



CJ431.01E: Law and the Courts

COURSE SYLLABUS: SPRING 2026

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Andrew M. Garcia, J.D., Ph.D.

Office Location: Ferguson Social Sciences 206

Office Hours:

Tuesday/Thursdays: 10:30AM-12:30PM (Zoom and in-person)

***Additional availability by appointment

University Email Address: Andrew.Garcia@etamu.edu

Preferred Form of Communication: E-mail

Communication Response Time: 48 hours or sooner during normal M-F business hours.

COURSE INFORMATION

Textbook(s) Required: The course uses a *creative commons* textbook, meaning that it is freely available for students to use for academic purposes. A copy of it has been placed on D2L under the “content” tab.

Ashford, S., & Villanueva, L. (2023). *Introduction to criminal law*. LibreTexts.

https://biz.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Criminal_Law/Introduction_to_Criminal_Law

Assigned readings (provided by instructor; accessible on D2L)

Software Required

Microsoft Office (or compatible) word processor

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.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Identify the key principles of U.S. criminal law and the structure of federal, state, and local courts.
2. Describe how criminal law has developed and how court systems operate in practice, including the roles of working groups within the justice system.
3. Analyze the application of criminal law to real-world scenarios by interpreting cases, statutes, and legal sources using legal databases.
4. Evaluate the interaction between legal principles, court processes, and societal impacts.
5. Explore alternative perspectives on criminal law and the courts, including critical views on power, control, and social impact.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

GRADING

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

A = 90%-100%

B = 80%-89%

C = 70%-79%

D = 60%-69%

F = 59% or Below

EVALUATION

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Course Journal | 20% (4 entries, each worth 5%) |
| Interview Assignment | 15% |
| Midterm Exam | 15% |
| Film Analysis Paper | 10% |
| Legal Worksheets | 10% (2, each worth 5%) |
| Legal Memos | 15% (2, each worth 7.5%) |
| <i>Class Participation</i> | 15% |
| | 100% |

Assessments

Please check your ETAMU email account and D2L daily, as important information about this class may be emailed or posted. The breakdown below shows course requirements and their contribution to your final grade. Assignments and exams may be made up without penalty if missed due to an excused absence.

Participation (15% of Final Grade): Participation is the **most important element of this course** and will be assessed holistically based on engagement in lectures, group discussions, and related in-class activities. Each student's participation grade reflects not only attendance but also the quality of contributions, preparation, and engagement with course materials. Students are allowed up to two unexcused absences; each additional unexcused absence beyond this limit will reduce the participation grade by 10 points. A *temporary* midterm participation grade will be provided to give students feedback on their relative progress, but this grade may be adjusted at the end of the semester based on overall participation and engagement.

Course Journal (20%, 4 entries each worth 5%): Throughout the semester, students will be assigned four journal prompts based on lectures and readings from the current and/or previous week. Students will be required to develop a written entry (roughly 500 words), which will be uploaded into the Assignments tab on D2L. Successful journal entries will be thoughtful, introspective, and attempt to make connections between the course material and the student's own ideas. Each journal entry is graded on a 5-point scale and contributes 5% of the course grade. Prompts will be released Monday morning, and students will have until 11:59 PM the following Sunday to submit their entry.

Interview Assignment (15%): The interview assignment will ask students to conduct and transcribe qualitative interviews on criminal law with selected participants. Afterwards, students will produce a written essay connecting course content with findings from their interviews, analyzing how laypersons may or may not understand the nature of U.S. criminal law and discussing possible explanations for observed patterns.

Legal Worksheets (10%, each worth 5%): In this assignment, students will gain hands-on experience using *Westlaw Academic*, a professional legal research database available through the Waters Library. Students will locate and analyze real legal documents and sources, including cases, statutes, and secondary materials, to practice identifying relevant information for legal analysis.

Legal Memo Assignments (2 × 7.5% = 15% of Final Grade): Students will complete two legal memo assignments during the semester, each worth 7.5% of the final course grade. For each memo, students will be provided with a legal question or scenario and will use *Westlaw Academic* to research relevant cases, statutes, and secondary sources to formulate a clear legal answer. Each memo should include the following elements: a heading identifying the student, instructor, date, and purpose of the memo; a question presented that states the legal issue clearly and concisely; a brief answer providing a

direct response to the legal question; a facts section summarizing the relevant facts of the scenario or case; a discussion/analysis section analyzing the law using the sources located and explaining how it applies to the facts; a conclusion that restates the answer and summarizes the reasoning; and proper citations to cases, statutes, and other sources (APA or Bluebook). Memos will be submitted via D2L by the assigned due dates. Students are encouraged to start early to allow time to explore Westlaw and seek assistance from library staff or the instructor if needed.

Midterm Exam (20%): One online midterm exam will be administered through Brightspace/D2L. The exam is worth 100 points and will include 40–50 multiple-choice, true/false, and fill-in-the-blank questions. It will cover the assigned readings, course lectures, and assigned multimedia materials. **The exam will be available on March 5th at 9:00 AM via D2L, and students will have until midnight on the same day to begin the exam.** Students will have 75 minutes to complete all questions. The exam can only be taken once; it cannot be paused or returned to later. Students will need reliable internet access and a quiet environment suitable for test-taking. Additional instructions and guidance for taking online exams in this course are available on D2L under the “ONLINE EXAMS” section.

FINAL: Film Analysis Paper (20%): Students will conduct a sociological analysis of Werner Herzog’s documentary **Into the Abyss**, which explores the moral dimensions of criminal law through the case of a triple homicide in Texas. The film will be screened in class, and students will not need to acquire it independently. After viewing, students will produce a 3–4-page essay analyzing the film through the lens of criminal law concepts discussed in class. A full assignment description and grading rubric will be provided on D2L.

Makeup Exam Policy: I totally understand that life happens. Students that experience exceptional circumstances which cause them to miss a scheduled exam should contact me ASAP. Students that have a university approved absence or otherwise produce written documentation regarding their absence will be scheduled for a make-up time. Students that have not reported their absence or spoken to me within 2 days of the exam will be considered unexcused and receive a “50” score for that exam.

Course Policies

Electronic Device Policy

Please refrain from the use of electronic devices during class, as it is distracting not only to you, but also to your instructor and peers. Laptops should only be used for note taking unless they are part of the instructor assignment and discussion for the class day.

Classroom Civility, Respect and Tolerance

University study is largely about exposure to a diverse range of worldviews and lived experiences. This course relies on challenging and critiquing deeply held societal beliefs over a wide range of sensitive topics. Students should engage in discourse with other students and the instructor respectfully. My classroom is predicated on principles of mutual respect and students are expected to exhibit this same respect for the diversity of ideas. Forms of incivility towards other students or the instructor will not be tolerated.

Instructor Error

Because instructor errors can and do occur, students should keep an extra copy of any work they submit. In addition, make sure to keep and safeguard graded assignments and tests until final course grades have been posted.

Access to Grades

All grades will be available in D2L. Please note that I am unable to furnish any information about grades or student status via e-mail or telephone. This is considered a violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), even with student permission or at student request. Verify your D2L grades often. Discuss grade posting errors/omissions with me immediately.

Borderline Grades

Students will not be awarded extra points at the discretion of the instructor. Be aware at the outset that this course has a firm policy against grade “bumping”. However, students will be automatically rounded to a higher letter grade at the .5 threshold (i.e., 89.5% is an A).

Incompletes

Grades of “incomplete” are given only under rare circumstances when students provide detailed documentation of a significant crisis (e.g., serious illness of the student or death in the immediate family) near the end of the semester and which render them unable to finish the course. Incomplete grades will not be given under any other circumstances. Students with circumstances negatively affecting their class performance should discuss the situation with me immediately so that we can identify and implement strategies for managing the problem(s).

PowerPoint

Students with approved documentation from Student Disability Services may receive hard copies of the PowerPoint presentations used to develop course materials. Email the instructor for more information

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

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 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>

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Course Specific Procedures/Policies

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>

<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/GraduateStudentAcademicDis honestyFormold.pdf>

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedur es/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 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 ETAMU Rule 34.06.02.R1, license holders may not carry a concealed handgun in restricted locations.

13.99.99.R0.03 Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty

13.99.99.R0.10 Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty

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 ETAMU campuses. Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or 9-1-1.

Counseling Center Services

The Counseling Center at ETAMU 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

ETAMU Supports Students' Mental Health

The Counseling Center ETAMU, 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 policy [Draft 2, May 25, 2023]

ETAMU 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

CJ431 Tentative Course Calendar

| Week (Dates) | Topic(s) | Readings, Videos, and Activities | Assignments |
|-----------------|--|--|---|
| 1 JAN. 12-16 | Course Introduction: Syllabus, course structure, and assessment | Crime Quiz and Ranking/Judge Sheet (in-class) | <i>Friday Assignment:</i> Introductions due JAN16@5PM |
| 2 JAN. 19-23 | Foundations of Criminal Law | Ashford and Villanueva (A&V), Ch. 1: Introduction to Criminal Law | Course Journal #1 |
| 3 JAN. 26-30 | Federalism and the U.S. Court System | A&V, Chapter 2: The Legal System in the United States <i>Video: Westlaw Academic</i> | Legal Worksheet #1 |
| 4 FEB. 2-6 | The Constitution and Crime | A&V, Ch. 3: Constitutional Protections <i>Video: Miranda v. Arizona</i> <i>Bradley, C. M. (2012). Is the exclusionary rule dead?</i> | Course Journal #2 |
| 5 FEB. 9-13 | Elements of a Crime | A&V, Ch. 4: Elements of a Crime | Legal Memo #1 |
| 6 FEB. 16-20 | Justification and Excuse Defenses | A&V, Ch. 5: Criminal Defenses, Pt. 1 Chapter 6: Criminal Defenses, Part 2 | |
| 7 FEB. 23-27 | Alternative Perspectives: Sociolegal Studies | Friedman (1975), Chapters 2-3 (D2L) | |

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|--------------------------|---|--|--|
| 8 MAR. 2-6 | MIDTERM WEEK | Midterm Review Guide | MIDTERM (opens Mar. 5 at 9AM and closes 11:59PM) |
| 9 MAR. 9-13 | SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS) | | |
| 10 MAR. 16-20 | <i>Alternative Perspectives: The Role of Media in Criminal Law</i> | Assigned Readings (D2L) | Legal Worksheet #2 and Legal Memo #2 |
| 11 MAR. 23-27 | Criminal Homicide | A&V, Chapter 9, Criminal Homicide <i>CSI Effect (Shelton 2008; Chin & Ibaviosa, 2022)</i> | Course Journal #3 |
| 12 MAR. 30- APR. 3 | Sentencing and Plea Bargains | <i>Helm, R. K. (2024). The psychology of guilty plea decisions.</i> | |
| 13 APR. 6-10 | Movie Week: <u>Into the Abyss</u> | <i>Final Paper Assignment Instructions</i> | |
| 14 APR. 13-17 | <i>Alternative Perspectives: Wacquant, Garland and Social Control</i> | Assigned Readings (D2L) | Course Journal #4 |
| 15 APR. 20-24 | Roundtable Week: USSC Cases | TBA | |
| 16 APR. 27- MAY 1 | Final Thoughts: The Future of Criminal Law | Podcast: AI and Risk Scores Bipartisan report: "A Better Path Forward for Criminal Justice" | FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 3rd at 11:59PM |

***All course readings will be found under the Content tab in D2L**