

University of Maryland
Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice

CCJS 454 -Contemporary Criminological Theory

Fall 2023

Online - Asynchronous

PROFESSOR

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OFFICE HOURS:

Tuesdays & Thursdays
12:00pm - 2:00pm

NOTE ON EMAILS: Always include your name and course/section number in emails sent to me. I attempt to respond to all emails within 24 hours of receipt.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to provide students with an overview of major contemporary criminological theories. For each theory, we will cover the major concepts and propositions, review the empirical evidence, and discuss implications for policy and practice.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Know the major concepts and propositions of contemporary criminological theories
2. Demonstrate an ability to apply these theories to the explanation of criminal behavior
3. Show familiarity with early and recent research on these theories
4. Describe ways these theories have informed or could inform policy and practice

Required Text

Cullen, Francis T., Robert Agnew, and Pamela Wilcox (Eds.). 2017. *Criminological Theory: Past to Present*, 7th edition. New York: Oxford University Press. Available [on RedShelf here](#).

Course Website

Apart from the textbook, we will use ELMS for access all course materials and class announcements. I strongly encourage you to use ELMS often throughout the course. Go to <http://elms.umd.edu> and log in with your Directory ID (login ID) and password.

Office Hours

All office hours meetings will be held [here via Zoom](#). Students will enter the waiting room and will need to wait until the professor admits them into the meet. Virtual walk-ins are always welcome and encouraged, but if another student is already in the virtual meeting, students must remain in the waiting room area to be admitted once I am done with the previous student, much as you would need to wait outside a professor's office while they are meeting with another student. This process

is done to maintain a private space for each student to meet and address questions or concerns. I strongly advise students to reach out prior to the office hours to set up a specific time to meet.

Course Grading Scale

Your final grade for this course will be based on the following scale:

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

To calculate final grades, weight the raw scores on your assignments by the percentage value in the table below and sum the categories. I will round the percentage to the nearest whole number, rounding up at .5 (for example, 86.4% will be a B and 86.5% will be a B+). If you have questions or concerns about a grade on an assignment and believe I should review it, please describe your concern in detail via email, within 48 hours of the assignment due date. If you have questions or concerns about your final grade, please email me as early as possible after grades are posted. For more information on grade complaints, visit:

<https://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html>

Graded Materials

Exam 1	10%
Exam 2	10%
Exam 3	20%
Discussion - Posts & Responses	20%
Three Essays:	
Essay 1	10%
Essay 2	15%
Essay 3	<u>15%</u>
	100%

Exams (40% of Final Grade, combined)

There will be three online exams (ELMS) in this course: two midterm exams (10% each) and one comprehensive final (20%). All three will include multiple choice and short answer questions. Each exam will be open-note and timed, and you will have flexibility (within a window of a few days) on when you take it. Makeup exams will only be given in cases of university-excused absences, and official documentation is required showing that you were not able to take the exam on any of the days on which the exam was open on ELMS. Exams are considered "major scheduled graded events." Therefore, the University medical excuse policy, which allows one student-signed honor statement attesting to illness, does not apply. Excused absences are: illness with a doctor's note, death in the immediate family, religious observances, required school activities, and required court appearance. I

will not accept a Health Center honor statement to verify an illness. If you go to the Health Center and a doctor will not write you a note, you will need to get a copy of your medical record from them to verify your illness. By law, you are entitled to get a copy of this, and it is your responsibility to do so. I must be notified prior to missing an exam for me to consider giving you a makeup, and you are expected to take the make-up exam prior to the exam date. If you have a problem on the day of an exam, email me and I can advise you what to do.

Discussion - Posts & Responses (20% of Final Grade)

Throughout the semester, students will participate in online blogs about the course material. After watching the lectures and reading the course materials, students will post **one original blog** posting in reaction to the materials, and will be expected to **respond to the postings of at least three of their fellow students**. The original blog postings and their replies are due by 11:59pm on their assigned days in the course outline.

Original blog postings (300 words min.) should address issues in the week's materials, pose questions and criticisms of the topic, and illicit discussion with classmates. All personal opinions should be supported by references to texts and lectures. Quality of discussion is valued; in your replies to others' posts, simply commenting that "you agree" with a previous entry will not earn you credit. Thoughtful, articulate responses to the topics being discussed will earn students a higher grade on their entries.

To help you construct your postings, here are some examples:

Example of an 'Excellent' Original Blog Posting:

Classical criminology first emerged as a protest against the harsh, existing criminal justice policies of the spiritualistic approach to criminology. Borrowing from Locke's idea of the 'social contract' classicism assumes that as members of society we all implicitly agree to relinquish some of our freedoms so that we can enjoy protection against infringements on those freedoms ourselves. Classicism is most associated with the ideas of Italian philosopher and scholar, Cesare Beccaria. According to Beccaria, punishments should be certain, severe (just proportional to the seriousness of offenses), and swift so that potential offenders would then be deterred and avoid committing crime based on rational calculation. He believed that the primary goal of punishment was deterrence (BSG pg. 17). Today, these basic ideas of the classical approach have become the basis for all modern criminal justice systems.

One of the main issues that I have with the deterrence theory is that it's based on the assumption that humans are rational beings and therefore offenders rationally calculate the costs and benefits of committing a crime. I don't contest that humans are rational beings-I just don't think that criminal behavior is always calculated rationally. What about the numerous people who are under the influence of alcohol or another substance or even under a certain emotional when they commit the crime? Surely these states inhibit rational? Also, these theories don't explain why people commit crime, but rather assumes that there are always people around who will commit a crime if given a chance. So how do we find out a definitive way to measure why people commit crime? Is there such a way? And if research shows that severity of punishment does not have a significant impact on deterrence, why is it that the United States has such a huge problem with mass incarceration specifically because of the severity of sentences on drug related crimes?

Example of an 'Excellent' response to another students' blog posting:

I think you bring up an excellent point about rationality, and how it can change under conditions such as being intoxicated, enraged, etc. But I think that the theory might argue that although rationality is altered it is still a decision-making process. That might be what Cornish & Clarke meant by 'bounded rationality' (BSG pg. 25). Even though the decision is quick and seems thoughtless, they would argue the person used the information they had available and made the decision to act. Just a thought!

Example of a 'Poor' response to another students' original blog posting:

I agree, nice job! I think we need to rethink our use of incarceration since it doesn't deter criminals.

Three Papers (3 Assignments - 40% of Final Grade)

There are 3 essay assignments. Each essay will ask you to present a solution to a criminal justice issue that utilizes contemporary knowledge of a criminological theory being covered in the course. For this, you will propose a theory-based policy or program that addresses the problem. Your essay should provide a thorough explanation of the theory and how it applies to the problem, a discussion of how the program incorporates elements of the theory, and a prediction of how the program or policy will help the problem. Plagiarized essays receive a 0 and no opportunity for rewrite. Essays should meet the following requirements:

- Minimum of 4 scholarly source citations (peer-reviewed academic journal articles, edited volumes and books)
- Citations included when necessary
- Minimizing use of direct quotations, more focus on use of paraphrasing
- Proper MLA, ASA, or APA formatting of citations throughout, with reference page
- Double spaced/12-point font
- 5 page maximum (not including reference page)

I will grade your papers based on how well you have done the following requirements:

- (1) Clearly present the thesis of your paper in the opening and concluding sections.
- (2) Make sure you demonstrate a solid understanding of the core components of each theory and accurately define important concepts. You may need to read ahead in the course schedule if we have not already covered the theories you choose in class lectures. Be sure to appropriately cite class readings.
- (3) Provide the reader with a sense for how the policy or program you are introducing will be constructed and administered. There should be a clear link discussed between the policy and its foundation in contemporary criminological theory.
- (4) Make sure your papers have clear organization and natural flow. Each should include an introduction section, transition sentences to connect major ideas, and a conclusion section. It should also have few, if any, grammatical or spelling errors, and the use of passive voice should be kept to a minimum.
- (5) Use 12-point Times New Roman (double-spaced) and 1-inch margins. Follow APA, MLA, or ASA style guide for in-text citations and references/bibliography. I have no preference, but you should be consistent.

COURSE OUTLINE

Note: CAW = Cullen, Agnew, & Wilcox (2018) *Criminological Theory: Past to Present*
(your required textbook)

Week 1: Introduction, Crime Trends, Correlates, and Data Sources

Readings: Travis et al. 2014 (excerpts); Rocque et al. 2016; Rosenfeld, 2018;

Week 2: Criminological Theory Evaluation and Testing

Readings: Kubrin, Stucky, and Krohn (excerpts);

Original Blog Due 9/7; Replies Due 9/8

Week 3 : Biological and Biosocial Theories

Readings: CAW Part I.2 (The Criminal Man); Rafter 2004; CAW Part XII.41 & 42 (Biological Explanations of Criminal Behavior; Personality and Crime: Are some people crime prone?); Rocque & Posick 2018

Original Blog Due 9/14; Replies Due 9/15

Week 4: Social Disorganization Theory, Part I

Readings: CAW Part II. 3 & 5 (Juvenile Delinquency in Urban Areas; Collective Efficacy and Crime); Sampson & Groves 1989

Original Blog Due 9/21; Replies Due 9/22

Week 5: Social Disorganization Theory, Part II

Readings: CAW Part II.6 (Legal Cynicism and Crime); Hipp & Wickes 2017; Hamm et al. 2017

Original Blog Due 9/28; Replies Due 9/29

Week 6: Anomie and Strain Theories, Part I

Readings: CAW Part V. 11 & 13 (Social Structure and Anomie; Crime and the American Dream)

Essay 1 Due 10/6 at 11:59pm

Week 7: Anomie and Strain Theories, Part II

Readings: CAW Part V.14 (Pressured into Crime: General Strain Theory)
; Broidy 2001; Thaxton & Agnew 2018

Exam 1: Released at 12:00am on 10/12, Due on 10/13 at 11:59pm

Week 8: Control Theories, Part I

Readings: CAW Part V: 15 & 16 (Techniques of Neutralization; Social Bond Theory);
Wiatrowski, Griswold, & Roberts 1981

Original Blog Due 10/19; Replies Due 10/20

Week 9: Control Theories, Part II

Readings: CAW Part V. 17 (A General Theory of Crime); Vazsonyi et al 2016

Original Blog Due 10/26; Replies Due 10/27

Week 10: Developmental and Life Course Theories

Readings: CAW Part XIII (all); Bowman & Mowen, 2018

Original Blog Due 11/2; Replies Due 11/3

Week 11: Deterrence and Rational Choice Theories

Readings: CAW Part I.1 (Essays on Crime & Punishment) Part X.32 & 33 (Reconceptualizing
Deterrence Theory; Crime as a Rational Choice); Paternoster et al., 2017; Ramey & Steidley, 2018

Original Blog Due 11/9; Replies Due 11/10

Essay #2 Due on 11/10 at 11:59pm

Week 12: Routine Activities Theory

Readings: CAW Part XI (all)

Exam 2: Released at 12:00am on 11/16, Due on 11/17 at 11:59pm

Week 13: Learning Theories

Readings: CAW Part II.7 & 9 (A Theory of Differential Association, A Social Learning Theory of Crime); McGloin 2009

Week 14: Subculture Theories

Readings: CAW Part III.10 (Code of the Street), Part IV.12 (Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang), Part V:15 (Techniques of Neutralization); Kwak et al, 2019; McGloin et al. 2011

Original Blog Due 11/30; Replies Due 12/1

Essay #3 Due on 12/1 at 11:59pm

Week 15: Labeling Theories

Readings: CAW Part VI (all)

Exam 3: Released at 12:00am on 12/4, Due at 12/8 at 11:59pm