

Instructor: Brenden Beck, PhD ([Brenden.Beck@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Brenden.Beck@ucdenver.edu))

Class time and location: Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:30pm – 4:45pm, North 1207

Office hours: Wednesdays 2:15-3:15pm or by appointment

Office: 1380 Lawrence Street, Suite 420

## **SOCY 3490: Criminology, University of Colorado Denver, Fall 2021**

### **Course Description**

Welcome! In this course, we will look at the theories, nature, and causes of crime as a social phenomenon. We'll discuss the processes of making laws, breaking laws, and the social reaction to law breaking. We will also ask how to create a more just legal system and reduce crime.

### **Course Objectives**

Through this course, you will:

1. Understand the central criminological theories, concepts, and research methods used by criminologists.
2. Connect those theories, concepts, and methods to criminal justice policy and practice.
3. Recognize, understand, and think critically about the major issues in criminology.
4. Become a critical consumer of media reports and politicians' claims about crime and crime policies.

### **Course Materials**

I will provide all texts as PDFs on the class Canvas page. You do not need to purchase any books for this class, though you may want to buy a physical copy of our textbook:

Beirne, Piers & James W. Messerschmidt. 2016. *Criminology: A Sociological Approach*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition. Oxford University Press.

### **Requirements and Grading**

The weight of each assignment is below. After I grade each assignment, I will post your grade on Canvas. Letter grades are the unrounded percentages and follow the typical A for 93% or above, A- for 90% to 92.9%, B+ for 87% to 89.9%, B for 83% to 86.9%, and so on, with the minus and plus cut-offs at the 3s and 7s.

#### **15% of total grade - Attendance**

There are 28 classes this semester. I don't take attendance the first day and I calculate the attendance grade out of 25 classes, so you can miss two days and still get full credit. For each class you miss beyond the two, a percentage point will be deducted from your total grade, up to 15 points. If you have an approved excuse for an absence, please email me ([Brenden.Beck@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Brenden.Beck@ucdenver.edu)).

#### **15% of total grade - Participation in Class**

Most of our classes will involve discussion, and your active participation is part of how I assess your grasp of the material. To be an active discussant, you'll need to come to class with all the readings completed and annotated. I will frequently start discussions by asking

you to share the main idea of a reading and/or a question you still have for the author, so it would be a good idea to write these down as part of your annotations. The question could be something you didn't understand, something you want to discuss further, or a critique you have. To earn an "A" in this area you will need to be an active participant and be ready when called on. If you are not comfortable speaking extemporaneously, don't worry, I will give you plenty of chances to write your responses before sharing them.

**5% of total grade – Media Project**

See September 22nd, below, and the separate instructions sheet (provided closer to the due date) for more on the media project.

**20% of total grade – Exam 1**

The first exam will cover all readings, lectures, and class discussions preceding it. It will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay responses. You will be allowed to use one piece of paper, single-sided, size-12 font, of notes. The best way to prepare for the exams is to read each text twice.

**5% of total grade – Neighborhood Project**

See October 25th, below, and the separate instructions sheet (provided closer to the due date) for more on the neighborhood project.

**20% of total grade - Research Presentation and Annotated Bibliography**

Toward the end of the semester, you will make a 5-minute presentation to the class, using slides, summarizing the findings of your research project. On the day you make your presentation, you will hand me an annotated bibliography with at least six sources, one of which must be a book. We will review the expectations and rubrics for the presentation and bibliography as the semester progresses.

**20% of total grade – Exam 2**

The second exam will resemble the Midterm Exam and cover the material since the Midterm.

**Covid-19 Protocols**

I hope everyone will get a Covid vaccine as this is the best way to protect ourselves and our communities from the disease. As an extra precaution, CU Denver is requiring we wear masks when indoors, at least for the start of the semester. If you are giving a presentation and can stand at least 10 feet from other people, you may remove your mask.

**Work Time per Week**

As with most college courses, one credit represents about three hours of academic work per week, so for our three-credit class, you should expect to do about nine hours of work per week. Some weeks will be more and some will be less. You'll have about 40 pages to read in the typical week, so plan breaks and persevere through tough passages. I turn off my laptop's wifi and put my phone in a different room when I have a lot of reading to do.

## **Phones, Laptops, and Tablets**

You may use laptops or tablets to store the readings or to take notes in class. Please do not use a phone or access the internet during class. Turning off wifi might help with self-control if you want to use a laptop. If you use a laptop or tablet for purposes other than reading or note taking, you will lose participation points for the day and no longer be able to use the device in class. Students who look particularly engrossed in their laptops are more likely to be called on.

## **Academic Honesty**

Plagiarism or cheating of any kind, on any assignment, will result in failing the entire course. For more information, review UCD's Honor Code [here](#) and review best practices for citation at the library's site [here](#).

## **Late Work**

If you submit work late, your grade will be reduced by one letter grade for every 24 hours it is late. Presentations and exams cannot be made up. Technical glitches are not an excuse for missing deadlines, so allow extra time before the deadline in case you need switch computers or call the CU Denver helpdesk (link below). If there is an emergency life situation, email me 24 hours in advance of the assignment due date. CU Denver's tech help desk is at: <https://www.ucdenver.edu/offices/office-of-information-technology/get-help>.

## **Students with Disabilities**

I am committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in our class, including students with disabilities. If you have a disability or think you have a disability and need accommodations to succeed in this course, contact Disability Resources and Services (DRS) and speak with me as soon as you can. DRS is in Academic Building 1, Suite 2116, and at [disabilityresources@ucdenver.edu](mailto:disabilityresources@ucdenver.edu).

## **Communicating with me**

I will periodically send out Canvas announcements with updates, links, or other items of interest to communicate with the class. To communicate with me, email me at [Brenden.Beck@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Brenden.Beck@ucdenver.edu). If I don't respond in 48 hours, email me again. You can also message me on Canvas, but I check my email more regularly. Before emailing me, please check the syllabus first, and consider emailing a fellow student to see if they know the answer.

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## **Course Schedule**

### **Monday August 25<sup>th</sup> – Introduction**

#### **Wednesday August 25<sup>th</sup> – How should we define “crime”?**

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 1. “The Problem of Crime.” pp. 14-24.

Levitz, Eric. 2021. “Progressives Don't Need to Downplay Rising Homicides.” *The Atlantic*. July 1<sup>st</sup>.

#### **Monday August 30<sup>th</sup> – How can we measure crime?**

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 2. “The Measurement of Crime.”

### **Wednesday September 1<sup>st</sup> – Why do people commit crime? Part 1**

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 4. "Social Structure, Anomie, and Crime."

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 5, Section 1. "Social Disorganization and Delinquency," pp 103-113.

### **Monday September 6<sup>th</sup> – Labor Day, no class**

### **Wednesday September 8<sup>th</sup> – Why do people commit crime? Part 2**

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 6, Sections 2, 3, and 4. "Social Learning, Social Control, and Self-Control Theories."

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 7. "The Conflict Tradition."

Every Other Hour. 2017. "Why We Shoot." *WBEZ*.

### **Monday September 13<sup>th</sup> – Gender and crime**

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 8, Section 1. "Feminist Criminologies," pp 186-194.

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 9, Section 2. "Gender and Crime," pp 222-228.

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

### **Wednesday September 15<sup>th</sup> – Interpersonal violence**

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 11. "Interpersonal Violence" pp 263-284.

Groff, Lauren. 2020. "The Wind." *The New Yorker*.

### **Monday September 20<sup>th</sup> – Media and crime**

Beirne & Messerschmidt. "Crime in the Mass Media," pp 9-12.

### **Wednesday September 22<sup>nd</sup> – Media project**

For this project you'll find a media object like a news report or tv clip that discusses crime or criminal justice, and you'll analyze it in a 1-minute report to the class. Brenden will provide a detailed instructions sheet closer to this date.

### **Monday September 27<sup>th</sup> – Economic inequality and crime**

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 9, Section 1. "Class and Crime," pp 216-222.

Kiel & Eisinger. 2018. "Who's More Likely to Be Audited: A Person Making \$20,000 — or \$400,000?" *ProPublica*, December 12.

### **Wednesday September 29<sup>th</sup> – Economic inequality and crime, cont.**

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 12. "White-Collar Crime."

Leopold et al. 2020. "FinCEN Files Show Criminals Moved Billions as Banks Watched." *Buzzfeed*, September 20.

### **Monday October 4<sup>th</sup> – Race, crime, & criminal Justice**

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 9, Section 3. "Race and Crime."

### **Wednesday October 6<sup>th</sup> – Race, crime, & criminal justice, cont.**

Read or Listen: Price, Richard. 2008. "Bicycle Safety on Essex." *The Moth*. 12:52.

Travis & Western. 2015. "Poverty, Violence, and Black Incarceration," in *Policing the Black Man* ed. Angela J. Davis.

### **Monday October 11<sup>th</sup> – Crime globally**

Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 14. "Comparative Criminology and Globalization."  
Barry. 2017. "How to Get Away with Murder in Small-Town India." *The New York Times*.  
Economist. 2012. "A Surprising Safe Haven: How Central America's Poorest Country Became One of Its Safest."  
Optional: Tonry. 2015. "Is Cross-National and Comparative Research on the Criminal Justice System Useful?" *European Journal of Criminology*.

### **Wednesday October 13<sup>th</sup> – Crime and justice in the city**

Bratton, Bill and George Kelling. 2015. "Why We Need Broken Windows Policing." *City Journal*.  
Lowry. 2018. "Where Killings Go Unsolved." *The Washington Post*.  
Beirne & Messerschmidt. Chapter 10, Section 1. "Robbery and Burglary," pp 240-248.

### **Monday October 18<sup>th</sup> – Exam prep**

### **Wednesday October 20<sup>th</sup> – Exam 1**

### **Monday October 25<sup>th</sup> – Police**

Willis. 2014. "A Recent History of the Police." *Oxford Handbook on Police and Policing*.  
Illing, Sean. 2021. "A professor became a police officer — and learned what's really broken about policing." *Vox*. May 19<sup>th</sup>.

### **Wednesday October 27<sup>th</sup> – Police, cont.**

Finnegan. 2020. "How Police Unions Fight Reform." *The New Yorker*.

### **Monday November 1<sup>st</sup> – Neighborhood project presentations**

For the neighborhood project, you'll choose a neighborhood in Denver, analyze numerical data about its crime, policing, and incarceration trends, and compare those data to city averages. Then, you'll make a one-minute presentation to the class about your neighborhood. Brenden will provide more detailed instructions closer to this date.

### **Wednesday November 3<sup>rd</sup> – Brenden at a conference, no class**

### **Monday November 8<sup>th</sup> – Courts**

Rakoff. 2014. "Why Innocent People Plead Guilty." *New York Review of Books*.  
Smith. 2019. "Progressive DAs are shaking up the criminal justice system. Pro-police groups aren't happy." *NBC News*.  
Serial. 2018. "A Bar Fight Walks into the Justice Center," Episode 1, Season 3 (52:00).

### **Wednesday November 10<sup>th</sup> – Incarceration**

Lind. 2014. "Two Simple Facts that Explain Why the US Prison Population is so Large." *Vox*.  
Roeder. 2015. "The Prisoner's Dilemma," *Five Thirty Eight*.

### **Monday November 15<sup>th</sup> – Incarceration, cont.**

Uggen, Chris and Sara Wakefield. 2010. "Incarceration and Stratification." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 387-406.

### **Wednesday November 17<sup>th</sup> – What is to be done?**

Kotlowitz, Adam. 2021. "The Killing of Adam Toledo and the Colliding Cycles of Violence in Chicago." *The New Yorker*. April 24<sup>th</sup>.

Alcorn, Ted. 2021. "Reimagining the Justice System, From Inside the Mayor's Office." *The New York Times*. May 17<sup>th</sup>.

Further readings TBD about reforms to reduce crime and increase justice. Readings might include those by Charles Murray, Charles Koch, Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Michelle Alexander.

**Monday November 22<sup>nd</sup> – Fall break, no class**

**Wednesday November 24<sup>th</sup> – Fall break, no class**

**Monday November 29<sup>th</sup> – Research presentations**

**Wednesday December 1<sup>st</sup> – Research presentations**

**Monday December 6<sup>th</sup> – Exam review**

**Wednesday December 8<sup>th</sup> – Exam 2**