

POLS 3300 Criminal Justice Reforms

Sections: 182 & D01 - Spring 2024

Faculty Information

Rebecca Larsen

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Office Hours: Mondays, 4PM to 6PM or by appointment.

Location: Zoom or in MAC 227.

Sign up during or outside of office hours here: <https://calendly.com/rebecca-larsen/meet-with-larsen>

Course Description

Class Meeting Time: Mondays, Wednesdays 10AM to 11:20AM

This course will examine criminal justice reform from the perspective of political science. We will look at the history, theory behind, and current status of different elements of the United States criminal justice system. We will then consider reforms to improve this system. You can expect to learn about criminal justice in addition to policy analysis skills to understand ways of analyzing policy problems, considering reforms, and presenting recommendations.

Learning Outcomes

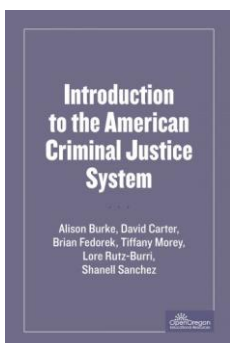
Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand the U.S. criminal justice process, laws, and structure.
- Analyze the impact of legislative, executive, and judicial action on criminal justice policy at the local, state, and federal level.
- Evaluate criminal justice problems and conflicts.
- Propose and defend criminal justice reforms to identified problems.

Learning outcomes for the Communication Literacy plan:

This course is also a communication literacy class. Therefore, it contains written reports, oral presentations, class discussions, and in-class activities to fulfill learning outcomes in written and oral communication.

Course Materials

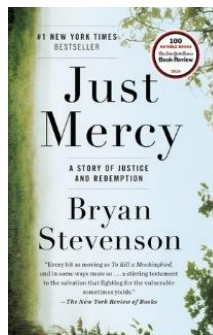


Book Title: Introduction to the American Criminal Justice System.

Authors: Burke, A.S., Cater, D., Fedorek, B., Morey, T., Rutz-Burri, L., Sanchez, S.

An open-source text available for free:

<https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/ccj230/>



Book Title: Just Mercy
Authors: Stevenson, Bryan.
ISBN: 9780812984965

We will use this memoir of an attorney to supplement the weekly readings. This can be found in audiobook, electronic book, and hard copy form – any of which are fine. Note: the film by the same name will not work to fulfill the assignments connected to this book. The film tells only one story captured in this book. **All other assigned readings will be provided on Blackboard and through the TTU library.**

Technology for joining as a distance student:

Distance students will join the class from their computers via Zoom. The link for our Zoom classroom is on the Blackboard homepage. You will need to be able to both observe and engage in class, which requires a working microphone and camera. If technology is a concern, please reach out. IT support is always available to troubleshoot issues and support to obtain technology may be available.

Grading Scale

A = 90 – 100
B = 80 – 89
C = 70 – 79
D = 60 – 69
F = 0 – 59

Grading:

Briefs – 30%
Book Report – 20%
Policy Proposal and Presentation – 35%
Course Engagement – 15%

Course Assignments

Briefs (10% Each - 30% Total)

You will write three short briefs. Each brief is different but each one asks you to engage with the readings and present positions or participate in experiential learning. These are also a way to incentivize reading and give you an opportunity to be engaged in class, as we will refer to your briefs as discussion guides during the relevant class periods.

- **Brief #1 – Theory**
- **Brief #2 – Trial Observation**
- **Brief #3 – Reflection**

Book Report (20%)

In the first few weeks of class, you will read Just Mercy. This memoir presents one perspective on injustices within our systems in a way that is different from the focus of most politicians, policymakers, and researchers. It also connects individual stories to their larger context with data and trends, which will serve as a jumping off point for our discussions later in the semester. Upon reading the book, you will

write a book report that asks you to consider key takeaways and select and update one of the policy issues raised in the book. *CONTENT WARNING:* This book covers heavy material that can be distressing. I recommend looking at chapter descriptions online and reaching out to me with any concerns.

Policy Solution Proposal and Presentation (35%)

Throughout the semester, you will explore a criminal justice problem and propose a solution to your identified problem. You should identify an area not fully explored in class so that the class learns from your presentation. See the Policy Solution Proposal in Blackboard for details.

Course Engagement (15%)

Course engagement will be assessed by your preparedness for class, current events brief, book report discussion, and in-class assignments and discussions. Everyone's learning is enhanced when we all come to class prepared and ready to engage. Because there are many ways to participate and care about your own learning, you will submit a form at the end of the semester grading your engagement in the course and supporting that grade.

Course Plan

Assignments are due by the beginning of our class period via Blackboard.

Week	Topic	Readings	Due
Week 1: W 1/10	Course Introduction		Sign up for current events. Fill out survey on crime and criminal justice system impact.
Week 2: M 1/15	No Class. MLK Day.		
W 1/17	Introduction to Policy Process and Typologies	Mallicoat, S. Chapter 1: The Politics of Crime and the Policy Making Process. In <i>Criminal Justice Policy</i> .	
Week 3: M 1/22	Theories of Crime and Punishment Response	Territo. Socialization Theories 43-45. Siegel, pp. 20-29 (Perspectives on Justice);40-43 (How is Crime Defined?) Burke, Sections 8.1 to 8.5 (Philosophies of Punishment); Section 9.10 (Restorative Justice)	Theory Brief Due Current Events Briefs Begin
W 1/24	Theories of Crime and Punishment Response	Continued from above.	
Week 4: M 1/29	U.S. System Structure and Process	Burke et al. Sections: 1.7 (3Cs) and 3.1 to 3.6 (Sources of Criminal Law and Classifications)	
W 1/31	U.S. System Structure and Process	Continued from above.	
Week 5: M 2/5	Public Opinion and Media	Borah. P. (2016). Media Effects Theory Hutson, M. (2020). The Trouble with Crime Statistics. <i>Annals of Inquiry</i> , The New Yorker.	
W 2/7	Just Mercy Discussion	Discussion of Just Mercy and your reports Be prepared to discuss the book and your policy updates from your report.	Just Mercy Book Report Due
Week 6: M 2/12	Incarceration Drivers and Population	Chapters 2, 3, and 4 in National Research Council (2014). <i>The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences</i> . Prison Policy Initiative (2023). Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2023	
W 2/14	Incarceration Drivers and Population	Continued from above.	
Week 7: M 2/19	Criminal Trials	Burke et al. Chapter 7, All Sections	Trial Observation Brief Due
W 2/21	Criminal Trials	Continued from above.	

Week 8: M 2/26	Crime Victims and Rights	Burke et al. Chapter 1 Sections: 1.14 Victims and Victim Typologies and 1.15 Victim Rights and Assistance Bureau of Justice Statistics (2023). Criminal Victimization, 2022. Texas Department of Public Safety. Victim Services: https://www.dps.texas.gov/administration/staff_support/victimservices/pages/index.htm (Read through the different programs and rights in Texas listed in the right-hand menu)	
W 2/28	Appeals and Wrongful Convictions	Revisit Burke et al. Chapter section 7.6 The Appeals Process, Standard of Review, and Appellate Decisions Review the National Registry of Exonerations interactive data. Garret, B.L. (2020). Wrongful Convictions. <i>Annual Review of Criminology</i> .	
Week 9: M 3/4	Prison Conditions and Oversight	Burke Section 8.12 (Prison Levels) Part I and Part IV from: Deitch (2020). But Who Oversees the Overseers?: The Status of Prison and Jail Oversight in the United States. <i>American Journal of Criminal Law</i> . NPR. (2024). There is Little Scrutiny of “natural” cause deaths behind bars.	Policy Proposal Topic Due
W 3/6	Prison Conditions and Oversight	Continued from above.	
Week 10: M 3/11	No Class. Enjoy Spring Break.		
W 3/13	No Class. Enjoy Spring Break.		
Week 11: M 3/18	Privatization	Burke, Section 8.11 (Privatization) Siegel, pp. 484-485 (Privatization of probation); 519-520 (Private prisons); 547 (Private prison enterprise) Adler, J.L., Chen, W., & Page, T.F. (2020). Transitions in “Privatized” Prison Health Systems: Emergency Department Visits and Hospitalizations Among Incarcerated People in Florida, 2011-2018.	
W 3/20	Privatization	Continued from above.	
Week 12: M 3/25	Drugs	Burke et al. 9.14 Current Issues in Corrections: War on Drugs Mosher, C.J. & Akin, S. (2014). From ‘Just Say No!’ to ‘Well, Maybe’ - The War on Drugs & Sensible Alternatives. <i>Criminal Justice Policy</i> .	
W 3/27	Racial Disproportionality	Federal Research: U.S. Sentencing Commission. (2023). Demographic Differences in Federal Sentencing. Park, K. (2017). The Impact of Judicial Elections in the Sentencing of Black Crime. <i>Journal of Human Resources</i> .	
Week 13: M 4/1	No Class. Enjoy the Holiday		
W 4/3	Jail and Bail	Burke et al. 8.7 to 8.9: A brief history of jails, Types of jails, and Who goes to jail. Main findings: Dobbie, W., Goldin, J. & Yang, C. (2018). The Effects of Pre-trial Detention on Conviction, Future Crime, and Employment: Evidence from Randomly Assigned Judges. <i>American Economic Review</i> Vera Institute (2019). Justice Denied.	
Week 14: M 4/8	Jail and Bail	Continued from above.	
W 4/10	Juvenile Justice	Burke et al Chapter 10, Juvenile Justice: All sections Texas Judicial Council Committee Report (2018). Juvenile Justice	
Week 15: M 4/15	Juvenile Justice	Continued from above.	

W 4/17	Capital Punishment	Skim: Death Penalty Information Center. (2023). The Death Penalty in 2023: Year End Report Perspectives: Case for the death penalty -> Muhlhausen (2007). The Death Penalty Deters Crime and Saves Lives. The Heritage Foundation. Case against the death penalty -> Drehle (2015). The Death of the Death Penalty: Why the Era of Capital Punishment is Ending.	
Week 16: M 4/22	Re-entry, Recidivism & Rehabilitation	Siegel, Chapter 12 Siegel, Chapter 14: pp. 542 - 549 (Correctional Rehabilitation); pp. 558 - 569 (Leaving Prison Section) Loeffler, C. & Nagin, D. S. (2022). The impact of incarceration on recidivism. <i>Annual Review of Criminology</i>	Reflection Brief Due
W 4/24	Re-entry, Recidivism & Rehabilitation	Continued from above.	
M 4/29	Presentations and Final Activities		Policy Proposal and Presentations Due

Late Work

Late work may be submitted at any time before the last day of class for a 20% penalty.

Use of AI

AI tools are a reality that can serve to support learning, but in this class, all work must be your own. Feel free to use tools like Grammarly to help improve your writing, but all assignments must be in your own words and be your own original work.

TTU Policies

Texas Tech Policies on Religious Holy Days, ADA Support, Academic Integrity:

<https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpdc/RequiredSyllabusStatements.php>

Texas Tech resources and guidelines for Title IX, recovery services, plagiarism, & student support: <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpdc/RecommendedSyllabusStatements.php>

Basic Needs

If at any time during the semester, you face challenges accessing regular food and housing, you are encouraged to contact the Dean of Students for support, <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/>. If you are located at the Waco campus you also have access to [MCC's food pantry](#). If you are located at the Lubbock campus, you have access to the [TTU Food Pantry](#). In addition, if you feel comfortable, please feel open to notifying me so that I can assist in connecting you with university and community resources specific to your area of needed support and geographic location.