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SOC 497 01H: Prison, Power and Inequality

COURSE SYLLABUS:WINTER MINI 2025 (Intensive)

Meets 12/16/2024 through 1/10/2025

Web Based Class

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Dr. Nicole Farris, Professor

Office Location: Ferguson Room 218

Office Hours: Online by appointment

Main Office Phone: 903-886-5332

Office Fax: 903-886-5330

University Email Address: Nicole.Farris@tamuc.edu

Preferred Form of Communication: Email

Communication Response Time: 24 Hours,

COURSE INFORMATION

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings

Required:

Piper Kerman, *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison* (Purchase)

Access to Netflix Streaming Platform or Season 1 DVD of the series.

Available online on our course webpage:

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (excerpts)

Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (excerpt)

Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (excerpt)

Megan Sweeney, *Reading Is My Window* (excerpt)

Bruce Western, *Homeward* (excerpt)

Sociological articles on *Orange Is the New Black* and the prison system

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Software Required: Access to course website- you need to have an active email username and password. I will post your grades to the course website, as well as your powerpoints, assignments, and supplemental articles that I see fit to include in lecture.

Course Description

Hours: 3

Honors Special Topics. Three semester hours. This intensive course, *Sociology of Prisons: Orange Is the New Black*, explores the intersection of gender, race, and class within the U.S. prison system through the lens of the popular television series *Orange Is the New Black*. Using a sociological framework, we examine the realities of life in women's prisons, focusing on topics such as institutional power, social hierarchies, reentry challenges, and the portrayal of marginalized communities in media. Students will engage with scholarly readings and critical analyses alongside select episodes of *Orange Is the New Black* to unpack the social and structural forces that shape the lives of incarcerated women. Through daily discussions and reflective writing, students will gain a deeper understanding of prison reform, intersectionality, and the sociological implications of incarceration.

Student Learning Outcomes (Should be measurable; observable; use action verbs)

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

1. Analyze the portrayal of gender, race, and class within the prison system, as represented in *Orange Is the New Black*, and discuss how these intersect to impact incarcerated individuals.
2. Evaluate the sociological concepts of power, authority, and control as they relate to the dynamics between prison staff and inmates within the context of total institutions.
3. Apply sociological theories and concepts learned in class to analyze real-world prison issues, using specific examples from the course readings and media to support their arguments.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Minimal Technical Skills Needed

Using the Learning Management System, Powerpoint, Microsoft Word, and Internet.

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Instructional Methods

Main Course Meetings: This course is entirely online. We will not meet in person for this course.

Student Responsibilities or Tips for Success in the Course

Do the reading ahead of time: You are responsible for completing all the readings before the class for which they are assigned.

Prepare to watch and write: This course is writing and watching intensive. It will consist of discussions, reading responses, watching the television series, and other items.

Be respectful: In this course, you are expected to engage in critical thinking. This means that you will be able to understand many sides to an issue, even if you disagree with the arguments presented. You should be able to analyze the course material actively and set aside your personal beliefs and values in order to understand issues from a scientific perspective.

A Note on AI/ChatGPT Use

Texas A&M University-Commerce acknowledges that there are legitimate uses of Artificial Intelligence, ChatBots, or other software that has the capacity to generate text, or suggest replacements for text beyond individual words, as determined by the instructor of the course.

Any use of such software must be documented. Any undocumented use of such software constitutes an instance of academic dishonesty (plagiarism).

Individual instructors may disallow entirely the use of such software for individual assignments or for the entire course. Students should be aware of such requirements and follow their instructors' guidelines. If no instructions are provided the student should assume that the use of such software is disallowed.

In any case, students are fully responsible for the content of any assignment they submit, regardless of whether they used an AI, in any way. This specifically includes cases in which the AI plagiarized another text or misrepresented sources.

13.99.99.R0.03 Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty

13.99.99.R0.10 Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty

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For this course, the use of AI is NOT allowed. The use of AI will result in a grade of 0 for the assignment for the first offense. The second offense will result in a grade of F for the course and submission to the academic dishonesty committee.

GRADING AND ASSESSMENTS

Final grades in this course will be based on the following scale:

Final grades in this course will be based on the following scale of 300 total points:

A = 270-300 points

B = 240-269 points

C = 210-239 points

D = 180-209 points

F = 179 or less points

Your final grade will be based on the following:

- **Discussion Posts (Daily):** Post responses to guided questions each day, reflecting on the readings and viewings.
- **Final Reflection Paper (Due January 10):** A 3-4 page paper analyzing a major sociological theme from *Orange Is the New Black* using course materials. **The use of AI/ChatGPT is prohibited.**

Discussions: Your active participation in the discussions is essential to your overall success this term. Discussion questions will help you make meaningful connections between the course content and the larger concepts of the course. These discussions give you a chance to express your own thoughts, ask questions, and gain insight from your peers and instructor. More instructions will be provided in the course webpage.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

LMS

All course sections offered by Texas A&M University-Commerce have a corresponding course shell in the myLeo Online Learning Management System (LMS). Below are technical requirements

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LMS Requirements:

<https://community.brightspace.com/s/article/Brightspace-Platform-Requirements>

LMS Browser Support:

https://documentation.brightspace.com/EN/brightspace/requirements/all/browser_support.htm

YouSeeU Virtual Classroom Requirements:

<https://support.youseeu.com/hc/en-us/articles/115007031107-Basic-System-Requirements>

ACCESS AND NAVIGATION

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or helpdesk@tamuc.edu.

Note: Personal computer and internet connection problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all course work in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs to have a backup method to deal with these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the local library, office service companies, Starbucks, a TAMUC campus open computer lab, etc.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

If you have any questions or are having difficulties with the course material, please contact your Instructor.

Technical Support

If you are having technical difficulty with any part of Brightspace, please contact Brightspace Technical Support at 1-877-325-7778. Other support options can be found here:

<https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport>

Interaction with Instructor Statement

I only respond to communication via email. I will try to respond to email within 24 hours, between normal business hours of 8am to 5pm. Please be sure that when you email me, you use a proper greeting (Dr. Farris, Professor Farris, Instructor Farris), an email body, and an appropriate closing. You should never send an email with just an attachment and no email body. Be sure you have an appropriate and informative subject line.

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COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Course Specific Procedures/Policies

Late Assignment Policy

Due to the accelerated nature of this Winter Mini course, all assignments and discussions must be submitted by the stated deadlines. This timeline allows us to maintain a cohesive and engaging learning experience. Unfortunately, late assignments or discussion posts cannot be accepted, as each day's work builds upon the last in this intensive format.

Please reach out in advance if you anticipate any challenges meeting a deadline. Staying on schedule is crucial to making the most of our course, and I am here to support you in managing this pace.

Syllabus Change Policy

The syllabus is a guide. Circumstances and events, such as student progress, may make it necessary for the instructor to modify the syllabus during the semester. Any changes made to the syllabus will be announced in advance.

University Specific Procedures

Student Conduct

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. The Code of Student Conduct is described in detail in the [Student Guidebook](http://www.tamuc.edu/Admissions/oneStopShop/undergraduateAdmissions/studentGuidebook.aspx).
<http://www.tamuc.edu/Admissions/oneStopShop/undergraduateAdmissions/studentGuidebook.aspx>

Students should also consult the Rules of Netiquette for more information regarding how to interact with students in an online forum:
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/netiquette>

TAMUC Attendance

For more information about the attendance policy please visit the [Attendance](#) webpage and [Procedure 13.99.99.R0.01](#).
<http://www.tamuc.edu/admissions/registrar/generalInformation/attendance.aspx>
<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/13students/academic/13.99.99.R0.01.pdf>

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Academic Integrity

Students at Texas A&M University-Commerce are expected to maintain high standards of integrity and honesty in all of their scholastic work. For more details and the definition of academic dishonesty see the following procedures:

[Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty 13.99.99.R0.03 Undergraduate Student Academic Dishonesty Form](#)

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/documents/13.99.99.R0.03UndergraduateStudentAcademicDishonestyForm.pdf>

[Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty Form](#)

<http://www.tamuc.edu/academics/graduateschool/faculty/GraduateStudentAcademicDishonestyFormold.pdf>

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/13students/undergraduates/13.99.99.R0.03UndergraduateAcademicDishonesty.pdf>

Students with Disabilities-- ADA Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Velma K. Waters Library Rm 162

Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835

Fax (903) 468-8148

Email: studentdisabilityservices@tamuc.edu

Website: [Office of Student Disability Resources and Services](#)

<http://www.tamuc.edu/campusLife/campusServices/studentDisabilityResourcesAndServices/>

Nondiscrimination Notice

Texas A&M University-Commerce will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the

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basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

Campus Concealed Carry Statement

Texas Senate Bill - 11 (Government Code 411.2031, et al.) authorizes the carrying of a concealed handgun in Texas A&M University-Commerce buildings only by persons who have been issued and are in possession of a Texas License to Carry a Handgun. Qualified law enforcement officers or those who are otherwise authorized to carry a concealed handgun in the State of Texas are also permitted to do so. Pursuant to Penal Code (PC) 46.035 and A&M-Commerce Rule 34.06.02.R1, license holders may not carry a concealed handgun in restricted locations.

For a list of locations, please refer to the [Carrying Concealed Handguns On Campus](#) document and/or consult your event organizer.

Web url:

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/34SafetyOfEmployeesAndStudents/34.06.02.R1.pdf>

Pursuant to PC 46.035, the open carrying of handguns is prohibited on all A&M-Commerce campuses. Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or 9-1-1.

The Counseling Center at A&M-Commerce, located in the Halladay Building, Room 203, offers counseling services, educational programming, and connection to community resources for students. Students have 24/7 access to the Counseling Center's crisis assessment services by calling 903-886-5145. For more information regarding Counseling Center events and confidential services, please visit www.tamuc.edu/counsel

Department or Accrediting Agency Required Content

COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

Week 1: The Prison System and Gender

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

December 16 (Monday) – Day 1: Introduction to Sociology and Prisons

Readings:

- *Orange Is the New Black*, Chapter 1

Viewings:

- *Orange Is the New Black* (Season 1, Episode 1)

Discussion Topics:

- Overview of the U.S. prison system

December 17 (Tuesday) – Day 2: Gender, Race, and Class in Incarceration

Readings:

- *Orange Is the New Black*, Chapter 2
- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Introduction (excerpt)

Discussion Topics:

- The role of race, gender, and class in incarceration

December 18 (Wednesday) – Day 3: Piper’s Journey in a Sociological Context

Readings:

- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Chapter 1 (excerpt)

Discussion Topics:

- Introduction to Piper’s journey and its sociological significance

December 19 (Thursday) – Day 4: Women, Incarceration, and Intersectionality Part 1

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Readings:

- *Orange Is the New Black*, Chapter

Viewings:

- *Orange Is the New Black* (Season 1, Episode 2)

Discussion Topics:

- Gender and sexuality in prisons

December 20 (Friday) – Day 5: Women, Incarceration, and Intersectionality Part 2

Readings:

- *Orange Is the New Black*, Chapter 4
- Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Chapter 5 (excerpt)

Discussion Topics:

- Portrayal of marginalized women in the series
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Week 2: The Realities of Life in Prison

December 23 (Monday) – Day 6: The Realities of Life in Prison Part 1

Readings:

- *Orange Is the New Black*, Chapter 5

Viewings:

- *Orange Is the New Black* (Season 1, Episode 3)

Discussion Topics:

- Social hierarchies and survival strategies

December 24 (Tuesday) – Day 7: The Realities of Life in Prison Part 2

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Readings:

- *Orange Is the New Black*, Chapter 6
- Megan Sweeney, *Reading Is My Window* (excerpt on prison life and coping)

Discussion Topics:

- The impact of prison life on mental health

December 25 (Wednesday) – Holiday Break (Christmas)

December 26 (Thursday) – Day 8: Power and Authority in Prisons Part 1

Readings:

- *Orange Is the New Black*, Chapter 7
- Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (excerpt on total institutions)

Viewings:

- *Orange Is the New Black* (Season 1, Episode 4)

Discussion Topics:

- Power dynamics and institutional control

December 27 (Friday) – Day 9: Power and Authority in Prisons Part 2

Readings:

- *Orange Is the New Black*, Chapter 8

Discussion Topics:

- Inmate-guard relationships and abuse of authority

Week 3: Power, Control, and Reform in the Prison System

December 30 (Monday) – Day 10: Prison Reform and Reentry Part 1

Readings:

- *Orange Is the New Black*, Chapter 9

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

- Bruce Western, *Homeward* (excerpt on reentry)

Viewings:

- *Orange Is the New Black* (Season 1, Episode 5)

Discussion Topics:

- Challenges of reentry and reintegration

December 31 (Tuesday) – Day 11: Prison Reform and Reentry Part 2

Readings:

- *Orange Is the New Black*, Chapter 10

Discussion Topics:

- Approaches to reform and rehabilitation

January 1 (Wednesday) – Holiday Break (New Year's Day)

January 2 (Thursday) – Day 12: Media, Prisons, and Public Perception

Readings:

- Article on media representations of prisons

Discussion Topics:

- How media shapes public perception of prison life and reform

January 3 (Friday) – Day 13: Conclusion and Final Reflections Part 1

Readings:

- Summary of key themes from *Orange Is the New Black*

Discussion Topics:

- Media portrayals of prison and their sociological impact

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Final Week: Reflection and Analysis

January 6 (Monday) – Day 14: Sociological Perspectives on Incarceration

Readings:

- Review previous course readings

Discussion Topics:

- Comparative analysis of readings on gender, race, and class in incarceration

January 7 (Tuesday) – Day 15: Policy and Reform Strategies

Readings:

- Additional readings on prison policy reform (article)

Discussion Topics:

- Policy recommendations and the future of incarceration

January 8 (Wednesday) – Day 16: Intersectionality and Final Reflections

Readings:

- Sociological review of *Orange Is the New Black* (article)

Discussion Topics:

- Reflecting on the intersectional nature of prison issues

January 9 (Thursday) – Day 17: Final Paper Preparation and Q&A

- Final discussion and Q&A for support on final paper topics and structure

January 10 (Friday) – Final Assignment Due

- **Final Reflection Paper Due:** January 10, 2025 11:59pm
(3-4 page paper analyzing a major sociological theme from *Orange Is the New Black* using course materials)

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