

**SOC 441 - CRIMINOLOGY**  
MONDAY / WEDNESDAY – 2:30-3:45PM  
Birge Hall B302

Instructor: Michael Light, PhD, Associate Professor of Sociology  
Office: 8144 Sewell Social Sciences Building  
Office Hours: Th 3:00-4:00pm & appointment  
Email: [milight@ssc.wisc.edu](mailto:milight@ssc.wisc.edu)  
Instructional Mode: Face-to-Face  
Canvas site: <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/117148>

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Sections: Monday (9:55-10:45am – SS 6224); (11-11:50am – SS 6314); (12:05-55pm SS 6314)  
Thursday (12:05-55pm SS 4322); (1:20-2:10pm SS 4322)

Credits: 3. This class meets for two 75-minute class periods each week over the fall/spring semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, problem sets, studying, etc) for about 3 hours out of classroom for every class period. The syllabus includes more information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

**Course Description**

“Every cobbler thinks leather is the only thing, and for better or worse, I am a sociologist.”  
– C. Wright Mills (1959)

“We are compelled to admit that ‘criminology’ as traditionally conceived is a bastard science grown out of public preoccupation with a social plague.” - Thorsten Sellin (1938)

This course is intended to be a broad introductory overview to the study of crime and to the field of criminology. The course is divided into three major sections. The first part of the class focuses on basic definitions and the empirical understanding of crime and crime trends. The second and largest section details theories and research on the causes of criminal behavior. The final section focuses on three contemporary controversies at the fore of criminological inquiry: the death penalty, gun control and immigration control.

**Learning Objectives**

1. Students will develop an empirically grounded understanding of crime and criminal justice outcomes and be able to analyze criminological patterns through the application of theory in the social sciences.
2. Students will engage major theoretical debates in criminology. Why do people break the law? Do our peers affect whether we break the law? Why is crime higher in some

neighborhoods and not others? Does the death penalty deter crime? Does immigration increase crime?

3. Students will competently interpret representations of data and critically analyze study design in published research on crime and punishment.
4. Through engagement with course readings and class discussion, students will establish a foundation for critically assessing the often controversial issues surrounding crime and the administration of criminal justice.

### **Required Texts**

Akers, Ronald L. and Christine S. Sellers. 2016. *Criminological Theories: Introduction, Evaluation, and Application, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Oxford University Press.

- This will be the main text for our course, however, there will be other required readings throughout the semester uploaded to Canvas.

### **Required Materials**

This course utilizes Top Hat ([www.tophat.com](http://www.tophat.com)) technology to help facilitate student participation, stimulate discussion, and provide real-time feedback on lectures. You will be able to submit answers to in-class questions using Apple or Android smartphones and tablets, laptops, or through text message. You can visit the Top Hat Overview (<https://success.tophat.com/s/article/Student-Top-Hat-Overview-and-Getting-Started-Guide>) within the Top Hat Success Center which outlines how you will register for a Top Hat account, as well as providing a brief overview to get you up and running on the system. An email invitation will be sent to you by email, but if don't receive this email, you can register by simply visiting our course website: <https://app.tophat.com/e/XXX>

### **Course Requirements:**

Your grade for this course is based on three exams, a course paper, a debate, and participation in both lecture and discussion sections.

Exam I	15%
Exam II	25%
Exam III	20%
Paper	20%
Debate/Section Part.	10%
Lecture Part.	10%

Grading: The standard UW grading scale will be used.

<b>Total Percent</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Total Percent</b>	<b>Grade</b>
93-100	A	70-76.99	C
87-92.99	AB	60-69.99	D
83-86.99	B	<60	F
77-82.99	BC		

Exams: There will be three exams in this course. You are responsible for all material from lectures (including media) and the assigned readings for the exams. The exams will be some combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay. The exams will not technically be cumulative, but there are concepts that will carry over from the previous parts of the course for which you will be responsible. There will be *no makeup exams* without a valid, documented excuse.

Participation: Each week there will be interactive questions posed to the class that will count as your participation. The questions will be multiple choice and will be conducted using TopHat. Questions will not be posed on exam weeks. There will be 13 weeks of questions but only the 10 best grades will be count towards your grade.

Course Paper: The course paper asks you to engage **one** of the current controversies in criminology. You can choose to write on any **one of the three** following topics:

- (1) **Death Penalty**: The death penalty remains a controversial issue both within the United States and across the globe. Drawing from criminological theories and research in this area, discuss the following two issues: 1) what are the trends in the use of the death penalty in the U.S., and 2) should the U.S. increase or decrease the use of death penalty?
- (2) **Immigration and Crime**: Few topics have more criminological significance and public policy salience than understanding the impact of immigration on crime. Drawing from research in this area, use two different criminological theories to answer the following question: does immigration increase crime? Why or why not?
- (3) **Gun Control**: In the wake of multiple mass shootings, the topic of gun control has become a divisive social and political issue. Drawing from criminological theories and research in this area, discuss the following two questions: 1) does the U.S. have an issue with gun violence, and if so, 2) are stricter or more lenient gun laws potential solutions? Why or why not?

Paper Requirements: The paper must be 11 or 12 point Times New Roman font, double spaced w/ 1" margins, stapled w/ name on each page. Do not use a cover sheet or plastic report cover. The essay should be approximately 5-7 pages (not including citations). Your final paper will be due **Wednesday December 12<sup>th</sup>**. Late papers will be deducted one full letter grade per day. In support of your argument I want you to draw from in-class readings and **at least two outside sources from peer-reviewed, scholarly books or articles**. Be sure to properly cite all supporting material. The journals below are appropriate examples, but certainly not exhaustive. If you have questions about your sources feel free to ask me or the TA.

- *Criminology, Law & Society Review, American Sociological Review, Social Forces, Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, American Journal of Sociology, Quantitative Criminology, Justice Quarterly, Social Problems, American Journal of Public Health, Journal of Law & Economics*

Debates: Each of you will participate in one of the three debates. The topics for the debates are the same as the paper topics above (Death Penalty, Immigration-Crime, and Gun Control). **We will assign you to a debate topic and team** (e.g. pro-gun control). The format of the debates will be detailed later in the semester and the debates will take place during your discussion section. Your grade for the debates will be based on two criteria: 1) your involvement and level of preparation, and 2) the feedback from your teammates regarding your contribution. I encourage

the use of presentations (PowerPoint, Prezi, graphs, handouts, etc.) in addition to written remarks. The goal is to communicate effectively on a complex and controversial topic.

### **Course Policies and Friendly Reminders**

- **Attendance.** Attendance is not mandatory, but you will be highly disadvantaged by missing class. All TopHat questions are posed in class and ***there are no make-ups.*** In addition, there is valuable information given during lecture that is not in the assigned readings and you are expected to know lecture material for the exams. Please also make every effort to be on time for class, as students entering late can be distracting to both teaching and learning.
- **Classroom Civility.** The study of crime requires discussing sensitive and often controversial topics that may be uncomfortable for some students. I encourage both good discussions and critical assessment of issues, however, I require that students will respect their peers and inflammatory remarks will be dealt with accordingly. The University of Wisconsin is committed to fostering diversity and inclusion and welcomes individuals of all ages, religions, sex, sexual orientations, races, nationalities, languages, military experience, disabilities, family statuses, gender identities and expressions, political views, and socioeconomic statuses. Behaviors that threaten, harass, discriminate or that are disrespectful of others will not be tolerated. Inappropriate behaviors will be addressed with disciplinary action, which may include being referred to the Dean of Students Office. Please visit UW's Nondiscrimination policy for more information: <https://oed.wisc.edu/statement-of-non-discrimination.htm>.
- **Accommodations.** Please inform the instructor if you are eligible for necessary accommodations for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course. This may be the case if English is your second language or you experience a physical or psychological condition that makes it difficult for you to complete assignments and/or exams without some modification of those tasks. Accommodations are provided for students who qualify for disability services through the McBurney Center. Their website has detailed instructions about how to qualify: <https://mcburney.wisc.edu/>
- **Academic honesty.** As with all courses at the University of Wisconsin, you are expected to follow the University's rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. The standards are outlined by the Office of the Dean of Students at <http://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/>. According to UWS 14, academic misconduct is defined as:
  - seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation
  - uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise
  - forges or falsifies academic documents or records
  - intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others
  - engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance
  - assists other students in any of these acts.
- **Other Issues.** It is important that YOU stay on top of issues as it relates to the class. The worst thing you can do is come to me at the end of the semester and bring up issues that happened weeks and months earlier.

**Departmental notice of grievance and appeal rights.** The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistants near the end of the semester. Students who have more immediate concerns about this course should report them to the instructor or to the chair, 8128 Social Science.

**Department learning objectives.** Beyond the specific substantive and methodological content described above, the course is designed to achieve the following instructional objectives designated as priorities by the Department of Sociology:

*Critically Evaluate Published Research.* Sociology graduates will be able to read and evaluate published research as it appears in academic journals and popular or policy publications.

*Communicate Skillfully:* Sociology majors write papers and make oral presentations that build arguments and assess evidence in a clear and effective manner.

*Critical Thinking about Society and Social Processes:* Sociology graduates can look beyond the surface of issues to discover the "why" and "how" of social order and structure and consider the underlying social mechanisms that may be creating a situation, identify evidence that may adjudicate between alternate explanations for phenomena, and develop proposed policies or action plans in light of theory and data.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

<b>Date</b>	<b>Lecture</b>	<b>Required Readings</b>
<b>Section I: The Empirical Reality of Crime and Punishment in America</b>		
Sept. 5 <sup>th</sup>	Introduction: What is Criminology?	No readings
Sept. 10 <sup>th</sup>	Sociological Criminology: A brief History	Barkan pp. 2-12 (available on Canvas)
Sept. 12 <sup>th</sup> & 17 <sup>th</sup>	Measuring Crime & Crime Patterns	Barkan Ch. 3 & Walker Ch. 1 (available on Canvas)
Sept. 19 <sup>th</sup> & 24 <sup>th</sup>	Responses to Crime: Punishment in America	Western Ch. 1 & Pew (2 reports) (available on Canvas)
<b>Section II: Explaining Criminal Behavior</b>		
Sept. 26 <sup>th</sup> & Oct. 1 <sup>st</sup>	Introduction to Theory & Rational Choice Theories	Akers & Sellers Ch. 1 & 2
Oct. 3 <sup>rd</sup> & 8 <sup>th</sup>	Biosocial and Psychological Theories	Akers & Sellers Ch. 3 & 4
Oct. 10 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Exam I</b>	
Oct. 15 <sup>th</sup> & 17 <sup>th</sup>	Social Learning Theory	Akers and Sellers Ch. 5
Oct. 22 <sup>nd</sup> & 24 <sup>th</sup>	Social Bonds and Control Theories	Akers & Sellers Ch. 6
Oct. 29 <sup>th</sup>	Life Course Theory	Laub and Sampson Ch. 2 & 3 (available on Canvas)
Oct. 31 <sup>st</sup>	Social Disorganization Theory	Akers & Sellers Ch. 8
Nov. 5 <sup>th</sup>	Anomie and Strain Theories	Akers & Sellers Ch. 9
Nov. 7 <sup>th</sup>	Labeling Theory	Akers & Sellers Ch. 7
Nov. 12 <sup>th</sup>	Catch Up and Review for Exam II	
Nov. 14 <sup>th</sup>	ASC CONFERENCE (GUEST SPEAKER)	No readings
Nov. 19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Exam II</b>	
Nov. 21 <sup>st</sup>	Debate Preparation (NO CLASS)	
<b>Section III: Crime and Controversy</b>		
Nov. 26 <sup>th</sup>	The Death Penalty	Hickey pp. 244-265 (available on Canvas)
Nov. 28 <sup>th</sup> & Dec. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Does Immigration Increase Crime?	Ousey and Kubrin (2018) (available on Canvas)
Dec. 5 <sup>th</sup>	So is it More or Less Guns?	Hickey pp. 266-297 (available on Canvas)
Dec. 10 <sup>th</sup>	Catch Up Day	
Dec. 12 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Course Paper Due &amp; Review</b>	
Dec. 19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Exam III at 5:05pm</b>	