

SOCI 123

Crime and Delinquency



General Description

Introduction

The study of crime is broad in scope, cutting across many fields including sociology, psychology, law, history, philosophy, and biology. SOCI 123 is a three credit hour introduction to the sociological study of criminology. Sociologists study what Emile Durkheim, one of the fathers of sociology, termed emergent properties, or those properties that emerge out of human interaction and cannot be explained by studying only the characteristics and attributes of individuals. In this course, we therefore concentrate on the social facts of crime, studying both social structures, such as the criminal justice system and the structure of economic inequality, as well as social processes, such as the development of a criminal identity through interactions with other criminals. We also discuss the environments in which people are embedded, paying particular attention to the disruptive physical and social settings characteristic of the American urban underclass.

In SOCI 123, we focus on how our lives reflect the context of our social experience and the ways that social forces translate into our everyday understandings of crime. Many of the facts discussed in this course will contradict both media and commonsense notions of crime, criminals, victims, and the criminal justice system.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, I hope you will have achieved the following:

- a basic knowledge of important facts surrounding crime today, including general patterns of crime, important statistics, changing definitions of crime and criminals

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throughout history, and possible and probable future trends concerning crime in America.

- a basic knowledge of some important sociological theories concerning crime, including compatible ideologies and their implications for crime control policies.
- the ability to use this basic knowledge to discuss current crime problems and possible solutions beyond media sensationalism and political rhetoric.

Required Textbooks

The required textbook for SOCI 123 is:

Barkan, Steven. *Criminology: A Sociological Understanding*, 4th edition. Prentice Hall, 2008.

The text can be purchased from Friday Center Books & Gifts at the Friday Center using the book order form in this manual, or online at <https://s4.its.unc.edu/HigherGrounds>.

Course Organization

This course is divided into fourteen lessons and a book report/final. We begin the course by discussing how we study and come to understand crime. For example, we discuss in some detail the role of sociological perspective and how this is relevant for studying crime and punishment. Because most of us get our knowledge of crime through media, we also discuss the role of media and public opinion in shaping our views on crime. In this first part of the course, we also examine data collection and statistics on crime, which we will use throughout the course. Starting with Lesson 3, we study sociological theories that attempt to explain various aspects of crime and criminals. Lessons 9 through 12 examine specific crimes—their definitions, characteristics, and how they change over time. Lessons 13 and 14 focus on societal reactions to crime. Here we discuss, for example, the criminal justice system and the state of American prisons. Finally, you will explore a topic of your choice in a book report, which also serves as your final exam.

Included in each lesson is a set of notes on the reading. These notes, which are similar to lecture notes, are not designed to provide a complete summary of the reading. Instead, the notes highlight and expand upon general, important points and will hopefully serve to help you organize the information from the assigned reading.

Study Suggestions

1. **Be careful and take your time.** Although introductory textbooks can sometimes seem like “easy reading,” the many facts and theories make it difficult to identify the most important points. In the notes with each lesson, I provide you with what I consider to be the central ideas for each topic. I strongly encourage you to read these notes carefully, as I think they will help you identify and better understand important points in the text. If you have questions regarding anything in the text or notes, please let me know. I will be happy to help you.
2. **Make sure that you understand the assignment questions.** One of the most common mistakes that students make is not taking enough time to consider what the question is really asking. Frequently, students find themselves in the unfortunate situation of having written a very good answer to a question that was not asked. Please take time to consider what the question requires, and be extra careful to make sure you answer all parts of each question. This, I think, is an especially difficult problem in a course where we do not meet face to face. Therefore, I encourage you again to not only write to me with questions regarding the text, but also with questions regarding the assignments (even if you think they are minor or trivial questions).
3. **Don’t be afraid to question the material in the course.** Sometimes the pressure to take in all of the facts (and there are many) in an introductory course prevents students from thinking about those facts. I encourage you to evaluate the material in light of your own knowledge, perhaps from other courses or even personal experience.

4. **Be careful with the use of direct quotations.** When you use a direct (word for word) quote, you are required to use quotation marks and cite the author, year, and page number of your source. *When you do not cite sources or use the appropriate punctuation marks, you are committing plagiarism, which is a very serious violation of the Honor Code.*

You also need to be aware of paraphrasing. If you only change one or two words in a sentence, and you do not cite the author, page number, or use quotation marks appropriately, then you are also committing plagiarism. For example, the following sentence appears in the 2006 edition of the Barkan textbook: “One problem with experiments is that they are not generalizable” (Barkan, 2006, p. 20). Now, if you only change one or two words in this sentence and write something like: “The problem with experiments is they can’t be generalized,” you would be committing plagiarism. The proper way to write a slightly changed sentence would be: “[The] problem with experiments is [they can’t be generalized].” (Barkan, 2006, p. 20).

Although using direct quotations—providing they are properly cited—is not incorrect, it is a good idea to put things in your own words and cite the source. Use this class as an opportunity to develop and sharpen your writing skills. The most effective way to become a better writer is to practice. I’ll make suggestions and we can work together. This may take you a little more time, but the benefits far outweigh the cost.

Grading and Final Examination

Your course grade will be based on fourteen written assignments and your book report/final. The first fourteen assignments, which count as 85 percent of your grade, consist of several essay questions drawn from the readings and lecture notes. Assignment 15 is a book report on the book *Code of the Street*, by Elijah Anderson, and counts for 15 percent of your grade. If you wish to use a different book for your final book report, please clear it with me first. Only the Anderson book is stocked at Friday Center Books & Gifts.

I judge your essay and written assignments by the following criteria:

Clarity In order for me to evaluate your work appropriately, I must first understand what you are trying to say. It is therefore very important for you to keep your answers focused and to the point. Be careful to use terminology correctly and don't assume I know what you mean. If you are having difficulty with any concepts discussed in the text or notes, please let me know. My advice is that you first write your answer and then put it away for a few hours or even a day. When you reread the answer, you might find mistakes that you would have otherwise overlooked.

Organization As stated above, your answers should be focused. Be sure you understand the question and organize your answer accordingly. Your answers should indicate that you understand the relevant issues and you can separate important issues from trivial ones. More words don't necessarily make for a better answer.

Analysis Your analysis should be comprehensive. Make sure you answer each question thoroughly and completely. Often, one question may have several parts, so please be careful not to miss any. Your analysis should also consider the merits of different points of view, using evidence to support your conclusions. Be careful to cite work appropriately. For example, don't just write "studies indicate"—you need to cite which studies you are discussing. Finally, the arguments you present should be well thought out and follow a pattern of logical construction.

A Final Word I want to take this opportunity to wish you good luck with SOCI 123. I hope you will find the course both useful and thought provoking. I also hope that this course will increase your desire to learn more about crime and delinquency as well as the field of sociology.

Sources Durkheim, Emile. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. (New York: Free Press, 1964).