

## OU Online Syllabus Information

**Sociology 260**  
**Call #86284**  
**Fall, 2009**

**Professor: Jim Taylor**

**Methods of Instruction:** All course content is presented on Blackboard. E-mail is used for submission of assignments, and exams, as well as for the instructor's evaluation and comments. Students will also engage one another and interact with the instructor in a series of discussion board exercises.

**Course Objectives:** This course will focus on one of the most highly debated and emotionally charged social processes in our contemporary world: the American criminal justice system. Criminal Justice is a complex system which has its own extensive history, organizational logic, and cultural mythology. Since September 11, 2001, the central themes, debates, and issues of criminal justice have assumed center stage in the American social reaction to terror. In a post-9/11 world, we are confronted with the fundamental tensions in public discourse that have always shaped the nature of American justice, including the conflict between public safety and individual rights, the expediency, efficiency, and fairness of American law and its enforcement, and appropriate ways in which to respond to criminal acts. For those of you who plan to work one day in the criminal justice system or one of its rapidly expanding related agencies, you will quickly find your own vision of justice to be transformed in the daily life of your new organization. Whether working in law enforcement, court systems, prisons, probation, parole, victim advocacy, dispute settlement, juvenile justice, etc., individuals face similar obstacles and issues that all professionals encounter. These professionals have to know something about how to organize and work with large groups of people, about how to meet goals and objectives with limited resources, about how to manage conflicts and resolve disputes, and about how to develop strong social skills and create a meaningful workplace. As criminal justice actors and agents, employees also face a number of unique circumstances unlike any other profession. They are perennially in the position of making (in some cases, split-second) decisions about people's lives, careers, families, and futures. They often face non-voluntary, if not, hostile clients, frustrated co-workers, and a stressful workplace. They also must invoke and transform the law on a daily basis by way of their own discretion. Finally, they are part of a system that is considered to be the last resort when all other social institutions have failed. Consequently, justice actors engage in a workplace that American citizens persistently imagine and develop standards of expectations about without much attention to its reality. In this course, we will ask primarily two questions of all of this: 1) Why? and 2) How do these factors affect the quality of American justice?

Our goal is to develop the critical thinking skills necessary to help develop answers to these questions. We will do this by reviewing the main components of the American criminal justice system – the police, courts, and corrections – asking how each operates and examining the nature of their interrelationships. In doing so, we will trace the movement of a citizen through the criminal justice process and see what happens as we move from one component to the next. But we want to do more than simply accumulate information about how the system operates. We want to be challenged to think broadly about why the system operates as it does. Toward this end, we will structure many of our discussions around three key themes that are considered to be essential for understanding criminal justice in the United States.

**General Course Requirements:** The course will be made up of **two formal exams** (the mid-term and final) composed of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions, **four "reading" quizzes**, **weekly discussion board postings**, and an **annotated bibliography project**. The final exam will be comprehensive, covering the entire course.

**Discussion Board** - Students are required to participate in discussion about the assigned chapters on the *Blackboard* discussion page. Students will be evaluated on the quality and quantity of their posts, and their interaction with classmates. The minimum number of posts is at least one for each chapter or

assigned article, and one topic to be assigned later in the quarter). Each student should also write a brief reaction to a minimum of 1 submission per week that is posted by a classmate on the Discussion Board. There will be a topic heading for each chapter or assigned article. Discussion participation will be evaluated at the end of the sixth and tenth weeks of the course. Students are expected to be participating regularly (those who post all comments in the final weeks of the course will not receive full credit). To receive full credit, students must post each week's discussion by the listed due date. Students are free to voice their (informed) opinions regarding reading assignments, and no one will be graded on the basis of their views. As these essays have strong POVs (points of view), they are likely to invoke both discussion and disagreement. Students are expected to be civil when in disagreement and to refrain from personal attacks and/or intolerant behavior.

**Quizzes** – There will be 4 reading quizzes given this quarter. Students will have 2 hours to complete each quiz. All quizzes must be completed by the listed deadline.

**Exams** – The mid-term and final exam will follow a similar format to the quizzes. Students will have 2 hours to complete the 2 online exams. Both exams must be completed by the listed deadline.

**Annotated Bibliography** – Each student will write a brief annotated bibliography this quarter, based on a criminal justice-related topic of your choosing to be approved by the end of week 2. You will find copies of sample bibliographies posted under the assignment section of *Blackboard*. To complete this assignment, you will need a minimum of 10 and maximum of 15 sources related to your topic. Although your final paper is expected to conform to ASA guidelines (to be provided), you are not limited to any specific type of source. In other words, as long as you can justify the use of a source and demonstrate its relevance to your project, than you may use any form of media (ex. Journals, books, newspapers, movie scenes, song lyrics, poems, tv shows/commercials, etc.). The only limit is your imagination. All papers will be written in Microsoft format, double-spaced, with a 12 pt., Times New Roman Font and 1 inch margins.

## Required and Optional Materials

### Texts:

- 1) Siegel, Jarry J. and Joseph Senna. 2008. Introduction to Criminal Justice (11<sup>th</sup> ed).
- 2) A Series of Articles and Chapters on Blackboard. These texts will have a double asterisk (\*\*) next to them in the syllabus.
- 3) Jimmy D. Taylor. 2009. American Gun Culture: Collectors, Shows and the Story of the Gun. NY: LFB Scholarly Publishing.

## Exam Requirements

Number of exams: There will be 4 reading quizzes, a mid-term and a final exam. All exams will be a combination of multiple choice, T/F and fill in the blank. Exams and quizzes will be timed and taken on Blackboard. Books and notes ARE allowed during exams and quizzes, but everyone is expected to do their own work (No proctor is required).

Dates of exams\* (All assignment, exam and quiz postings are EST)

- Quiz 1 – Must be posted by midnight on 9/16
- Quiz 2 - Must be posted by midnight on 9/30
- Mid-Term - Must be posted by midnight on 10/3
- Quiz 3 - Must be posted by midnight on 10/19
- Quiz 4 – Must be posted by midnight on 10/26
- Final Exam – Must be posted by 7pm EST on 11/18