

The **U**niversity of South Dakota
College of Arts & Sciences
Criminal Justice Studies: Political Science Department

Introduction to Criminal Justice (3 CR)
CJUS 201/POLS 201
Format: *Desire 2 Learn (D2L)*

Fall 2009

Welcome Letter

CJUS 201 INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE: (Also **POLS 201**.) In the United States (and elsewhere), the concept of “criminal justice” means many things to many people. Unfortunately, many of these “meanings” are often built upon shaky foundations and include a variety of misunderstandings about crime (rates & causation), criminal justice organizations (e.g., jails and prisons are not the same thing) and criminal justice processes generally. This poorly constructed cognitive foundation (“aided and abetted” by distorted media portrayals of crime and criminal justice) has facilitated the construction of an increasingly distorted image of crime and criminal justice at both the individual (micro) and societal (macro) levels. Problematically, (at least from a policy perspective) dominant versions of these distorted images clash in very public forums (e.g., the political process and various news media outlets) and/or are given unwarranted legitimacy through for-profit “infotainment” programs (e.g., C.O.P.S; “To Catch a Predator,” & etc.), which further exacerbates the public’s confusion about crime and criminal justice.

This course is designed to provide the student with a solid foundational understanding of American criminal justice. This foundation will provide the student with the tools and knowledge they will need to build an increasingly sophisticated understanding of what, how, and to what end criminal justice is conceived and implemented in American society. In doing so, this course will present a general descriptive and theoretical overview of the criminal justice system and its components (Police, Courts, Corrections) as well as its response[s] to those who transgress the law. Sociological notions related to the social construction of deviance are also important to an understanding of the law. Thus, a limited portion of the course is devoted to analyses of criminal law in terms of why (and how) we make certain kinds of conduct criminal (or not) in our society.

In this course, readings, and other discussions related to American criminal justice will focus primarily on the institutions involved in the operations of law including the police, the attorney in the legal system, the bail system, the trial process, the guilty plea, sentencing, and corrections. Although CJUS 201 examines the law’s proactive and reactive functions as they relate to maintaining peaceful communities and sanctioning criminal behavior, it places a special emphasis on the criminal justice institutions responsible for implementing criminal justice.

Critical then to our understanding of the American criminal justice system (and criminal justice processes) in this course will be our study and understanding of the criminal justice organization as both a political institution and as a bureaucracy:

What is it? How does it function (or dysfunction)? What “environmental” pressures influence decision-making by criminal justice officials (i.e., politics, the media, public perceptions of crime and criminal justice, & etc.)? And, how (and to what extent) do criminal justice organizations relate (or not) to one another and to the community generally?

CJUS 201 encourages and enables students to think critically when evaluating the behavior of criminal justice organizations in light of the unique relationships they enjoy with one another and with their employees; with individual citizens and local communities; with the mass media; and with the political system itself.

Required Texts

Siegel, L.J. and Senna, J.J. (2008). Introduction to Criminal Justice. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Welch, M. (2005). Ironies of Imprisonment. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tonry, M. (2004). Thinking About Crime: Sense and Sensibility in American Penal Culture. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Additional Required Readings & Video Segments:

An electronic reading packet and video segments are available online through D2L.

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