



# RUTGERS

School of Arts and Sciences

Program in Criminal Justice

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## INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE

### Course Overview

#### ADMIN INFO

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Course Management:

Canvas (not Sakai). <https://tlt.rutgers.edu/canvas>

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#### COURSE OVERVIEW

Welcome to Rutgers – and to all returning students: welcome back. Please read this syllabus carefully, as it contains detailed information that can help you maximize your experience in the course.

“Criminal justice” (CJ) refers to a plurality of institutions and practices of three distinctive yet interdependent systems: 1) police, 2) courts, and 3) corrections. This course provides an introduction to these systems. While this course is primarily focused on the practical and applied features of criminal justice policies and practices, we will continuously examine core questions and contradictions that have been a mainstay of Euro-centric criminological and political thought. Such questions include: *is the criminal born or made? What are the boundaries between individual and collective rights? On what basis is punishment justified? Whose law, and what order is reflected in systems of formal social control? What does the criminal justice system suggest about broader relations of power in the political economy?* Whether or not you are interested in a criminal justice career, this section of Introduction to Criminal Justice will offer both a substantive theoretical foundation and a professionally-oriented curriculum that will be of use to both majors and non-majors alike.

The curriculum is divided into five segments. Section 1 established key terms, concepts, and themes – beginning first with what it means to study the decentralized, fragmented nature of criminal justice systems in the United States. We also examine various definitions of “crime” and how crime data are generated and recorded. We then turn to what it means to take a sociological and historical approach to studying criminal justice, which requires that we assess the degree to which major features and functions of criminal justice reflect centuries-long projects involving hierarchical and violently maintained configurations of race, class, gender, and citizenship.

Section 2 of the course is exclusively focused on policing. We examine the origins, historical development, contemporary structure, and structural challenges related to law enforcement in the United States. This section strikes a balance between critical perspectives on formal social control and more pragmatic topics that best support students who might be pursuing careers in law enforcement.

Section 3 focuses on the judiciary and court systems, with an explicit focus on criminal law. We will engage with both concrete and abstract perspectives to examine the gaps between criminal law *on the books* and criminal law *in action* (and inaction). Some portions of this section are theory-intensive and will require careful attention to lecture-based materials. Whether you’re interested in law school or simply want to be better informed on civil rights and civil liberties, this section of the course will provide a curriculum appropriate introduction to “law and society” in a criminal justice context.

Section 4 specializes in formal corrections. We will cover the origins of the penitentiary and the development of correctional policies and practices. This section will be supplemented by introductory material regarding philosophies of punishment and sociological views on formal social control.

Section 5 is a brief and discretionary part of the curriculum, where – contingent on the availability of guest speakers and current events – I will provide CJ-relevant case studies. These may include white-collar and

corporate crime, transnational organized crime, gangs, gun violence, and state corruption. My own professional experiences will inform my approach to Section 5 of the course.

It is my goal to ensure that by the end of the semester, we will have collectively engaged with both pragmatic and existential questions concerning criminal justice policies and practices, and that you will end the term with a secure introductory foundation in criminal justice. Welcome to the course.

## LEARNING GOALS

This course will directly advance the learning goals of the Criminal Justice major. Additionally, students who successfully complete this class will have demonstrated competencies in being able to:

1. Have an introductory sociological and historical understanding of core elements of criminal justice;
2. Clearly articulate the institutional characteristics and structural contradictions of the justice system;
3. Understand the similarities and differences between criminology, sociology, and criminal justice;
4. Critically interpret examples of contemporary empirical research that influences criminal justice policy;
5. Understand your basic Constitutional rights as they pertain to law enforcement and the courts;
6. Be better versed in how to unpack potentially controversial topics, ideas, and/or themes involving criminal justice.
7. Apply concepts about human and social behavior to particular questions or situations involving criminal justice.