

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

Introduction to Criminology (3 CR)

CJUS 351/SOC 351
(U0820T)

Fall 2009

Welcome!

CJUS/SOC 351 INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINOLOGY

Welcome to CJUS/SOC 351: Criminology!

In the United States (and elsewhere), most people feel that that they understand crime and do not hesitate to make sweeping generalizations about its causes. Typically, these understandings (and resulting generalizations) are usually built upon a single, normative (i.e., value-laden) belief that crime is a result of **moral** failure on the part of the individual. Unfortunately, this belief—though wielding significant public policy influence—is built upon **very** shaky foundations. As a result, many of us do not know as much as we think we do about crime and its causes. This poorly constructed cognitive foundation (“aided and abetted” by distorted media portrayals of crime and repeated portrayals of anomalous criminal behavior) has facilitated the construction of an increasingly distorted image of crime at both the individual (micro) and societal (macro) levels. This has led, many argue, to a number of distorted and unproductive (or outright destructive) criminal justice policies.

Developing a sophisticated understanding of crime causation require data. However, we first need a framework, or theory, which may usefully inform our collection and analysis of that data. We may also use multiple theories to explore different types of crimes committed by individuals possessing very different personal attributes (e.g., gender, age, race, & etc.) and living within unique environments (e.g., high crime, suburbs, rural & etc.) As opposed to relying strictly on our *beliefs* about crime causation, this course enhances the student’s understanding of crime and its causes by building upon solid empirical evidence developed through rigorous, theory-driven research and (falsifiable) hypothesis testing. From analyses of data collected through theory-driven research we may increase our chances of improving rather than worsening crime and recidivism.

This course is designed to provide the student with a solid foundational understanding of crime and its causes. In the first portion of this course we will survey multiple theories of crime causation. This exploration will be somewhat historical in that we will examine the origins of a “social science” of crime. We will use that knowledge as a platform from which we will explore current (and currently debated) theories of crime causation—from micro-level explanations to macro-level explanations and evaluate them as we go. This foundation will provide the student with the tools and knowledge they will need to build an increasingly sophisticated understanding of crime and its causes. In the second portion of the course, you will be exposed to empirical, anecdotal and literary accounts of crime and asked to analyze the accounts theoretically.

CJUS 351 encourages and enables students to think critically when evaluating their own beliefs about crime causation, media and pop culture accounts of crime causation and the theories of crime causation presented to you in this course.

Required Texts

Siegal, L.J. (2008). *Criminology: Theories, Patterns, and Typologies* (9th Ed.). Belmont, CA: Thompson/Wadsworth.

Messner, S.F. & Rosenfeld, R. (2007). *Crime and the American Dream*. Belmont, CA: Thompson/Wadsworth.

Camus, A. (Any Edition). *The Stranger*. (Any Edition)

Shakur, S. (1993). *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member*. NY: Grove Press.

Abbott, J.H. (Any Edition). *In the Belly of the Beast: Letter From Prison*. (Any Edition).

Zimbardo, P. (2008). *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. NY: Random House.

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