

Instructor: Brenden Beck ([bbeck@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:bbeck@gc.cuny.edu))  
11:10am – 12:25pm Tuesdays and Fridays (HW 404)  
Office hour: Fridays 12:30pm – 1:30pm or by appointment (HW 1636)

## **Hunter College Soc 325: The Sociology of Crime and Punishment**

### **Course Description**

Welcome! This course will expose you to how sociologists analyze crime and society's responses to crime. We will ask: What has brought crime rates to forty-year lows? What is the difference between crime and harm? What has made the U.S. the largest jailer in the world? Do police and prisons reduce crime?

We will study the criminal justice system, drug laws, corporate crime, racial disparities in punishment, intimate-partner violence, "victimless" crimes, the criminalization of poverty, the causes of crime, and other topics. This course will expose you both to the topics that sociologists study and the methods we use. As the semester progresses we will each develop a research project that pursues our individual interests and hones our writing skills. We will also explore ways to reduce crime and create just social responses to crime.

### **Required Texts**

Goffman, Alice (2014). *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Alexander, Michelle (2010). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: New Press.

The other texts will be posted on Blackboard as PDFs under "Course Materials". Be sure your Blackboard account is up and working and that it is connected to an email address you check regularly. The books are for sale at Shakespeare and Co. on Lexington and 69<sup>th</sup> St. for between \$15 and \$25 each. Electronic copies are not allowed.

You will need to bring each day's readings to class in hard copy or on a tablet or laptop. You will not be allowed to access the readings on a phone during class. Most of the readings (besides the book) are on Blackboard now under "Course Materials", so my suggestion would be to print them all off as soon as you can. At a cost of 5 cents per page this is an economical solution.

### **Requirements and Grading**

You will be eligible for 150 points throughout the semester. After I grade each assignment, I will post your grade on Blackboard.

#### **15 points (10% of total grade) - Attendance**

There are 26 total classes this semester. I calculate the grade out of 24 classes, so you can miss two and still get 15 points. Attending all 26 classes will result in an attendance grade above 100% (sometimes called "extra credit"). For each class you miss below 24,

a point will be deducted from the 15 possible attendance points. I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences so you do not need to email me when you miss a class unless you want to. As for snow days, I go by Hunter’s cancellation announcements.

### **15 points (10% of total grade) - Participation in Class**

I determine participation points based on two criteria: Did you bring annotated copies of the reading to class? And did you participate in the day’s discussion (both small-group and whole-group discussion)? For the talkative among us, be sure not to participate too much. I will deduct points if you dominate discussion.

### **30 points (20% of total grade) - Quizzes**

Seven times throughout the semester, during the first ten minutes of class, you will complete a short quiz. The quizzes will ask questions about the readings for that day’s class. You will be allowed to refer the readings during the quizzes, another good reason to annotate the readings and bring them to class. Your lowest two quiz scores will be converted into extra credit. You will not be able to make up missed quizzes, so be sure to be on time to class. You will need a pen or pencil to complete the quizzes.

### **30 points (20% of total grade) - Midterm Exam**

You will have a take-home essay exam that will cover multiple topics from the readings and classes. You will demonstrate your understanding and critical analysis of the readings, lectures, and class discussions in two short essays.

### **30 points (20% of total grade) - Research Paper and Presentation**

You will complete a 6 to 8 page research paper on a topic of your choosing. At the end of the semester you will present your research to the class with a five-minute presentation. The paper is worth 20 points and the presentation is 10. I’ll provide details about the research paper as it gets closer.

### **30 points (20% of total grade) - Final Exam**

You will have a take home, essay exam that will cover all the topics covered in class (with emphasis on the second half of the course). See the midterm exam for details.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism of any kind will be grounds for failing the course. Review Hunter’s academic honesty policies at: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/studentaffairs/student-conduct/academic-integrity>.

### **Late Work**

For each day you submit an exam or research paper late, one letter grade will be deducted from the grade for that assignment. So if you earn an A- on the assignment, your grade will be reduced to a B-. I count a “day late” as any time between the deadline and 24 hours after the deadline. The quizzes and research presentation cannot be made up once they are missed.

## **Classroom Discussion**

Most of our class sessions will involve discussion. Good discussions require that everyone participate but also that everyone listen so be sure to “step up and step back”. If you have spoken a lot, speak less, and if you haven’t contributed recently, add your voice. I will cold call on students so you should be prepared to answer when called on.

You are not allowed to use your cell phone or the internet during class. If a student does use a laptop or tablet for purposes other than reading or note taking, they will lose participation points for the day and no longer be able to use the device in class.

## **Reading**

You will complete the assigned readings by the day for which they’re assigned. I have selected about 35 pages of reading per class. Completing it will require considerable butt-in-chair reading time. Probably about two hours for each class. As with any college course, most of your learning will occur outside the classroom. If you get stuck on or bored with a passage try reading out loud or setting a timer with planned breaks. Turning off the internet and phone is helpful too.

Always annotate while you read and come to class with the reading’s (1) take-home message and (2) a question you still have about the reading written down. The best way to prepare for class and for the exams is to read each text twice.

## **Contacting Me**

Before you email me, check the syllabus. Many questions are answered herein. If that doesn’t answer your question, email a fellow student. If that is similarly fruitless, email me. If I don’t respond within 48 hours, email me again. For any substantive discussions please schedule a meeting or come to my office hour. Discussing research paper topics or grades after class is usually more frantic than helpful.

## **Food in Class**

Sometimes a snack helps one stay energized and engaged. Please confine your snacks to the non-smelly kind so as not to distract the rest of us. Granola bars, carrots, and beef jerky are good options. French fries, soup, and jambalaya are not as good.

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## **Schedule**

### **January 30<sup>th</sup> – Introduction**

Syllabus

### **February 3<sup>rd</sup> – Defining Crime**

Eckholm, Erik. 2015. “In a Safer Age, U.S. Rethinks Its ‘Tough on Crime’ System.” *The New York Times*, January 13<sup>th</sup>, p. A1.

Muncie, John. 2001. “The Construction and Deconstruction of Crime.” *Understanding Crime and Criminology*.

### **February 6<sup>th</sup> – Measuring Crime**

Beirne, Piers and James Messerschmidt. 2010. "The Measurement of Crime." *Criminology: A Sociological Approach*. New York: Oxford University Press.

\*\*Syllabus quiz

### **February 10<sup>th</sup> – Theorizing Crime and Punishment**

Vold, George, Thomas Bernard, and Jeffrey Snipes. 2002. "Strain Theory," "Marxist and Postmodern Criminology," and "Feminist Criminology." *Theoretical Criminology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

### **February 13<sup>th</sup> – The Causes of Crime**

Reading TBD

### **February 17<sup>th</sup> – Violence Against Women**

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1993. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43: 1241-1299.

You may ignore the footnotes in Crenshaw's article.

### **February 20<sup>th</sup> – Moral Panics and Media Representations of Crime**

Goode, Erich and Nachman Ben-Yehuda. 1994. "Moral Panics: Culture, Politics, and Social Construction." *Annual Review of Sociology* 20: 149-171.

### **February 24<sup>th</sup> – The Central Park Five**

Rakoff, Jed. 2014. "Why Innocent People Plead Guilty". *The New York Review of Books* November 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **February 27<sup>th</sup> – Corporate Crime**

Garrett, Brandon. 2014. Chapter TBD. *Too Big to Jail: How Prosecutors Compromise with Corporations*. New York: Belknap Press.

### **March 3<sup>rd</sup> – Corporate Crime**

Eisinger, Jesse. 2014. "Why Only One Top Banker Went to Jail for the Financial Crisis." *The New York Times Magazine*, April 30<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*Take-home midterm handed out

### **March 6<sup>th</sup> – No Class (Brenden at a conference)**

### **March 10<sup>th</sup> – Midterm Exam (no class but Brenden responding to emails quickly)**

\*\*Midterm exam due at 5:00pm via Turnitin.com

### **March 13<sup>th</sup> – Causes and Consequences of MI**

National Research Council. 2014. "Summary." *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*. Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration, J. Travis, B. Western, and S. Redburn, Editors. Committee on Law and Justice, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

### **March 17<sup>th</sup> – Consequences of MI**

Reading TBD

**March 20<sup>th</sup> – Legal Entanglements**

Goffman “Introduction” and “Chapter One: The 6<sup>th</sup> Street Boys and Their Legal Entanglements”

**March 24<sup>th</sup> – Avoiding the Police**

Goffman “Chapter Two: The Art of Running”

Richlin-Klonsky, Judith et al. 2001. “Getting Started.” *A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers*. New York: Worth Publishers. pp 11-13.

**March 27<sup>th</sup> – Collateral Consequences of Hyper-Policing**

Goffman “Chapter Three: When the Police Knock Your Door In”

**March 31<sup>st</sup> – Clean People**

Goffman “Chapter Seven: Clean People” and “Conclusion”

\*\*Research topic due by 5:00pm via email. Put “Soc 325 Paper Topic” in the subject line.

**April 3<sup>rd</sup> – No Class – Spring Break**

**April 7<sup>th</sup> – No Class – Spring Break**

**April 10<sup>th</sup> – No Class – Spring Break**

**April 14<sup>th</sup> – The Recent History of Mass Incarceration**

Alexander, “Introduction” and pp 45 to 58 of “Chapter One: The Rebirth of Caste”

**April 17<sup>th</sup> – Racism and the War on Drugs**

Alexander, “Chapter Three: the Color of Justice”

**April 21<sup>st</sup> – Post-release Effects of Incarceration**

Alexander, “Chapter 4: The Cruel Hand”

**April 24<sup>th</sup> – The New Jim Crow?**

Alexander, “Chapter 5: The New Jim Crow”

Critiques of Alexander TBD

**April 28<sup>th</sup> – Reading TBD**

Reading TBD

**May 1<sup>st</sup> – What is to be Done?**

Choose one reading from Charles Murray, Charles Koch, Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Brenden Beck, and Michelle Alexander.

**May 5<sup>th</sup> – Student Presentations**

**May 8<sup>th</sup> – Student Presentations**

**May 12<sup>th</sup> – Student Presentations**

\*\*Research Paper due at 5:00pm via Turnitin.com

**May 15<sup>th</sup> – Wrap-up Class**

Short assignment to be announced, wrap-up discussion  
Final exam handed out

**May 22<sup>nd</sup> – Final Exam Due (no class)**

Take-home exam due at 5:00pm via Turnitin.com

**Note:** I may change part of the course structure during the semester to better fit the flow of the class.