



## **CJ531.01W: Issues in Criminal Law and 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](mailto: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**

**Schedule:** Online

**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](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

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## Course Description

This course will focus on critical thinking related to issues concerning principles of criminal law and court procedures as well as selected practices particularly relevant to the United States. Issues will **include** justice for all, freedom and privacy of the individual, cruel and unusual punishment, use of deadly force in law enforcement, trial by jury, election of judges and morality and the law

## Student Learning Outcomes

1. Analyze key principles of criminal law and court procedures in the United States, including trial by jury, election of judges, and use of deadly force.
2. Evaluate legal and ethical issues related to justice, individual freedoms, privacy, and cruel and unusual punishment.
3. Apply critical thinking to assess the intersection of morality and law in selected criminal law practices and court procedures.
4. Communicate well-reasoned legal analysis in written form, demonstrating understanding of U.S. criminal law and court-related issues.

## 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

Assignment	Weight
Course Journal	10%
Legal Research Worksheet	10%
Legal Research Memo	20%
Discussion Board	20%
Interview Assignment	20% (10 for transcript, 10 for essay)
<i>Final Assignment: Podcast</i>	20%
	<b>100%</b>

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## Assessments

\*\*\*Please check your ETAMU email account and D2L regularly because important information about this class could be emailed or uploaded to you. A breakdown of course requirements and how each will contribute to your course grade is included below. *Assignments and exams may be made up without penalty if missed due to an excused absence.*

### Course Journal (10%, 2 at 5% each)

Throughout the semester, students will be assigned two (2) journal prompts with topics based on video 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. Successful journal entries will be thoughtful, introspective pieces discussing how the topic relates to their own personal experiences and attempting to make connections between the course material and their own ideas. Other students will not have access to a student's personal journal, and its content will only be viewed by the instructor of record.

**NOTE:** These are **NOT** term papers, do not require specific formatting or cover pages, and should not be highly formal. Truly think of them as personal journals to dialogue about the issues that week!

### Discussion Board (20%)

During two sessions (Weeks 3 and 6), students will be assigned supplemental reading and a discussion board debate prompt. Students must complete the reading and submit an academic response that clearly articulates their analysis and position on the issue by Wednesday at 11:59 p.m. of the assigned week. After posting their initial response, students are required to reply to at least two classmates. Responses that merely agree with or affirm another post do not constitute substantive academic engagement. Students are expected to adhere to the course guidelines on civility and respect; incivility toward classmates will not be tolerated and will result in forfeiture of credit for this assignment. Discussion board participation will be evaluated holistically based on the student's overall engagement and contribution to the discussion.

### Legal Research Worksheet (10%)

Students should watch the course video on legal research using Westlaw Academic to complete the legal research worksheet (available under the assignments tab on D2L)

### Legal Research Memo: Voluntary Confessions (20%)

For this assignment, students will prepare a concise 2-to-3-page legal research memorandum analyzing the legal standards governing the voluntariness of confessions. Students will be presented with a hypothetical scenario involving custodial LEO interrogation and must assess whether a statement given by a suspect would likely be considered voluntary under the Constitution. The memorandum should identify the relevant legal issues, synthesize applicable Supreme Court and federal appellate case law, including factors courts consider when evaluating coercion, intoxication, or mental health, and apply the governing doctrines to the facts.

### Interview Assignment (20%)

Students will be asked to conduct and transcribe 2 interviews with qualified respondents (those adjacent to the legal system, such as LEOs, lawyers, criminologists, etc.) using a set list of qualitative interview questions. After producing verbatim transcript, students will produce a 1 ½ to 2-page

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reflection in which they discuss the results in the context of the course content, comparing whether they align with academic understanding of issues in law and courts.

### **FINAL: VIDEO PODCAST (20%)**

For the final assignment, students will produce a video podcast analyzing a key issue in criminal law and courts. Individual podcasts should be 12–15 minutes in length, while paired podcasts should run 25–30 minutes. Students are expected to clearly break down the issue, summarize relevant legal doctrines and case law, and provide critical analysis. A list of suggested topics will be provided, including but not limited to:

- Use of deadly force in law enforcement
- Cruel and unusual punishment
- Trial by jury procedures
- Election of judges and judicial accountability

Podcasts should be structured, professionally presented, and demonstrate graduate-level research and reasoning.

**Extra Credit:** 5 extra points for producing a podcast with a classmate (but groups can be no larger than 2)!

All course writing assignments will be submitted online through D2L and utilize TurnItIn plagiarism software. Papers should be in Times New Roman, size 11 font, one- inch margins and double-spaced. Late assignments will be accepted but will be deducted 10 points for each day (or part of the day) they are late (without approved documentation).

**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 “0” score for that exam.

## **Classroom Guidelines**

**Electronic Device Policy:** Please refrain from the use of electronic devices during class, as it is distracting to 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**

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**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.

## Course Policies

**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 the online videos. 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](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>

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## 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](mailto: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, an 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>

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## 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/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](mailto:studentdisabilityservices@tamuc.edu)

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

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

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## **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.

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](http://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](http://www.tamuc.edu/counsel)

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## **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

# CJ531 Tentative Course Calendar

Week (Dates)	Topics, Videos, and Activities	Readings	Assignments
1 JAN 12-16	<b>Introduction: Law, Power and Legitimacy</b> <i>Welcome Video &amp; Video 1</i>	Ashford and Villanueva (A&V), Ch. 1  Judicial Legitimacy (link)	<b>Due 1/18 (11:59PM):</b>  N/A
2 JAN 19-23	<b>Overview of Criminal Law in the U.S.</b> <i>Video 2</i>	Overcrim (Husak, 2023)  Police use of force (Mora, et al. 2023)	<b>Due 1/25 (11:59PM):</b>  <b>Course Journal #1</b>
3 JAN 26-30	<b>Criminal Procedure and the Constitution</b> <i>Video 3: Legal Research using the Waters Library and Westlaw</i>	A&V, Chs. 4-6  <u>KA Video</u> : Miranda v. Arizona  <i>Exclusionary Rule</i> (Bradley, 2012)	<b>Due 1/28:</b>  <b>Discussion Post #1</b>  <b>Due 2/1:</b> Responses to Discussion Post #1
4 FEB 2-6	<b>Inside the Courtroom</b> <i>Video 4</i>	A&V, Ch. 2  <i>CSI Effect</i> (Shelton 2008; Chin & Ibaivosia, 2022)	<b>Due 2/8:</b>  <b>Legal Worksheet</b>  <b>Course Journal #2</b>
5 FEB 9-13	<b>Evaluating the US CJ System</b> <i>Video 5</i>	<i>Bail Reform</i> (Brennan Center for Justice, 2024)  <i>Life Without Parole</i> (Johnson, et al., 2021)	<b>Due 02/15:</b>  <b>Legal Research Memo</b>  Podcast topics! (Post on Discussion Board prompt)
6 FEB 16-20	<b>Judicial and Legal Reform</b> <i>Video 6</i>	Bipartisan report: "A Better Path Forward for Criminal Justice"  <i>Judge Selection</i> (Kowal, 2016) Minors and LWOP (Cwiklinski, 2023)	<b>Due 2/18:</b>  <b>Discussion Post #2</b>  <b>Due 02/22:</b> Responses to Discussion Post #2
7 FEB 23-27	<b>The Future of Law and Courts</b>	<u>Podcast</u> : AI/Risk Scores  <i>AI and the Rule of Law</i> (Greenstein, 2022)	<b>Due 03/1:</b>  <b>Interview Assignment</b>
8 MAR 2-6	<b>FINAL PROJECT: LAW PODCAST</b>		<b>***VIDEO PODCAST DUE WEDNESDAY MAR. 4 AT 11:59PM***</b>

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