



## **SOC 3575-090: Critical Perspectives on Criminal Courts**

Spring 2025

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**Pronouns:** she/her/hers

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**Office Hours:** *by appointment*

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### **Course Description**

Criminal courts are a fundamental component of the Criminal Justice System. This course provides an overview of how criminal courts function in our society. Students will learn about the history and sources of law that influence our society, the organization of our court system, and be introduced to how actors within the Courtroom Work Group collaborate. Students will also learn about the extensive pre-trial process. Issues during trials and the post-trial process will also be discussed, including jury selection, expert witnesses and forensic evidence, jury deliberations, sentencing, and wrongful convictions.

### **Course Outcomes and Objectives**

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- **Understand** the role that judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and other court actors play throughout the criminal case process.
- **Explain** how criminal courts exacerbate racial, ethnic, and class inequalities.
- **Analyze** social science research and media about criminal courts by evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of evidence provided by the authors.
- **Apply** what you learn in class to your own court observations.
- **Communicate** complex research findings by condensing them into easily digestible and accessible material for the public.
- **Engage** in discussions about topics related to criminal courts using effective communication skills.

## Course Assignments

- Weekly Exit Tickets – 20%
- Weekly Discussion Posts and Replies – 30%
- Court Observation Paper – 25%
- Infographic/Social Media Campaign – 25%

## Preliminary Course Schedule

| Dates        | Topic                                          | Assignments                                                                           |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week 1:      | Introduction                                   | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket                                               |
| Week 2:      | Law: Sources & Types                           | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket                                               |
| Week 3:      | Court Organization & Criminal Case Process     | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket                                               |
| Week 4:      | Prosecutors                                    | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket                                               |
| Week 5:      | Defense Attorneys                              | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket                                               |
| Week 6:      | Judges                                         | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket                                               |
| Week 7:      | Criminal Courts as Social Control Institutions | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket                                               |
| Week 8:      | Bail and Bond                                  | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket<br><b>Court Observation Paper</b>             |
| Week 9:      | Pretrial Services                              | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket                                               |
| Week 10:     | Spring Break                                   |                                                                                       |
| Week 11:     | Algorithms in Criminal Courts                  | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket                                               |
| Week 12:     | Juries & Trials                                | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket                                               |
| Week 13:     | Wrongful Conviction                            | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket                                               |
| Week 14:     | Problem-Solving Courts                         | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket<br><b>Infographic/SM Campaign Rough Draft</b> |
| Week 15:     | Juvenile Court                                 | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket<br><b>Infographic/SM Campaign Feedback</b>    |
| Week 16:     | Conclusion                                     | Discussion post, reply, and exit ticket                                               |
| Finals Week: |                                                | <b>Infographic/SM Campaign Final Draft</b>                                            |

*\* This schedule is subject to revision, if necessary, during the semester \**

## Weekly Rhythm

| Criminal Courts: Weekly Rhythm |                                                                                    |                          |                                   |          |                              |          |                        |  |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|----------|------------------------|--|
|                                | Monday                                                                             | Tuesday                  | Wednesday                         | Thursday | Friday                       | Saturday | Sunday                 |  |
| Week                           |                                                                                    | Weekly Unit Begins       |                                   |          |                              |          | Weekly Unit Ends       |  |
|                                | Reading Day                                                                        | Required Lectures Posted | Required Readings / Lectures Open |          |                              |          |                        |  |
|                                |                                                                                    | Weekly Exit Ticket Opens |                                   |          |                              |          | Weekly Exit Ticket Due |  |
|                                |                                                                                    | Discussion: Initial Post |                                   |          | Discussion: Respond to Peers |          |                        |  |
|                                | Work on Long-term Assignments (Court Observation Paper or Infographic/SM Campaign) |                          |                                   |          |                              |          |                        |  |
|                                | Communications via Canvas throughout the week                                      |                          |                                   |          |                              |          |                        |  |

## Grading Scale

A total of 1,000 points are available in this course. Final grades will be assigned according to the table below, which reflects university grade distributions and cut-off points. Final grades will not be rounded up or down. There are no extra credit activities for this course. I will try my best to return your graded assignments within one week of submission.

| Points    | Grade |
|-----------|-------|
| 970-1,000 | A+    |
| 930-969   | A     |
| 900-929   | A-    |
| 870-899   | B+    |
| 830-869   | B     |
| 800-829   | B-    |
| 770-799   | C+    |
| 730-769   | C     |
| 700-729   | C-    |
| 670-699   | D+    |

630-669 D  
600-629 D-  
0-599 E

**University Policies**

Updated mandatory syllabus policies regarding the ADA Act, Safety at the U, Addressing Sexual Misconduct, and Academic Misconduct can be viewed at: <https://cte.utah.edu/instructor-education/syllabus/institutional-policies.php>