763 and 24939  
 Tuesday/Thursday, 9:00-10:15 am  
 Old Main, Room 117

Instructor: Stephen G. VanGeem, PhD  
 E-mail: stephen.vangeem@usu.edu  
 Office: Old Main 224D  
 Office hours: Wednesday 10:00 am - 12:30 pm and by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES**

The criminal justice system is the premiere formal institution of social control in the United States. The aim of the system is enforce the social norms that we have codified into law and maintain the rights of the accused, the rights of those that have been victimized, and the rights of law-abiding society. This course will provide a brief overview of the criminal justice system as well as a critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of that system as it is currently configured. Students will participate in a series of in-class debates about many of the most contentious issues in the current legal system, and will examine the disconnection between the ideal of law and the reality of law.

**REQUIRED TEXT AND EQUIPMENT**

- Hickey, Thomas J. (2016). *Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Crime and Criminology* (12th edition). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lab, Steven P., Marian R. Williams, Jefferson E. Holcomb, Melissa W. Burek, William R. King, and Michael E. Buerger. (2016) *Criminal Justice: The Essentials* (4th edition). New York: Oxford University Press.

**STUDENT EVALUATION**

Your course grade will be based upon two exams, a series of persuasive presentation assignments, and class participation. Each exam is worth 15 percent, persuasive presentation assignments are worth 50 percent, and participation in class discussion is worth 20 percent.

- Exam #1 15%
  - Exam #2 15%
  - Persuasive Presentation Assignments 45%
  - Participation: Class Discussion 16%
  - Participation: Pre-/Post-Discussion Surveys 9%
- Total 100%

**GRADING SCALE**

A 93 and above	A- 92-90	
B+ 89-87	B 86-83	B- 82-80
C+ 79-77	C 76-73	C- 72-70
D+ 69-67	D 66-60	F 59 and below

## LECTURES AND ATTENDANCE

This course is aimed at facilitated discussion more than knowledge obtainment, so the class is primarily built around student-made persuasive presentations (see the PERSUASIVE PRESENTATION ASSIGNMENTS section below). Attendance is not mandatory for this course but student absences will have an indirect effect on your semester grade. As this is a discussion-based course, participation will directly factor into your final grade (see the PARTICIPATION section below), and you cannot participate if you are not here.

## EXAMINATIONS

There are two exams given throughout the semester, one exam administered halfway through the semester and one exam scheduled during finals week. Both exams will be worth 60 points and will contain a combination of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer questions. **\*THE FINAL EXAM WILL NOT BE CUMULATIVE.\***

## PERSUASIVE PRESENTATION ASSIGNMENTS

This course is designed to have weekly debates about contentious topics that we will be exposed to in class. For this assignment, two teams of students will collaborate in groups of 4-5 to prepare separate 15-20 minutes persuasive presentations. **\*EACH STUDENT WILL BE REQUIRED TO PARTICIPATE IN 3 DEBATES OVER THE COURSE OF THE SEMESTER\***

Each group will present conflicting sides of a difficult issue in criminal justice, followed by 20-30 minutes of in-class discussion. Assessment will be based upon four components: the quality of persuasive presentation itself (60%), moderation of an in-class discussion (10%), assessment of and by other group members (20%), and a pre- and post-presentation peer opinion surveys (10%).

The quality of each presentation will be based upon: (1) organization, (2) delivery, and (3) content. The group assessment will require each group member to rate his or her colleagues on: (1) collaboration skills, (2) content identification and contribution, (3) responsibility, and (4) overall group participation. **\*GROUP ASSESSMENT SURVEYS MUST BE COMPLETED ON CANVAS BY 8 PM MT ON THE SUNDAY AFTER YOUR DEBATE\***

All students, whether they are involved in either presentation or not, will be asked to participate extensively during the in-class debate. All students will be required to fill out a brief "pre-debate" survey and "post-debate" survey so that I can gauge the persuasiveness of each presentation.

## *ACKNOWLEDGING THE DIFFICULTIES OF GROUP WORK*

If a group is finding a particular member difficult to work with, that group can "fire" that member if he/she is struggling to meet his/her group obligations. The "fired" group member will have to turn in a make-assignment directly to me at a later date. **\*EACH STUDENT CAN ONLY BE "FIRED" ONCE THIS SEMESTER AND STILL SUBMIT A MAKE-UP ASSIGNMENT\***

## PARTICIPATION

Student participation is worth 25 percent of the overall semester grade and is tied to (1) class discussion and (2) participation in pre-/post-discussion opinion surveys. Participation in class discussion is worth 16 percent of your final grade, while the opinion surveys are worth 9 percent.

### *CLASS DISCUSSION*

Discussion grades will be contingent upon substantial participation in each class debate after listening to both persuasive presentations.

### *PRE-/POST-DISCUSSION OPINION SURVEYS*

As student presentations are meant to be persuasive in nature, I have included two weekly opinion surveys as part of class participation in order to tap into *\*how\** persuasive each presentation might be. Students will be asked at the beginning of class (prior to watching either group presentation) to gauge where they stand on a contentious contemporary issue in criminal justice.

At the end of class, after watching both presentations and participating fully in the online discussion, students will be asked the same question again in order to see how much their opinion shifted as a result of the arguments put forth. Any shift will be aggregated with the rest of the class to see who ultimately “won” the debate by changing the most minds. “Winning” the debate will be factored into the group presentation grades for that week. **\*ALL STUDENTS MUST PARTICIPATE IN PRE-/POST-DISCUSSION OPINION SURVEYS INCLUDING THOSE THAT ARE PRESENTING THAT WEEK.\***

### **COURSE POLICIES**

1. The subject matter of this course can be both highly theoretical and highly technical, which means that the material can be rather dense and difficult to understand at times. My role is to help clarify each topic, provide explanations and context that are not included in the readings, and answer any questions that you might have, but you are expected to read all of the assigned readings so that you can participate as fully as possible. In addition, you are responsible for knowing the content of any supplemental materials posted to the online-classroom in Canvas, including any additional written or audio lectures.
2. Please extend courtesy and respect to your fellow students in any discussion and avoid any overtly hostile or demeaning language when reacting to another student's ideas. Repeated disrespectful and rude behavior may be grounds for dismissal from the class.
3. Late assignments will not be accepted unless: (1) you notify me 48 hours *\*before\** the assignment is due and (2) provide me with an acceptable reason for why the assignment will be late. I may request written documentation for the excuse if deemed necessary. If you do not follow this procedure then you will receive a zero on the assignment.
4. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated (see below).
5. This syllabus is not a contract. I reserve the right to modify this syllabus at any time throughout the semester and will give you ample notification beforehand via class-wide announcements. It is your responsibility to stay abreast of any changes made.
6. In line with university policy, students with disabilities who are in need of academic accommodations must (1) register with and provide documentation to the Disability Research Center (DRC) and (2) bring a memorandum from the DRC to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be accomplished within the first two weeks of the semester. Additional information can be accessed at [www.usu.edu/drc/](http://www.usu.edu/drc/)

7. In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), academic progress in this course will be kept private from all third parties unless waived by the individual student. This waiver, along with other information, can be found at <http://www.usu.edu/registrar/htm/ferpa>.

8. If you have a problem, please do not hesitate to contact me. It is easiest to reach me via email, although I do request that you include your \*first name\*, your \*last name\*, your \*A number\*, and the \*course and section number\* in all correspondence. I check my email account daily, so if you need to contact me, you can expect a response within 24 hours, but you should not wait until the last minute before deadlines to write to me with questions.

### **MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESS MANAGEMENT**

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning (e.g., strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation). These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. Utah State University services are available to assist you. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services visit: <https://counseling.usu.edu/> and <https://rgs.usu.edu/graduateschool/mental-health/>

### **CHEATING, PLAGIARISM, AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. A single case of cheating can be the basis for a failing grade and/or dismal from the University. Plagiarism includes knowingly “representing, by paraphrase or direct quotation, the published or unpublished work of another person as one’s own in any academic exercise or activity without full and clear acknowledgement. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials” (*Code of Policies and Procedures for Students*, Article V, Section 3A.1). The penalties for plagiarism are severe and may include probation, suspension, expulsion, withholding of transcripts, denial or revocation of degrees, referral to psychological counseling, and other appropriate disciplinary actions. If you have any questions concerning what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, feel free to ask me.

### **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNED READINGS**

#### **WEEK 1: Course Introduction (Tuesday, August 28)**

##### **What is Crime? (Thursday, August 30)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 1, pp. 1-23

#### **WEEK 2: Introducing Persuasive Presentations (Tuesday, September 4)**

##### **The Criminal Justice System (Thursday, September 6)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 1 continued

#### **WEEK 3: Debate #1: “Stand Your Ground” Laws (Tuesday, September 11)**

*Taking Sides*, Unit 2.1, pp. 55-68

##### **Substantive Law (Thursday, September 13)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 2, pp. 24-49

**WEEK 4: Debate #2: Private Companies Cracking Cell Phones (Tuesday, September 18)**

*Taking Sides*, Unit 4.4, pp. 264-272

**Procedural Law (Thursday, September 20)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 2 continued

**WEEK 5: Debate #3: Torturing Suspected Terrorists (Tuesday, September 25)**

*Taking Sides*, Unit 2.5, pp. 123-138

**Role of Police in Society/Issues in Policing (Thursday, September 27)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 3, pp. 50-81

**WEEK 6: Debate #4: Racial Profiling (Tuesday, October 2)**

*Taking Sides*, Unit 2.2, pp. 69-87

**Review for Exam #1 (Thursday, October 4)**

**WEEK 7: EXAM #1 (Tuesday, October 9)**

**The Court System in Society (Thursday, October 11)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 4, pp. 82-118

**WEEK 8: Debate #5: Capital Punishment (Tuesday, October 16)**

*Taking Sides*, Unit 3.4, pp. 201-216

**Issues in the Court System (Thursday, October 18)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 4 continued

**WEEK 9: Debate #6: The Confederate Flag (Tuesday, October 23)**

*Taking Sides*, Unit 2.6, pp. 139-147

**Institutional Corrections in Society (Thursday, October 25)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 5, pp. 119-152

**WEEK 10: Debate #7: Solitary Confinement (Tuesday, October 30)**

*Taking Sides*, Unit 3.1, pp. 151-174

**Issues in Institutional Corrections (Thursday, November 1)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 5 continued

**WEEK 11: Debate #8: "For-Profit" Prisons (Tuesday, November 6)**

*Taking Sides*, Unit 3.3, pp. 188-200

**Community Corrections (Thursday, November 8)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 6, pp. 153-183

**WEEK 12: Debate #9: "Three Strikes" Laws (Tuesday, November 13)**

*Taking Sides*, Unit 3.2, pp. 175-184

**Issues in Community Corrections (Thursday, November 15)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 6 continued

**WEEK 13: Juvenile Justice in Society (Tuesday, November 20)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 7, pp. 184-222

**\*\*NO CLASS\*\* (Thanksgiving Break, Thursday, November 22)**

**WEEK 14: Debate #11: Juvenile Life Sentences (Tuesday, November 27)**

*Taking Sides*, Unit 5.1, pp. 275-291

**Issues in Juvenile Justice (Thursday, November 29)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 7 continued

**WEEK 15: Debate #12: Abolishing Juvenile Courts (Tuesday, December 4)**

*Taking Sides*, Unit 2.3, pp. 88-103

**Course Summary (Thursday, December 6)**

*Criminal Justice: The Essentials*, Chapter 8, pp. 223-228

**FINALS WEEK: FINAL EXAM (Thursday, December 13, 9:30 to 11:20 MST, in Old Main 117)**