

**Special Topics: *Crime in Film***

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**SYLLABUS**

**PURPOSE OF THE COURSE:**

Scholarly interest in criminal justice and criminology has taken a cultural turn over the past several decades, producing an array of innovative approaches, viewpoints, and sites of analysis. Among them is film. Indeed, images and messages infused in cinema have given moviegoers a rich vocabulary about lawbreaking and punishment. So much so that crime discourse often enters into a realm of imagination that transcends the empirical world. The course maps out significant ways in which crime is depicted in film and how it shapes our perceptions and emotions. In keeping with a cultural sociology of crime, lectures, discussion and writing assignments are geared toward critique and theoretical interpretation. (See also Learning Goals listed below.)

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

Rafter, Nicole (2006) *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films and Society*, 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

**SUGGESTED READINGS:**

Smith, Philip (2008) *Punishment and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Brown, Michelle (2009) *The Culture of Punishment: Prison, Society and Spectacle*. New York: New York University Press.

## WEEK/FILMS:

- (1) A Clockwork Orange/ Taxi Driver
- (2) Dog Day Afternoon/ Cidade de Deus (City of God) (brazil)
- (3) Double Indemnity /House of Games
- (4) In the Name of the Father (Northern Ireland)/ Cry Freedom (South Africa)
- (5) Bound/ Psycho
- (6) Blue Velvet/ Inside Job
- (7) Les Diaboliques (french)/ Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (swedish)
- (8) The Night Porter/ Midnight Express
- (9) Spring break (no films)
- (10) The Hurricane (Rubin Carter)/ Blood Simple
- (11) Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer/ Silver Tongues
- (12) The Boys from Brazil/ Headhunters (norway)
- (13) Gun Crazy (1949)/ Bonnie and Clyde
- (14) Deliverance/ Capturing the Friedmans

## EVALUATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE:

Two Exams: 100 points each  
Final Quiz: 10 points  
Two Written Critiques: 50 points each  
Total Semester Points: 310

Exams consist of 50 multiple-guess items (2 points each), covering both lecture (50% of test) and reading assignments (50% of test). Final Quiz is cumulative.

In the first written assignment, select one of the films on the course list and prepare a case study. In doing so, refer to Chapter 4, Theoretical Penology, in Michael Welch (2011) Corrections: A Critical Approach, 3rd edition (London & New York: Routledge). Your task is to explore the selected film by discussing in-depth its relevance to one the following perspectives: classicism,

positivism, or radicalism. Your critique should be three pages (single-spaced). Bring your papers to class (do NOT email them to me) by MARCH 8 THURSDAY.

In the second critique, please identify what you believe are the best three films of the semester as well as the worst three. However, do not include the film you chose for the first assignment. Elaborate on your analysis by explaining how those films greatly improve (and fail to improve) our understanding of crime in film from a criminological perspective. Your critique should be three pages (single-spaced). Bring your papers to class (do NOT email them to me) by APRIL 19 THURSDAY.

There are NO extra-credit assignments.

Final Grades:

90 - 100% A  
87 - 89% B+  
80 - 86% B  
77 - 79% C+  
70 - 76% C  
60 - 69% D  
00 - 59% F

Nota Bene: Tape recording lectures are strictly prohibited, along with photographs and videotaping as well as note taking for commercial purposes.

### IS THIS COURSE RIGHT FOR ME?

Students often enroll in a class without the benefit of knowing much about the course, the professor, and what is expected of them. In deciding whether this course suits your personal needs, interests, and lifestyle, the following checklist may be of assistance. Should you have difficulty with any of these items, this course is probably *not* suited for you.

1. Attendance and punctuality
2. Rigorous reading assignments and challenging exams
3. Being aware of current events and the world around you
4. Tolerance for the ideas and opinions of others
5. Remaining attentive and riveted to each lecture
6. Abstract thinking and critical thought
7. True and amazing stories

## **Program in Criminal Justice, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, March 2008**

### Learning Goals: A Statement of Principles

The Program Committee for the Program in Criminal Justice at Rutgers University in New Brunswick has adopted a series of learning goals for students who complete the major. These goals represent the consensus of the faculty regarding the concepts a student should grasp and the skills a student should acquire in the course of completing the major. These goals guide the choices faculty make about the structure of the curriculum and the requirements for our majors. Moreover, they guide faculty and instructors preparing course material and teaching courses.

The Program in Criminal Justice will provide students with a rich understanding of crime and criminal justice in the United States and abroad through an interdisciplinary approach that blends a strong liberal arts educational experience with pre-professional instruction in the field of criminal justice. Graduates of the program will be well-informed citizens on the topic of crime and justice, and qualified for graduate study or for employment as practitioners in a variety of legal, policymaking, and law enforcement fields.

Criminal justice majors graduating from a research university should be able to use critical thinking, factual inquiry, and the scientific approach to solve problems related to individual and group behavior. In addition, students should have an understanding of the legal, political and policymaking processes that affect criminal justice systems in the United States and elsewhere in the world. Finally, students should be familiar with the institutional structures and latest developments in the field in order to engage in meaningful debate about current public policy issues.

### **Learning Goals for Criminal Justice Majors**

#### Competence:

Theory. Students who complete the major in criminal justice should understand and be able to articulate, both orally and in writing, the core theoretical concepts that form the foundation of analysis and research in criminology and criminal justice today. Core concepts are derived from explanations of crime from a variety of perspectives, including biogenic, psychological, and sociological approaches. There are myriad theories of crime that are informed by these perspectives, including, classical, control, critical, ecology, labeling, learning, strain, and trait-based approaches. Theoretical literacy should extend to multicultural and international understanding.

Institutions. Students who complete the major in criminal justice should understand the special role of three types of institutions: Police, Corrections, and Courts. In addition, students should know how institutional forms vary across jurisdictions and how these institutions interact with and influence each other.

Research Methods: Students who complete the criminal justice major should be familiar with the tools, techniques, and data sources necessary for empirical analysis. Students should understand the various ways that empirical analysis is used in the scientific

approach: for description, for developing, and for testing theories. They should be able to analyze data using computer applications and should be familiar with basic statistical techniques and regression analysis. They should be able to read and assess research from a wide range of sources, including general interest, academic, and government publications.

#### Critical Thinking:

Upon completion of the major students should be able to apply their understanding of core concepts and quantitative tools to analyze and research real world problems, and evaluate alternative policy proposals on a range of criminal justice issues, from micro-level analyses relevant to particular cases to management concerns to macro-level analyses of legislative and other broad-scale policies. Accomplishment of this goal will require that students can apply their literacy and numeracy skills to different institutional structures, within the U.S. and across countries.

#### Scholarship:

Qualified majors should have an opportunity through such avenues as advanced coursework, internships, and faculty interactions to conduct independent research on matters of central relevance to the field of criminal justice.