

CCJS 345: Courts and Sentencing
Wednesdays 4:30-7:00pm | TYD 0117

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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description:

This course is intended to provide students with an introduction to American criminal courts and sentencing, including how criminal courts operate, who the important actors are, and how theory and empirical research inform sentencing approaches. This course will use materials (readings, podcasts, videos, guest speakers, etc.) to address several of the most pressing issues facing criminal courts today, including recent sentencing innovations, judicial and prosecutorial discretion, gender and racial disparities in sentencing, mass punishment, and collateral consequences. Students will be expected to consider both theoretical perspectives and empirical research evidence regarding criminal courts as well as to think critically about how our current knowledge about criminal courts and sentencing can help inform the future development and amelioration of the US criminal court system.

Course Format:

Our regular meetings will include some lecture, class discussions, your questions, and activities. All course materials and assignments will be available on ELMS. There will be assigned materials to complete before class meetings which will generally include reading and listening materials, lectures, and engagement activities.

Class Groups:

Many of the concepts and topics we will discuss this semester are best understood through discussion. To create opportunities for active discussion, we will form class groups. You will have the opportunity to work with your group to complete many of the assignments and activities for the course. Please let me know if at any point you would like to change your group.

Class Conduct:

Respect is of paramount importance. Respect for each other, respect for yourself, respect for me, and respect for the people whose lives are affected by the criminal justice system (from all sides of the law). The topics we discuss in CCJS classes can prove more

controversial or contentious than subjects in other departments. Respect for the ideas, opinions, and experiences of others is our first priority.

Undoubtedly there will be students in this class who either have been victims of crime or who have a family member/friend who has been a victim of crime. There will also likely be students who have had personal experiences with the criminal justice system as well. If you would like to share your experiences, you are welcome to, but in no way should you EVER feel compelled or required to share your personal experiences relating to these issues if you are not comfortable doing so.

In this course, we will listen to podcasts, watch video clips from movies or TV shows, as well as watch the occasional full-length documentary. The goal is to provide tangible, real-world, or fictional portrayals of real-world examples of the concepts and ideas we will discuss in class. If you find any of the material offensive, or anything at all offensive that we do in class, please come and talk to me.

Artificial Intelligence and LLMs

For this course, unless specifically permitted by the assignment directions, you may not use generative AI or LLMs (ChatGPT, TerpAI, Gemini, Grammarly, etc.) to assist in drafting assignments, answering quiz or exam questions, or completing coursework. You may use generative AI only for general study support (e.g., explaining concepts or generating practice examples), but not for any work that is submitted for credit. If in doubt, ask!

Suspected violations of this policy likely will first result in an awkward conversation with me. If concerns persist, or if suspected violations occur on a major assessment, the issue will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct.

Course Requirements, Self-Assessment, and Grading:

Grading for this course will primarily focus on the following components: quizzes and exams, class activities, and a group project.

- Class activities and miscellaneous assignments (10%): We will have several class activities and miscellaneous assignments throughout the semester. These will be low-stakes and meant to keep you engaged in the material
- SCOTUS Project (15%): This is a group presentation on a specific Supreme Court case. More details will be provided in class.
- Case Analysis Paper (15%): You will watch several parts of a trial throughout the semester. Based on your observations, you will complete an observation paper analyzing the proceedings and integrating course concepts.
- Quizzes (30%): There will be twelve out-of-class quizzes, six during the first half of the semester and six during the second half. The quizzes are required, will be on

ELMS, and will focus on the previous week's class and materials. They must be completed before the following week's class. For example, the "Quiz 3" will cover material, lecture, and activities from week 3, and must be complete *before* the Week 4 class begins. The first quiz will be due by the start of week 2's class.

The quizzes will be relatively short, consist of multiple choice questions, are equally weighted, and will not be cumulative. They will be open-note and open-book, but they will also be timed (you'll have 10 minutes to complete it once you open it). Any and all material assigned for the previous class session and any lecture/class material is fair game for a quiz (so don't just limit yourself to lecture slides). The goal is to evaluate your engagement and comprehension of those materials, and allow you to accrue some points along the way. There will be no makeup quizzes as they will be available to start at any point in the week between classes.

- Exams (30%): This course will also include two exams during the semester: a midterm exam around Spring Break and an end-of-semester exam. Like the quizzes, the exams are required and will evaluate your engagement and comprehension of the material up to that point. They will generally consist of multiple choice and short answer questions. The exams will also be on ELMS, will be open-note and open-book, and will be timed. The end-of-semester exam must be completed by the end of our assigned Final Exam time (but we will not be sitting for a final exam).
- [OPTIONAL BONUS] In-Class Attendance (1%): Everyone loves bonus points! In this class, you choose if you would like your attendance to count toward your final grade calculation. Because this class is only once a week, students who choose to opt-in to this bonus can miss up to one class meeting without permission or penalty. If you miss no more than one meeting, you will receive 1 percentage point added to your final grade. But if you miss two or more classes, your final grade will be docked by 1 percentage point. If you choose not to make your attendance count, your attendance will not affect your grade (though you still need to complete the other required elements of the class). You must submit your choice by **September 16** (and there are no changes).

Additionally, your final grade will also be informed by your own self-assessments. You will be asked to complete two short self-reflection questionnaires. These questionnaires will include a series of questions about your work in the course. Specifically, you will be asked to:

- Talk about the work you have done in the course. E.g., How much effort did you commit to the reading and listening materials, the engagement activities, the comprehension checks, the class videos, and the class projects?

- Talk about your successes and struggles in the course. E.g., When did you feel most successful in the class? What challenges did you encounter with the concepts, the assignments, or the logistics of the course?
- Talk about opportunities for improvement. E.g., What steps could you take to deepen your understanding of course concepts or increase your engagement in the class?
- Propose the grade you feel you should receive in the course (up to that point), based on your: level of engagement; comprehension of the course material; quality of your daily reflective assignments; and quality of your final essay.
 - Briefly explain why you would give yourself that grade.

When assigning final grades, I will take into account your assessment of your own performance and progress in this course. Final grade distribution will be as follows.

A+	97+	C+	77-79
A	93-96	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62

Weekly Materials:

Each class meeting page includes a mix of podcast episodes, videos, news articles, academic journal articles, and book chapters, which will all be available on ELMS. There is no required book for this course. I have chosen these materials to illustrate key concepts that we will discuss in class. Some of these materials may also inform the engagement activities you will be asked to complete that week. Plan to complete the items listed for each class meeting module **before** class.

Other Policies:

Familiarize yourself with [course-related policies](#) maintained by the Office of Undergraduate Studies.

Academic Dishonesty: Don't cheat. It's bad news for everyone. If you are having trouble – again, just communicate with me.

Incompletes: I can only give an incomplete if the majority of coursework has been completed, and you experience some kind of emergency. If this happens, contact me as soon as possible so we can come up with a plan.

Disability Support: I will make every effort to accommodate students who are registered with the Academic Support Services (ADS) Office and who provide me with a University of Maryland ADS Accommodation form. Just let me know.