



EAST TEXAS A&M
UNIVERSITY

CJ 431-01E CRN 21523

LAW AND COURTS

Course Syllabus: Spring 2025
Monday, Wednesday, & Friday 12:00pm-12:50pm
Ferguson 310

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: J. Alex Purdon, Ph.D.

Office Location: Ferguson, 229

Office Hours: 11:00am-12:00pm (MWF) or by virtual appointment

Office Phone: (903) 886.5332

University Email Address: James.Purdon@tamuc.edu

Communication Response Time: Emails are answered within 24 hours Monday-Friday during business hours (9am-5pm).

COURSE INFORMATION

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings

Required

- Neubauer, D. W., & Fradella, H. F. (2019). *America's courts and the criminal justice system* (13th ed.). Belmont, CA: Cengage. ISB: 978-1337557894
- Garrett, B. L. (2020). Wrongful convictions. *Annual Review of Criminology*, 3(1), 245-259.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an advanced approach which focuses on a combined examination of the criminal justice system highlighting the principles and nature of criminal law; while examining the operation of the American Court system at the federal, state, and local judicial levels. This course examines the court system working group(s) and the development of criminal law as it impacts society. In addition, this course is designed to emphasize case processing such as pretrial, adjudication, and sentencing, as well as offer an advanced understanding to the interworking of the court process.

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Interpret the major constitutional rights guaranteed to the accused in a criminal prosecution and how those rights affect criminal court proceedings;
2. Describe the significant Constitutional Amendments, doctrines, and other sources of law in the American judicial system.
3. Explain the basic structure and administration of the court systems, including federal, state, and juvenile courts;
4. Describe the role and function of key courtroom actors involved in the criminal court system;
5. Identify the pre-trial, trial, and post-trial processes;
6. Discuss the major criminal sentencing structures and various sentencing options available to judges under each;
7. Evaluate sentencing disparities resulting from the U.S. criminal court system.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Minimal Technical Skills Needed

- **Computer System:** Windows or Macintosh desktop or laptop computer purchased within the last 5 years. Chromebooks and mobile devices may not provide full online access.
- **Operating System:** Windows-based computers must be running Windows 10 or newer. Macintosh computers must be running OS 10.13 (High Sierra) or higher.
- **Required Software:** Microsoft Office 365; Adobe Acrobat Reader DC
- **Web Browser:** Use a recently updated internet browser.
- **Learning Management System (LMS):** See below for requirements.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES OR TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN THE COURSE

1. **Review** the **Syllabus** and the **Course Schedule** to keep up to date on requirements for the course.
2. **Read announcements and check email!** I will send updates about the courses through D2L, so check regularly.
3. Create a **personal organization system** to keep track of due dates specified.
4. **Communicate regularly** with your instructor and peers.
5. **Create a study and/or assignment schedule** to stay on track.
6. Set aside **regular times** in which you can do your classwork with minimal interruptions or distractions. Avoid multitasking while studying.
7. Learn about and use the student resources available to you! You can get free assistance from the [A&M-Library](#), [IT Support](#), [the Writing Center](#), and more.

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ASSESSMENTS

Attendance

Attendance is an essential part of the learning process; thus, students are expected to attend class regularly. This ensures students stay engaged with the course material through the instructor's interactive lectures, benefit from in-class discussions and activities, and learn from guest speakers from the field. Class attendance is worth 10% of the total grade.

While some absences are unavoidable, you are responsible for making up missed absences and notifying the professor. Students are allotted three (3) unexcused absences before seeing a reduction in their class attendance score. Missing more than 25% of the class will result in a failing grade or removal from the class.

Class Participation

Class participation is an essential part of the learning process. Students are expected to have completed all required readings and to be prepared to contribute to class activities and discussions. The goal of class participation is to engage critical thinking, practice communication, and develop collaborative skills, all essential elements for professional success. Thus, participation will be assessed based on the frequency, relevance, and quality of the contributions to class discussions, group activities, and online platforms. Mere attendance alone without active engagement will result in a poor grade. The instructor reserves the right to implement class participation strategies if participation falls below expectations. Class participation is worth 10%% of the total grade.

Double Jeopardy Paper

Students will be required to write a reflection on the case of Timothy Hennis. An excerpt is found on page 44 in the Courts, Controversy, and Administration of Justice feature of the text. For this assignment, students need to explain the prohibition of double jeopardy (Fifth Amendment), explain how Hennis was convicted in Federal court, and reflect on whether this is an appropriate method to carry out justice (i.e., does this follow the spirit of the law or does this jeopardize defendant rights). This should be approximately three (3) to four (4) pages in length, Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, normal (1") margins, and double-spaced. This assignment is worth 10% of the total grade.

Guest Lecture Reflections

Students will reflect on what they have learned, experienced, or observed from the guest lecturer/speaker of the week. These essays should identify key themes and ideas from the guest speaker, analyze the speaker's viewpoints in relation to your understanding of the topic, and consider how the lecture has influenced your personal perspectives, career aspirations, or future academic goals. This assignment should be completed in class, be approximately 300 to 400 words in length, and will be assessed for completion, coherency, and critical thought. The number of reflections are dependent upon the total number of guest speakers we end up having in class. This assignment is worth 10% of your total grade.

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Movie Reflection

Students will watch a movie or crime-drama of their choice and reflect on whether the movie accurately portrays the courts. This reflection should begin with a proper introduction and thesis statement, **briefly** describe the plot for the reader, and analyze the accuracy of the portrayals. This can include the use of the law, courthouse dynamics and organization, the courtroom work group, and case processing. The bulk of this reflection should be on the analysis. Lastly, finish the paper with a proper conclusion. This reflection essay should be approximately three (3) to four (4) pages in length, Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, normal (1") margins, and double-spaced. This assignment is worth 10% of the total grade.

Sentencing Project

Each student will be given the role of acting judge on a presiding hypothetical case (to be distributed on D2L). The students will be given the task of choosing an appropriate sentence based on factors of the case and sentencing guidelines (also distributed on D2L). Students must explain the rationale for the sentence (e.g., sentencing philosophy and purpose/goal of the sentence), and assess the potential strain on the criminal justice system. This paper should be between three (3) and four (4) pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, with 1" margins. This assignment is worth 10% of your total grade.

Wrongful Convictions Presentation

Students will research a case of a person who was exonerated from the Innocence Project website. The student will then deliver a 10 minute professional presentation to the class on the case. The presentation should include background facts of the case, the outcome of the case, causes for the wrongful convictions, and policy recommendations to prevent future wrongful convictions. Students are encouraged to use any relevant aids to facilitate the presentation, such as visuals (i.e., Adobe Acrobat, PowerPoints, GoogleSlides, or Prezi), **brief** segments or video clips (less than 1 minute), and pictures. This assignment is worth 10% of your total grade.

Exams

There will be three exams over the course of the semester that coincides with the three parts of this course. These exams include a variety of objective questions, such as true/false and multiple choice, as well as written components, such as short-answer and/or full-length essay questions. Exams will be administered in-person on an assigned day according to the course schedule. Students will only be allowed to use a writing instrument and will have the full class time to complete the exam. Each exam is worth 10%.

GRADING

Final grades in this course will be based on the following scale (see Table 1):

Table 1: Grade Cut-Offs		
Grade	Points	Percentage
A	450-500	90.00% – 100%
B	400-449	80.00% – 89.99%
C	350-399	70.00% – 79.99%
D	300-349	60.00% – 69.99%
F	0-299	Below 60.00%

Total points corresponding to the final letter grades (see Table 2):

Table 2: Assessments and Their Values		
Assignment	Points	Percentage
Attendance	50	10%
Class Participation	50	10%
Double Jeopardy Paper	50	10%
Guest Lecture Reflections	50	10%
Movie Reflection Paper	50	10%
Sentencing Project	50	10%
Wrongful Convictions Presentation	50	10%
Exams (x3)	150	10% (30% total)

Grades can be accessed on D2L.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

LMS

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

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

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Zoom Video Conferencing Tool

https://inside.tamuc.edu/campuslife/CampusServices/CITESupportCenter/Zoom_Account.aspx?source=universalmenu

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 ETAMU 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

Communication will be held either via email or through D2L.

What to call me – Please refer to me as Professor or Dr. Purdon.

Look for the answer first. When questions arise during the course of this class, please remember to check these two sources for an answer *before* you contact me:

- Course Syllabus
- Announcements in D2L

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COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Course Specific Procedures/Policies

Citation Style

Students are required to use the citation style and format of the American Psychological Association (APA). Review the *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.) or similar APA Citation Style online resource. It is acceptable to cite legal materials (cases, statutes, regulations, etc.) in accordance with the style specified in *The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation* (21st ed.) in all papers.

Extra credit

No individualized extra credit work will be permitted in my class. Why? Extra credit is unfair to the students who do their work diligently all semester long. However, extra credit may be offered to the whole class for a variety of activities that go beyond what is anticipated in the syllabus. For instance, your first extra credit opportunity will be to email me within the first week of class and notify me that you read the syllabus and are ready to begin the semester. You will get 3 points extra credit on your first exam for completing this activity.

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).

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>

ETAMU 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>

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<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/13students/academic/13.99.99.R0.01.pdf>

Academic Integrity

Students at East Texas A&M University 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

East Texas A&M University

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

East Texas A&M University will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran

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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 East Texas A&M University 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 East Texas A&M University 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 East Texas A&M University campuses. Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or 9-1-1.

EAST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SUPPORTS STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

The Counseling Center at East Texas A&M University, 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

AI Use IN COURSES

East Texas A&M University 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'

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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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COURSE SCHEDULE

ACTIVITIES/ASSIGNMENTS	PERCENTAGE	DUE DATE
WEEK 1: Introduction to law and the judicial function		01/13-01/17
Readings: Syllabus and Introduction	--	--
Readings: Chapter 1	--	--
WEEK 2: Court Organization (Federal)		01/20-01/24
MLK, Jr. Day – Campus Closed	--	01/20
Readings: Chapter 2	--	--
WEEK 3: Court Organization (State and Special Courts)		01/27-01/31
Readings: Chapter 3	--	--
Week 4: Court Organization (Juvenile)		02/03-02/07
Readings: Chapter 4	--	--
Assignment 1: Critical Reflection Paper Due!	10%	02/07
WEEK 5: Prosecutors		02/10-02/14
Exam 1	10%	02/10
Readings: Chapter 6	--	02/12-02/14
WEEK 6: Defense Attorneys		02/17-02/21
Readings: Chapter 7	--	--
WEEK 7: Judges		02/24-02/28
Readings: Chapter 8	--	--
WEEK 8: Defendants, Victims, and Witnesses		03/03-03/07
Readings: Chapter 9	--	--
Assignment 2: Movie Reflection Due!	10%	03/07
Week 9: SPRING BREAK March 10-14		
WEEK 10: Wrongful Convictions		03/17-03/21
Readings: Chapter 15 (485-492), Garrett (2020)	--	--
Exam 2	10%	03/21
WEEK 11: Pretrial Procedures		03/24-03/28
Readings: Chapter 10	--	--
WEEK 12: Law of Evidence		03/31-04/04
Readings: Chapter 11	--	--
WEEK 13: Presentations!		04/07-04/11
Assignment 3: Wrongful Convictions Presentations!	10%	04/07

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Assignment 3: Wrongful Convictions Presentations!	10%	04/09
Assignment 3: Wrongful Convictions Presentations!	10%	04/11
WEEK 14: Plea, Criminal Trials, and Juries		04/14-04/18
Readings: Chapter 12	--	04/14
Readings: Chapter 13	--	04/16-04/18
WEEK 15: Sentencing		04/21-04/25
Readings: Chapter 14	--	--
WEEK 16: The Appellate Process		04/28-05/02
Readings: Chapter 15	--	--
Assignment 4: Sentencing Project Due!	10%	05/02
WEEK 17: FINAL EXAM/EXPERIENCE		
Exam 3	10%	05/09 8:00-10:00

***Note:** the schedule does not reflect the Guest Lecture Reflections. See this specific assignment under assessments for more details.

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