

Criminology 307.003: Social Inequality, Crime, & Justice

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Office hours: Thursdays 10:30-11:45 AM & by appointment

TH 9:00 – 10:15 AM

East Building 201

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course approaches the United States justice system through a critical lens. We will explore the significance of social inequality (especially race, gender, and class) inequality in justice system issues. The course will follow the cycle of the justice system process, exploring (1) the conditions that create inequality in justice system involvement, (2) inequality in the justice system processing and correction, and (3) inequality in the consequences and outcomes of justice system involvement. At each stage, we will ask the following question: to what extent does our justice system (re)produce a hierarchy based on individuals' social-status-defining characteristics? Issues such as policing, mass incarceration, prison privatization, homelessness, sentencing, and re-entry will be explored in greater detail in this course.

Over the course of the semester, you will critically engage a variety of texts, including summative texts, journalistic accounts of social issues, and original academic research. These texts will give you a number of lenses through which to view issues of inequality in the justice system. You'll also learn to apply academic language and concepts to things that you encounter every day, like *social location* (identities like race, gender and class) and *social institutions* (organized entities that structure society, like education and family). You will learn to apply this language to defend positions about justice issues that are hotly debated every day.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Following every course session, and certainly following successful completion of this course, we will assess the extent to which we met several course objectives. Specifically, you should be able to:

1. Identify patterns of social inequality in multiple points of the justice system process;
2. Draw comparisons of inequity between various stages of the U.S. prison system;
3. Discuss the mechanisms through which social determinants of justice system involvement pattern disparities in justice system contact and involvement;
4. Articulate stances and perspectives regarding ethical issues and debates around mass incarceration;
5. Identify opportunities for improvement in the U.S. justice system regarding social inequality.

I encourage you to remain close to these goals throughout the course of the semester. Question the extent to which we meet one or more of these objectives in each course session. If at any point you are unclear about whether and how we are meeting these objectives, please ask for clarity. I also challenge you to consider and hold me accountable for meeting my overall teaching goal:

My goal in teaching is to have all students leave my classroom with the ability to analyze and evaluate the issues raised in class, drawing conclusions while maintaining and awareness of the social forces and context that shape those conclusions.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Davis, Angela. *Policing the Black Man: Arrest, Prosecution, and Imprisonment*
- Watkins, D. *The Beast Side: Living and Dying While Black in America*
- Morris, Monique. *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*
- Edelman, Peter. *Not a Crime to Be Poor: The Criminalization of Poverty in America*
- Additional material shared via Blackboard/email pertaining to justice issues

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

I will be using iClicker, a student response system, this term to conduct polls in class. This will help me keep track of attendance, understand what you know, and give everyone a chance to participate in class. This will also give you feedback on how well you are comprehending course concepts and will help you master the challenging material in this class. **You are required to bring your device to participate in my iClicker sessions during class.** It is your responsibility to properly register your iClicker remote in a timely fashion. Registration instructions will be made available on Blackboard.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Grade Breakdown:

- (2) Discussion Board Posts (#1 submitted by February 28 and #2 by May 2): 20%
- (6) Online Quizzes (on Blackboard, due every other week): 30%
- (2) Mini Papers (#1 Due March 7 and #2 Due April 25): 30% (50% if no Pecha Kucha)
- Pecha Kucha Presentation (Due May 2): 20% (optional)

Grading Scale

- **A - Outstanding Work (90-100%).** Goes above and beyond the requirements of the assignment, above and beyond merely competent work. Outstanding effort, significant achievement, and mastery of the material of the course are clearly evident. Exceptional critical skills, creativity or originality is also evident. Consistently developed critical perspective. (90-92=A-)
- **B - Above Average (80-89%).** Fulfills all aspects of the assignment and goes bit beyond minimum competence to demonstrate a thorough and above average understanding of course material. Extra effort, extra achievement or extra improvement often evident. Clearly demonstrated critical perspective. (80-82=B-; 83-86=B)
- **C - Average (70-79%).** Fulfills all aspects of the assignment with obvious competence and grace. A thorough and satisfactory understanding of basic course material and incorporation of a critical perspective. If you do the assignment exactly as it is assigned, you will likely receive an average grade. (70-72=C-; 73-76=C)
- **D - Below Average (60-69%).** Represents marginally satisfactory understanding of basic course material. A "D" may indicate failure to follow directions, failure to implement specific recommendations, or failure to demonstrate personal effort and improvement. Often a "D" is given either because some aspect of the assignments has not been fulfilled, or because a preponderance of errors interferes with clear communication. (60-62=D-; 63-66=D)
- **F - Lack of demonstration of satisfactory understanding of basic course material.** Failure to grasp or apply a critical perspective. Not acceptable, either because you did not complete the assignment as directed, or because the level of writing skill is below an acceptable level for college work.

Participation Policy

This course has a minimum participation policy. There are (28) classes in addition to the introductory class. You must attend and participate in (14) of them, not including the introductory class, or your grade will be reduced by a flat five points (e.g., a 90 is reduced to an 85). Attendance and participation will be collected in each class using the iClicker response system.

If you attend and participate in (24) classes (including to the introductory class), I will drop your lowest quiz grade in calculating your final grade.

I consider this to be a lenient policy. Therefore, I only count participation, not absences. There is no such thing as an “excused absence.” No participation credit is given for doctor’s notes or other emergencies, no matter how serious. However, I may waive a *late paper penalty* with appropriate documentation. Lastly, if you are more than 15 minutes late to class, you should avoid coming into the classroom and disrupting the learning process for your classmates.

Late Paper Policy

A course incomplete may be given to students who have not completed the writing assignments for this course in time for final grades, with excused absences. Late papers will be subject to a grade reduction without an appropriate excuse.

Make-up Quiz Policy

Students will have to take a quiz every *other* week on Blackboard. The quizzes are *not timed* and *do not need to be completed in one sitting*. Quizzes are due one week after they are posted before the start of class on the day they are due. You will be able to see all questions at the same time. Therefore, **ordinarily no extensions will be given.**

Students who are unable to take a quiz for a very good reason should alert me before I reveal the answers in class. Typically, answers are released about three days after the quiz ends, so let me know within that time period. In extraordinary circumstances, I can allow a student to take a quiz late *so long as I have not released the answers to the class.*

If you are unable to take a quiz for a very good reason and I have already released the answers to the class, I may allow a you to complete a portion of the quiz for partial credit (typically, the short answer portion of the quiz only). This is entirely within my discretion.

A (VERY IMPORTANT) Note on Respect

So long as your answer is genuine, respectful, and relevant, it is worthy of respect by classmates and myself. We may have different perspectives and experiences, and I hope and expect that all students will express these disagreements openly and honestly. Listening is just as important as speaking. However, harassment of any kind or efforts to make other students uncomfortable is strictly prohibited. The topics we discuss in class are potentially controversial. We should be able to discuss opposing viewpoints within the context of social science evidence. At the same time, I will (and I hope everyone will) avoid deliberately provoking classmates.

Students who are uncomfortable talking about such topics do not have to participate in the discussion. I expect that you will avoid revealing information about yourself or other students that is personal, and we should also avoid inquiring into other peoples’ personal lives. We will talk about these issues in a hypothetical and abstract way in class to avoid distraction and potential embarrassment. If you are ever

made angry or uncomfortable by anything in discussion, please feel free to speak up (politely), or to raise your concerns with me privately by email or in office hours.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 (1/22, 1/24): An Introduction to the Course and Critical Criminology

For Monday:

- Introductions
- 10 Things Every College Professor Hates

For Wednesday:

- Critical Criminology Readings (Blackboard)

Week 2 (1/29, 1/31): Racial Origins of Justice System Involvement

For Monday:

- **Davis:** p. xi – 56

For Wednesday

- **Quiz 1 Posted**

Week 3 (2/5, 2/7): Racial and Gender Origins of Justice System Involvement

For Monday:

- **Morris:** p. 1-55
- **[DROP DEADLINE]**

For Wednesday

- **Watkins:** p. xvii – 23, 109-114, 119-130
- Racial Origins Readings (Blackboard)
- **Quiz 1 Due**

Week 4 (2/12, 2/14): Racial and Gender Origins of Justice System Involvement

For Monday:

- **Davis:** p. 57-94
- **Watkins:** p. 25-36

For Wednesday

- **Morris:** p. 96-134
- **Watkins:** 37-41
- **Quiz 2 Posted**

Week 5 (2/19, 2/21): Economic Origins of Justice System Involvement

For Monday:

- **Edelman:** ix-44

For Wednesday

- **Watkins:** 115-118
- Economic Origins Readings (Blackboard)
- **Quiz 2 Due**

Week 6 (2/26, 2/28): Economic Origins of Justice System Involvement

For Monday:

- **Edelman:** 45-62

For Wednesday

- **Edelman:** 83-116, 135-158
- **Quiz 3 Posted**
- *Discussion Board Post #1 Due*

Week 7 (3/5, 3/7): Social Inequality in Enforcement of the Law

For Monday:

- **Edelman:** 117-134
- **Davis:** 95-160

For Wednesday

- **Watkins:** 47-60
- *Quiz 3 Due*
- *Mini Paper #1 Due*

Week 8 (3/12, 3/14): Social Inequality in Enforcement of the Law

For Monday:

- NO CLASS [SPRING BREAK]

For Wednesday

- NO CLASS [SPRING BREAK]

Week 9 (3/19, 3/21): Social Inequality in Enforcement of the Law

For Monday:

- **Davis:** 209-233

For Wednesday

- **Davis:** 234-293
- **Quiz 4 Posted**

Week 10 (3/26, 3/28): Social Inequality in Reentry

For Monday:

- **Morris:** 170-195
- **Watkins:** 43-46, 83-88, 139-141

For Wednesday

- Reentry Readings (Blackboard)
- *Quiz 4 Due*

Week 11 (4/2, 4/4): Social Inequality in Reentry

For Monday:

- **Davis:** 294 -

For Wednesday

- **Edelman:** 63-82
- Reentry Readings (Blackboard)

- **Quiz 5 Posted**

Week 12 (4/9, 4/11): Social Inequality in Reentry

For Monday:

- Reentry Readings (Blackboard)

For Wednesday

- Reentry Readings (Blackboard)
- **Quiz 5 Due**

Week 13 (4/16, 4/18): Reforming Inequality in the Justice System

For Monday:

- TBD

For Wednesday

- TBD
- **Quiz 6 Posted**

Week 14 (4/23, 4/25): Reforming Inequality in the Justice System

For Monday:

- **Davis:** 161-177

For Wednesday

- TBD Reserved for Guest Speaker, Video, Web Conference, or Make-Up Day
- **Mini Paper #2 Due**
- **Quiz 6 Due**

Week 15 (4/30, 5/2): Reforming Inequality in the Justice System

For Monday:

- **Edelman:** 159-182
- **Morris:** 222-242

For Wednesday

- **Discussion Board Post #2 Due**
- **Pecha Kucha Presentation Due (optional)**

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Discussion Board Posts (2 total): Over the course the semester, you'll be expected to submit 2 discussion memos: one by October 3 and the other by December 6. In the memo, you must engage at least one of the readings from the course AND incorporate an outside source related to the topic. Posts should be brief (3- to 4 paragraphs), and while these are less formal writing assignments, I will expect that you've put some thought into the issues raised. When studying some of society's most pressing problems, we are often tasked with conveying complicated topics to the community and policy makers. Keeping this in mind, you should construct these discussion memos as if you are writing to community members or policy makers about the topics being considered. Posts are due any time before the beginning of the class on the day they are due. Late posts will not be accepted. On some occasions, I will reference these posts in class to spark discussion.

Mini Papers (2 total): This course will have two writing assignments over the course of the semester. The instructions for these assignments will be circulated shortly. So that you can plan ahead, these papers will be 5 to 7 pages (no more than 7!) double-spaced. In general, it is best to think of these assignments as *writing tests* rather than solely opinion papers. Your grade is based on **how you write**, so **it is essential** to focus on grammar, presentation, conciseness, and clarity of writing. The papers are not long, but I will read every word, so every word should be selected carefully.

These papers ask for your opinion, but they are more than this. Both papers should cite a minimum of two sources, of which one should be scholarly. A paper based solely on unsupported assertions will receive a significantly reduced grade. I will provide instructions and can answer additional questions through email or office hours.

Pecha Kucha Presentations: A Pecha Kucha Presentation will be optional for this course. This is a style of presentation originally designed by young designers in Tokyo in 2003. The original parameters were to present with 20 slides that automatically advance every 20 seconds (for a total of 6 minutes and 40 seconds). This manner of presentation is intended to be concise and strictly require preparation.

In our version of the Pecha Kucha Presentation, students are required to present for 3 minutes using 6 slides that advance automatically every 30 seconds. Markdowns will be taken for presentations that substantially exceed 3 minutes.

The topic of the presentation will be to present a published piece of empirical research on an issue relating to social inequality and criminal justice. The presentation should (briefly) address the topic, provide some criminological data, and use visuals to help tell the story. Sample topics might include, for instance, race and the death penalty, sentencing disparities, policing, overcriminalization, and other topics.

The grading rubric will include six criteria: (1) bibliography; (2) technical aspects, including length; (3) visual presentation; (4) audio presentation; (5) how well visuals work with audio; and (6) strength of criminological or legal data presented. Submission instructions will be provided around the beginning of class.

COURSE POLICIES

Communication: Communication with me is important! It can only help you, and it will never hurt you. I want you all to do well in this class, and I want to hear from you if there is any problem. Use email. I tend to answer quickly. I also prefer email because it leaves a written record, which can always be useful. When you type the message subject, be specific. Avoid generic subjects such as “Question” or “CRIM 307”. If *I write to you*, and a response or an acknowledgement of my email is requested (or obviously appropriate), *do write back without unreasonable delay*. Writing back days later a message that starts with “I just saw your message” is unprofessional. It is in your best interest to visit the Blackboard course page frequently.

Assignment Submission Policy: To allow me to better track your progress through the semester, I ask that you submit all written materials through Blackboard on or before their due date. When submitting assignments, please name the file according to this system:

[Course Abbreviation]-[LastName][FirstInitial]-[AssignmentTitle] (example: CRIM307-HoustonA-ReadingResponse1)

Although you're submitting materials electronically, they should still adhere to correct manuscript formatting: double-spaced, using twelve-point font (Times New Roman or equivalent) and one-inch margins. You should number your pages, and include your name at the top of the first page (you'd be amazed how many people forget to do that part). I will deduct points for incorrect formatting. The number of points I deduct will increase as we get deeper into the semester.

Late Assignment Policy: Part of college education is about preparing you for life outside of college. Outside of college, you will be forced to meet deadlines and there will be consequences for missing those deadlines. That being said, assignments are due at the beginning of class on their scheduled due date. If you hand in an assignment late, your grade will drop by 10 percentage points. If an assignment is turned in more than one week late, the grade will drop by 25 percentage points. If you have major extenuating circumstances (severe illness, family emergency), you must contact me in advance to request an extension, and be prepared to provide documentation.

Electronics in Class: I am a huge proponent of the potential of digital learning. Therefore, laptops, tablets, and the like, are allowed and encouraged during class sessions. In fact, I will often ask students with laptops to look up information on the Internet and, as you know, I use polling mechanisms. When you use electronics, however, use them wisely. Texting, or any form of engagement with people outside the classroom, is not allowed and, if it becomes a distraction, I will ask you to leave and your appearance in class will not count.

Honor Code Policy: Available on the web at academicintegrity.gmu.edu. The Honor Code governs all work in this course. Since that text is very clear, I do not feel compelled to address the issue of plagiarism in class at all. Beware that "the instructor did not explain to us what plagiarism was" is an invalid argument to defend a case of plagiarism. So is the simpler "I didn't know" defense. Materials readily available to you online ensure that you do know. I will state explicitly that recycling from another course is a violation of the honor code. I reserve the right to submit course work to plagiarism detectors.

Disability Accommodations: If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should (1) make sure this documentation is on file with Office for Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; <http://ods.gmu.edu>) to determine the accommodations you need; and (2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs. I want to be helpful.