

Sociology 538: Problems in Criminal Law (Fall 2011)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This seminar course is designed to encourage discussion and analysis of a number of specific issues that can arise in criminal law. Among the legal concepts that will be discussed are: necessity, duress, actus reus, negligence, omission, mens rea, causation, conspiracy, complicity, and attempted crime.

Specific objectives:

Students will develop a thorough understanding of important legal concepts by reading the text, listening to class discussions, and doing legal research.

Students will enhance their oral communication skills by participating in class discussions. Students will learn the basics of doing legal research by participating in a law library tutorial and writing a series of four papers on a legal topic using legal materials.

Students will develop their writing skills by writing two essay exams and drafting four papers.

READINGS

The required book for this class is:

Katz, Leo. 1987. Bad Acts and Guilty Minds: Conundrums of the Criminal Law.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

In order to fully participate in class discussions, students are required to read the assignment prior to the class during which that particular material will be discussed.

QUIZZES

To encourage students to come to class well prepared, five quizzes will be administered without warning throughout the semester. Quizzes are worth a total of 25 points and will cover the current reading assignment.

CLASS DISCUSSIONS

Since much of the learning in this course will take place through guided class discussion, active and informed participation in such discussions is required. I will evaluate each student's level of participation for each day of the class on a 0 to 1 point scale. A student not present will receive 0 points for that day. The maximum number of participation points available is 25.

PAPERS

Each student will be required to write two 10-page papers analyzing the current law regarding a specific legal concept. Students are required to use the ASA format. With consent of the instructor, students may substitute a research project, a public presentation, portfolio, or other project for one of the papers. The papers or presentations are worth a total of 100 points.

EXAMS

There will be two essay exams which will test your comprehension of the course material. The first will be administered toward the middle of the semester; the second will be administered during finals week on Monday, December 12th at 10:10 in the morning. Each exam is worth 75 points.

GRADING

There are 300 points available:

Possible points

Participation in class discussions	25
Quizzes	25
Exam #1 (based on Chapters 1 and 2 and associated class discussions)	75
Exam #2 (based on Chapters 3-6 and associated class discussions)	75
Papers	100

A student's grade will be based on the total number of points achieved. Plus/minus grading will not be used in this class. Final grades will be assigned as follows:

270 points or above	A	180 to 210 points	D
240 to 270 points	B	179.5 points or below	F
210 to 240 points	C		

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS, FIRST HALF OF CLASS

August 30	Introduction
September 1	Necessity and other exceptions Reading assignment: Chapter 1 in Katz
September 6	Legal research presentation Meet in the Law School, room 203
September 8, 13, 15, 20	Necessity and other exceptions (continued)
September 22	Actus reus Reading assignment: Chapter 2 in Katz
September 27, 29 October 4, 6	Actus reus (continued)
October 11	Summary and review for exam #1
October 13	Exam #1