Criminology: CRIM 7200
Spring 2014 Syllabus

Course information:
Room: Churchill Hall 200
Time: Wednesdays 5:45-8:15
Course website on Blackboard (log in at: https://blackboard.neu.edu/webapps/login/).

Instructor information:
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Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays 4:30-5:30 (or by appointment)

Course Catalog Description:
Provides an overview of the current understanding of the causes of crime from an interdisciplinary perspective. Focuses on the major theories of crime and causation developed over the past two hundred years. Emphasis is on integrating criminological theory and research, assessing the implications of this knowledge base for policies relating to crime control and prevention. Also presents and discusses the most current data regarding the nature and extent of crime in the United States.

Course Rationale/ Description
“Criminology “is a required course for the Master of Science in Criminal Justice as well as the PhD in Criminology and Justice Policy (at least for those entering with a Bachelor’s degree). Most will take it in their first semester. My goal is for the class to serve as an introduction (or a re-introduction) to the study of crime. A strong understanding of the definitions, prevalence, correlates, and causes of crime will inform much of the rest of what you do here with your degree.

The course has been designed to provide useful skills and knowledge for students with a variety of long-term interests and goals. Whether you’re interested in crime research (within or outside of academia), crime policy, or work within a criminal justice or legal institution, a strong understanding of crime itself will be crucial.

Crime is both a popular and controversial subject. Political debates (and stalemates) over the death penalty, drugs, “tough on crime” laws, inner-city violence, and white collar crime are regular newspaper fodder. Among domestic concerns, being “soft” on crime is one of the most damaging characterizations one can make of a politician. Crime is also a central cultural focus: we seem fascinated by movies and television shows focusing on criminals, criminal investigators, lawyers, and prisons. Despite this interest, myths and misunderstandings of crime abound. Our goal will be to develop a sense of what we truly know, think we know, and actually don’t know about crime.

The course will be roughly divided into two sections. In the first section, which will cover the majority of the class, we will discuss many of the major theories of the causes of crime. In the second section we will think critically about criminal justice institutions and policy, and we will conclude by thinking about the implications of current criminal justice policy given what we learned about the causes of crime in the first section of the course.
General Course Learning Goals
This is a short list of what I hope to achieve this semester:

- Provide you with a critical understanding of what theories are and how they are useful.
- Provide you with an understanding of some of the major theories of the causes of crime.
  - Including theories about:
    - The effect of social structure on crime rates.
    - The effect of social influences on individual criminal acts.
    - How our reactions to crime may either deter or facilitate future crime.
- Introduce you to some recent research testing these theories.
- Make you a critical consumer of media reports on, politicians’ claims about, and media depictions of crime and crime policies.

What to expect in class/ What I expect of students:
The most important element of this class will be our class discussions. For the most part, discussions will be student-generated, though I will come to class with a list of topics I want to make sure are addressed and questions I want to make sure are discussed. Occasionally I’ll want to provide an introduction to or background on a topic in the form of a short lecture, but ideally I will keep these to a minimum.

Each day several students will be responsible for generating discussion questions. The rest of you will be responsible for completing the readings prior to the class such that you can act as the participants in the discussion. As this is a graduate-level class, I expect that students will not need extra incentives to complete the readings or attend class.

Blackboard:
This course has a Blackboard site which houses the syllabus, resources for assignments, extra readings, a discussion page with, and grades for assignments. I encourage you to check it regularly.

Requirements, Assignments, and Grading:
Summary and discussion questions  25%
Class participation  10%
Mid-term and Final Exam  25%
Course paper  40%

Summaries and discussion questions:
Each of you will be responsible for providing and discussing material in separate class sessions this semester.

First, you will each be assigned two classes in which you are responsible for generating discussion questions and leading the class discussion. I ask that you develop questions to stimulate discussion. These can include criticisms about the reading, questions about assumptions made by the reading, connections to other readings or topics, policy implications, etc. For each of the required readings (and there will be at least 5 or 6 or so per class) you’ll want several questions in mind, as well as a few more general questions about the readings as a whole or connections between the readings. Several students will be assigned each class period, but each will be responsible for generating questions about all the material (I’ll have students switch off in asking questions). Class will proceed by addressing each reading individually and then opening up a discussion of general issues or connections between readings. You must email me a typed copy of the questions by 5:30pm on the day of the assigned class.
Your grade will be based on your level of preparedness, your command of the material, and the quality of your discussion questions.
Second, you will also be assigned to write summaries of the readings marked “supplementary.” These duties will be split with one or more other students (you will not write duplicate abstracts). Each student will be assigned two summary pieces: one “long” piece and one “short” piece. For the short pieces students should prepare a short abstract (~200 words) and be prepared to spend a few minutes describing the piece in class and then answering questions other students may have about the piece. For the long pieces, students should prepare a slightly longer abstract (~400-500 words), and be prepared to give a slightly longer description in class (5-10 minutes). Abstracts are due to be posted on blackboard by 5pm the evening before the class in which it will be discussed. To the extent that the distribution of supplemental readings makes this possible, I would like students to present their two abstracts in separate class sessions.

Class participation:
This largely covers days when you are not assigned to write reading summaries or develop discussion questions. I expect everyone to complete the required readings and regularly take part in class discussions.

Course paper:
An original paper is required of all students. I’d like for the final paper to be of interest or use to you, so I’ve left the guidelines on the format and content intentionally loose. The major requirement is that the paper should deal with criminological theories in a direct and substantial fashion. Potential formats include a research proposal, a research paper (though I’ll care more about the theoretical section than the actual research for the purposes of the course), a policy proposal, a policy review or critique, a theoretical paper (a review, synthesis, or critique of theories). If you’re not sure whether a particular idea work or fulfill the requirements of the assignment, I would be happy to discuss it with you.

A two-page proposal is due on February 12th.

The final paper is due on April 16th. On this final day of class you should come prepared to talk about your paper for a 5 or so minutes and to answer questions others might have about it.

Exams:
The course will include one required take-home exam and one optional take-home exam. The required take-home exam will be distributed after class on November 6th, and will be due in class on November 13th. It will cover all of the theories discussed in the course up to that point. We will spend class on November 13th reviewing the exam (and thereby reviewing the first portion of the course). For those who did not do well on the first exam (it will be required for those with less than a B+ on the first exam), an optional second take-home exam will be distributed after class on December 8th and due in class on December 15th (note that the final paper is due that day). For those who take only the first exam, it will count for 25% of their final grade. For those who take both exams, the first will count for 15% and the second for 10%.

Required exam distributed on Feb. 19th, due on Feb. 26th.

Optional (for those with >=B+ on 1st exam) exam distributed on Apr. 9th, due on Apr. 16th.

Books/ Readings:
There are two required texts for this course. The first is a collection of readings from important historical and recent criminological research (the text by Francis Cullen and Robert Agnew). A broad course like this makes such a collection of some kind necessary as a starting place and I consider this to be one of the better collections. This book will form the backbone of the first section of the class. The second text is a recent book by a leading criminologist: John Hagan’s *Who are the Criminals?* The book provides
an overview and critique of historical changes in the criminal justice system. Additionally, a good number of other readings will be available on the blackboard site.

**Issues, Progress, Accommodations:**

Real life sometimes has a way of intruding upon your plans for a semester. Please inform me as soon as possible if you believe “real world” problems may affect your ability to do the readings, attend the classes, or complete assignments.

I am very happy to make accommodations for those with any kind of disability. Once you have registered with the DRC (www.northeastern.edu/drc/), please arrange for a brief chat with me so we can devise a plan for how best to make things work.

**Course Policies:**

Plagiarism of any kind is unacceptable. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, be sure to contact me and ask. In general, following these rules should work: If you directly quote OR paraphrase ANY source (another student, an internet site, an academic article, etc.), you must attribute the quote or paraphrase to that source. It should (but it won’t) go without saying that I expect every student will complete their own work.

For more information on this, Northeastern has an Academic Integrity Policy outlined on pages 52 and 53 of the Student Handbook (http://www.northeastern.edu/gradhandbook/handbook2011-12.pdf). I encourage all students to review this policy and to contact me with any questions.

**Topics/ Readings List:**

I have provided a detailed outline of the topics we will address each day of the semester in class. It is likely there will be at least small changes to this throughout the semester, so be sure to check the syllabus on the course webpage for the most recent version (and watch for announcements). I hope that this detailed outline will serve to illuminate for you the structure of the class: what we’ve covered, where we’re going, and how they tie together.

For each assigned date I have listed the topic as well as two sets of readings. For each class you should read all of the required readings. The day’s discussants will be responsible for leading the discussion on those readings. Each assigned reading is followed by its location in parentheses (either in the Cullen and Agnew reader, Hagan’s book, or available on our blackboard website). Be sure to read the assignments closely: I will often instruct you to skip over a chapter or two. Each week each of the supplemental readings will be assigned to a specific student so that they can summarize it for the class. The supplemental readings are designated either as “short” or “long.”