Sul Ross State University

Criminal Justice 4309
Seminar in CJ: Current Issues in Criminal Justice
Summer II: 2020

Professor: Martin Guevara Urbina, Ph.D.
Classroom: Web
Class Meeting: Online

Office: 201 (Faculty Building)
Phone: 830/703-4820 (office, direct line)
Hours: Monday and Tuesday, 12:00 to 5:00p.m. Even though this is an online course, you are welcome to visit the Professor’s office anytime.
E-mail: murbina@sulross.edu

Program Learning Outcomes:
1. Demonstrate proficiency in the application of legal concepts, theoretical applications, scientific principles, and historical trends in the criminal justice arena.

2. Demonstrate competency in the application of basic research methods, to include: research design, statistical analysis, and uses of empirical findings and interpretations.

3. Demonstrate the application of organizational principles, cultural, social and behavioral knowledge, critical thinking skills and cognitive thought processes within the criminal justice arena.

 Marketable Skills for Criminal Justice Program:
1. Oral and Written Comprehension: The ability to listen and understand information, ideas, and ideologies presented through spoken words; and the ability to read and conceptualize information, perspectives, and ideologies presented in writing. Broadly, oral and written communication involves active listening, speaking, and learning.

2. Critical Thinking: This includes the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking, which is fundamental for relevant inquiry and productive innovation, analysis, and synthesis of information, ideas, and propositions.
3. **Problem Solving:** Utilizing a humanist and liberating praxis, empower students to strategically utilize triangulation strategies for evaluating, finding, creating, and implementing solutions to difficult or complex issues in a never-constant society.

4. **Leadership Ability:** Transformational leadership, vital for motivating, decision making, and inspiring vision for achieving positive results—a defined mission.

**Course Description and Objective:** *The seminar in criminal justice* will offer a criminological, historical, philosophical, sociological, and theoretical analysis of the nature and scope of two pressing issues (capital punishment and policing) in the United States. Specifically, the intent of this course is to provide the student with a detailed understanding of 10 main topics, which are best expressed in the following questions:

1. What is capital punishment—the death penalty? And, by extension, why do “we” utilize capital punishment? How has the death penalty evolved in the United States? A series of secondary questions include the following: What are the links between capital punishment, time, and space? What role have historical events played in the application of the death penalty? What role do external and internal factors play in the application of the sentence of death?

2. What philosophical, theoretical, and ideological forces have driven and/or continue to drive capital punishment in America? And, by extension, why? Who has played the most significant role in “shaping” and “re-shaping” the death penalty? What is the driving force behind capital punishment?

3. What influence has social control legislation played on capital punishment? Again, there are a series of related questions that help shape our response to the first one: What have been the main “benefits” of past social control legislation? What, if any, have been the ramifications of prior social control legislation? How do the “benefits” compare to the “negative consequence” of past legislation? What is the significance of current social control legislation, especially since capital punishment is the most punitive sanction?

4. What has been the role of the “ultimate” criminal sanction: execution? Secondary questions include: What do advocates of an execution see as its main utility and function? What do the critics of an execution see as its main weaknesses? Is there a need for executions? Should capital punishment be retained? Or, should we do away with the death penalty?

5. How successful have sanctions, particularly capital punishment, been in achieving intended goals? What myths surround capital punishment, especially actual executions? And, what are their implications of executions? What role has the media played in the evolution of capital punishment? What is the future of capital punishment, including actual executions?

6. What are the origins of the American police? How has policing evolved in the United States over the years? What are some of the major historical events influencing law enforcement, crime, public safety, and community relations? What role do external and internal factors play in policing?

7. What are the links between law enforcement, social control polices, and practice? What philosophical, theoretical, and ideological forces have driven and/or continue to influence
policing in America? Why? Who has played the most significant role in “shaping” and “re-shaping” the police force? What is the driving force behind the police force?

8. What influence has social control legislation played on policing and social control? What have been the main “benefits” of past social control legislation? What have been the ramifications of prior social control legislation, to include local, state, and federal law enforcement? How do the “benefits” compare to the “negative consequence” of past legislation? What is the significance of current social control legislation, especially in modern times?

9. What do advocates of law and order see as its main utility and function? What do the critics of the American police see as its main weaknesses? Is there a need for a larger police force? Is there a need for a militarized police force? How representative is the American police force? What are the benefits of having a more diverse and representative force, at all levels of policing?

10. How successful have social control laws and the police been in achieving intended goals? What myths surround policing, especially in the context of the nature of crime? And, what are their implications for society? What role has the media played in the evolution of policing, particularly in critical areas like racial profiling, police brutality, and shootings? What is the future of the American police?

The next set of questions is essentially definitional in nature. It is essential that we share the same definitions of issues, events, situations, or problems if we are to come to a common understanding of both the problem and any possible remedies or solutions. As such, the class’s first segment deals with defining Current Issues in Criminal Justice (policing and capital punishment), as it pertains to criminal justice in the US and placing it in a global context.

The last set of questions is more analytical. A particular truism about human behavior, criminal justice, criminological, sociological, and theoretical aspects of the nature of society is as follows: There are many typologies of criminological, sociological, and legal theories as there are authors writing textbooks about the subject.

The final question has policy overtones. First, we must briefly look at the nature and process of human behavior, in the context of law enforcement and the death penalty and the U.S. criminal justice system, with a focus on safety, due process, equality, and justice, as well as civil, statutory, and constitutional rights. Next, we turn to the more difficult task of linking criminal justice policy, sociological, psychological, and criminological theory, particularly those we will review, to human behavior, legal rights, research, and practices.

Overall, this course is designed to introduce you to the nature and dynamics of policing and capital punishment within the context of the criminal justice system and, by extension, social interactions in a broad context and, ultimately, human behavior in the world. By introducing you to influential issues that provide the frameworks to studying a wide variety of phenomena, I intend this course to be a basis for further, more in-depth study in the areas that interest you.

Course Context: As an upper-level course, this class may include controversial, sensitive, and/or adult material. Students are expected to have the mentality and readiness for upper-level content and rigor.
Course Structure: This course will be presented in modules. Please note that the ENTIRE course will be taught online via Blackboard.

Required Texts:


Optional Readings:


**Recommended Readings**

**Books:**


**Book Chapters:**


**Refereed (Peer-Reviewed) Journal Articles:**


Encyclopedia, Magazine, and Other Publications:


**Weekly Assignments:** There will be five (5) Weekly Assignments, each worth 20 points for a total of 100 points. The “Weekly Assignments” will be discussed further the first week of class. Please do NOT panic! Handouts will be posted to assist you as you prepare your weekly assignments.

**Activities/Participation:** Please complete the reading assignments as assigned to avoid falling behind, and, more fundamentally, to capture the essence of the class. During the semester, I will be posting a question for you to respond (100 points) and post for ALL students to read. Again, please do NOT panic! If you do the reading, you should be fine. Participation in these “exercises” will be equated into your final grade.

**Required Paper:** The logistics of the project, which will be submitted as a formal paper, will be discussed in detailed in class. This project (paper) is required (100 points). Papers (approximately 3 to 5 pages in length) must be typed. Late papers will not be accepted. Do not turn in your only copy of any paper in case assignments are lost or destroyed.

**Mini-project:** This should be a fun exercise that allows you to explore (critically) some aspect of human behavior as it pertains to policing or capital punishment in greater depth with less evaluation anxiety than you would have in a full-length paper assignment. I would like you to try to and choose a project that you will enjoy, and that will stimulate your thinking about the concepts covered in this course.

Mini-projects are optional. You will receive “extra credit” points for completing mini-projects. If your mini-project is adequate, you will receive one percentage point. This point(s) will be added on to your final grade at the end of the semester.
You may turn in your mini-projects any time during the semester. The projects will be of greater value, though, if they are done thoughtfully. Thus, you may not submit more than three (3) mini-projects.

There is no minimum or maximum length requirement. Typically you will hand in a three to five page typed paper as the final product of each mini-project. Some projects, however, may require longer (or shorter) write-ups. Your analysis should illustrate or explore some phenomenon relevant to the course, while knowledgeably using concepts, principles, and language in the context of policing or the death penalty.

Attached to the end of the syllabus are descriptions of some mini-project options. Some of them will make more sense to you as we progress through the course. If you think of an alternative you would like to do as a mini-project, please feel free to ask me about it. Again, I am looking for you to implement class material–especially critical issues and perspectives–when describing the phenomena you choose to explore.

Make-up Work: A tentative schedule of assignment will be provided (posted) at the beginning of the semester. However, it is possible that the schedule will be modified during the semester. Hence, if you fail to log on as discussed herein, it is the student’s responsibility to check with the Professor (or the Professor’s website) regularly to determine the deadlines for weekly readings, assignments, and activities. To this end, as noted above, make-up exercises will NOT be given, unless otherwise specified. For missed readings, weekly assignments and activities (i.e., “special circumstances”), it is the student’s responsibilities to find out what make-up work is required. If you have any difficulties getting the assignments or making the deadlines, please contact me right way.

Note: Unless otherwise specified, all assignments and activities are due on the scheduled due date. No late assignments will be accepted.

Grades: There are a total of 300 points available in this course. Grades will be based on the total points for the semester. Specifically, grades will be assigned by comparing your performance to the best possible score (300) as follows:

- Weekly Assignments: 100 points*
- Activities/Participation: 100 points**
- Paper: 100 points**

Total: 300 points

*Tentatively, Weekly Assignments will count for 100 points. However, it is possible that the total possible points (i.e., 300) will be increased, or reduced. If increased, the TOTAL POSSIBLE points discussed herein (i.e., 300) will add to more than 300 points. If reduced, the TOTAL POSSIBLE points discussed herein (i.e., 300) will add to less than 300 points.
Similarly, if the 100 Activities and Participation (as well as for the paper) points are either increased or reduced, only the total possible points for Activities/Participation that are utilized will be equated in the final grade distribution. In such case, the TOTAL POSSIBLE points discussed herein (i.e., 300) will add to less (or more) than 300 points.

**Grade Distribution:**

- 90-100% = A (Excellent)
- 80-89% = B (Better than Average)
- 70-79% = C (Average)
- 60-69% = D (Below Average)
- Below 60% = Failing

Note: Mini-project points will be added to your point total at the end of the course.

Please be aware of class expectations, rules, and University/College Policies, which follow:

**Attendance Policy:**

This course is “Web” based. Students are expected to log on regularly, check the calendar for due dates and respond to all emails. Thus, it is to your advantage to log-on regularly. For instance, if you do not participate, you cannot learn the discussed material. Additionally, you will not be able to discuss the assigned readings. Much of the learning in class is through discussion with other students. In the process, feel free to ask questions and/or make comments that might enhance our understanding of policing and capital punishment and related issues. Also, do not hesitate to share experiences that may help to enhance our understanding of the nature and significance of criminal behavior and law within the context of the criminal justice system. (Please reference Sul Ross State University (SRSU) Catalog for additional information regarding this important issue.)

**Punctuality.** It is of extreme importance that you complete the readings and writing assignments on time to avoid falling beyond. I understand that it is not possible at times, but please do not make it a routine.

**Classroom etiquette.** Above all, always respect yourself and others; be patient; be willing to explore new ideas and perspectives; and restrict questions and comments to the topic being discussed.

**Incomplete Grades:**

PLEASE AVOID INCOMPLETE GRADES. ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE ON THE DATES OUTLINED IN THE SYLLABUS. It is the responsibility of students to notify the Professor if they cannot make an assignment or will not be able to log-on to the class. Please call me at 830/758-5017 if you do not plan to participate in a class discussion question or feel you will be missing an assignment. If I do not hear from you in regards to missed assignments, I will NOT allow an excuse for the missed work.
**Class Responsibilities and Conduct:**
You will be responsible for all information posted anytime during the semester. You will be responsible for obtaining announcements or amendments you may have missed. Any student who is intentionally abusive, disruptive, or disrespectful vis-à-vis posted discussions, activities, or emails will be asked immediately amend such communication, AND possibly dropped from the course. Any student who has been asked to amend “unjustified” communication twice will be reported to the Department Chair or Academic Dean. You are expected to show respect to yourself, other students, and your Professor.

**Academic Honesty (Reference Sul Ross State University Catalog):**
Sul Ross State University expects its students to maintain high standards of personal and academic conduct. Students who take part in academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work, plagiarism, collusion, and the abuse of resource materials. The faculty member is responsible for initiating action for each case of academic dishonesty. Discover any academic dishonesty by a student, may be reported to the Department Chair or Academic Dean.

**Disability Services:**
Students who have special instructional needs because of a physical handicap or a learning disability should discuss their special needs with the office of Student Disabilities Services. You may also see the University/College Catalog for additional information. Please do so before the end of the first week of class.

**Drop Policy:**
If you discover that you need to drop this class, you must contact the Records Office and ask for the necessary paperwork. Professors cannot drop students; this is always the responsibility of the student. The Record’s Office will give a deadline for which the paperwork and form, if required, must be returned, complete and signed. If you discover that you are still enrolled, FOLLOW-UP with the Records Office immediately. You are to attend class until the procedure is complete to avoid penalty for absence. Should you miss the deadline or fail to follow the procedure, you will receive an F in the course.

**Library Services:**
Library information and technology focus on research skills that prepare individuals to live and work in an information-centered society. Librarians will work with students in the development of critical reasoning, ethical use of information, and the appropriate use of secondary research techniques including: exploring information resources such as library collections and services, identify sources such as subject databases and scholarly journals, executing effective search strategies, retrieving, recording, and citing relevant results correctly, and interpreting search results and deciding whether to expand the search.

Again, I want this class to be useful to you in your future careers. As such, if I can assist you in any way, please stop by and see me or call/e-mail me. If a problem is to arise during the semester, please contact me immediately so that we can work out a solution. Do not wait until it is too late to remedy the problem.
**Tentative**

**Schedule of Classes and Assignments**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>“Situating the Current State of Research on Latino Police and Ethnic Community in Twenty-First Century America”</td>
<td>Preface, Chapter 1</td>
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<td>“The Need for Latino Police Officers: A Challenge for the New Millennium”</td>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
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<td><strong>Focus:</strong> Situate the current state of research on Latino officers, law enforcement, and the Latino community; and detail the need for additional Latino officers in the American police.</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>“Employment of Latino Officers by Federal, State, and Local Law Enforcement Agencies in the United States: Emerging Trends and Issues”</td>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
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<td>“Chicano Police Officers Working in the Latino Community: Diversity, Police Culture, and Unique Perspectives and Challenges”</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
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<td><strong>Focus:</strong> Document the hiring of Latinos in law enforcement agencies across the U.S.; explore historical and emerging trends and issues in policing and society; and detail the experience of Chicano officers.</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>“Latino Officers, Policy, and Practice”</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
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<td>“Mexican American Law Enforcement Officers: Comparing the Creation of Change Versus the Reinforcement of Structural Hierarchies”</td>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
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<td><strong>Focus:</strong> Explore major historical and contemporary forces defining, shaping, and re-shaping the dynamics of policing, including police shootings, in the United States: cultural, financial, political, legal, philosophical, ideological, and the like.</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>“Bridging the Gaps and Future Research: Thinking Ahead”</td>
<td>Chapter 7</td>
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<td>“Policy Recommendations: Toward a New Police Force”</td>
<td>Chapter 8</td>
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<td><strong>Focus:</strong> Detail mechanisms for bridging existing gaps in policing; provide recommendations for future research studies; and provide recommendations for a reformed police force for the twenty-first century.</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>“The Future of Latino Officers in the American Police”</td>
<td>Chapter 9</td>
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<td><strong>Focus:</strong> As the final week of class, the various topics discussed during the semester will tied together, placing them within a broader framework, while seeking to gain insight into the future of Latinos in the American police. Concluding with recommendations for the future, as we continue the discourse on policing.</td>
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*The syllabus is likely to be amended during the semester at the discretion of the Professor!*

**Note:** Please check Calendar on Blackboard for **due dates**!
Mini-Project Suggestions

1. With fellow students, family members, or friends, discuss the issue of policing in the United States or what could possibly be the DRIVING force behind the death penalty, including actual executions, in the US.

2. With fellow students, family members, boy-friends, or girl-friends, discuss the issue of whether issues like politics, culture, religion, morality, and the media are influential in the dynamics of law enforcement or capital punishment. WHY? Or, WHY NOT?

3. Find interesting stories in newspapers and magazines pertaining to policing or the death penalty in your community, like Del Rio, Eagle Pass, Del Rio, or other community, and detail a brief report. Explain what you find interesting about the stories, as projected through the lens of the media.

4. Watch a documentary, video, or movie that vividly documents that current state of policing or the history of capital punishment, possibly actual executions, and write a brief reaction paper.

5. With fellow students, family members, or friends, discuss the nature and scope of the American police or capital punishment within an historical, theoretical, and philosophical context.

6. With fellow students, family members, boy-friends, or girl-friends, discuss the utility and ramifications of the death penalty or the evolution of the police in the United States.