

CRIME AND JUSTICE IN THE UNITED STATES
CJUS 2100.400
Spring 2026

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Adam Trahan, Ph.D.
Office: Chilton Hall, 265
E-mail: Adam.Trahan@unt.edu
Phone: (940) 369-8860

For questions, please first email the Graduate Student Assistant, Ms. Tori Fuller at Tori.Fuller@unt.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the societal responses to people and organizations that violate criminal codes; discusses the history, development, organization and philosophy of the justice process; and analyzes the complex inter-relationships between the major components of the criminal justice system (i.e., police, courts, and corrections).

COURSE GOALS

Students who successfully complete this course will be able:

- 1) To identify the major foundations of crime and justice including the nature of law, behavioral aspects of crime, and measurement of crime;
- 2) To identify the major components of the criminal justice system including the police, courts, and corrections;
- 3) To use and critique alternative explanatory systems or theories;
- 4) To develop and communicate alternative explanations or solutions for crime;
- 5) To examine criminal justice institutions and processes across a range of historical periods, social structures and cultures;
- 6) To analyze the effects of historical, social, political, economic, cultural and global forces on criminal justice.
- 7) To identify and understand differences and commonalities within diverse cultures.
- 8) To employ the appropriate methods, technologies, and data that social scientists use to investigate criminals and the criminal justice system.

READING MATERIALS

Rennison, C.M., & Dodge, M. (2026). *Introduction to criminal justice: Systems, diversity, and change* (5th). Sage Publications

COURSE NOTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Please make sure to have your official UNT email forwarded to your preferred email address (if different) to receive important updates, changes, announcements, class cancellations (if applicable), and generally, so I can reach you if necessary.

Before emailing me with a question, make sure to review the syllabus, schedule and welcome statement. Most questions are answered in these documents.

The announcement board in Canvas, and email, will be used for primary communication to the class as a whole. I advise you check the announcements section frequently.

Important: It is your responsibility to utilize a computer system that works and is compatible with the UNT online system/Canvas. This is especially critical during examination times. I would recommend that you take your exams on the UNT campus if possible. If that is not possible, I would recommend you avoid waiting until the last minute to take your exam in case problems arise. **Do not take your exams on mobile devices such as smartphones or tablets.**

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined based on your performance on 14 chapter quizzes, 14 video activities, 14 data activities, 5 discussion assignments, and 1 research project assignment. There are a total of 469 points that can be earned in this class. The dates for each quiz, discussion assignment, writing assignment, and exam are listed in the course schedule on canvas.

Chapter Quizzes: 14 @ 15 points each

Video Activities: 14 @ 3 points each

Data Activities: 14 @ 3 points each

Discussions: 5 @ 15 points each

Research Project Assignment: 1 @ 100 points

Grading Scale:

423 – 469	= A
376 – 422	= B
329 – 375	= C
282 – 328	= D
0 – 281	= F

Note: Dates for when each assignment is available can be found on the course schedule in Canvas.

Chapter Quizzes: Each chapter quiz contains 15 multiple choice and true-false questions. Only 1 attempt is allowed for each.

Video Activities: Each video activity involves watching a video and answering a short number of questions (usually around 3 to 4). Two attempts are allowed. Your best attempt will be recorded for your grade.

Data Activities: Each data activity requires you to review data about crime and/or criminal justice outcomes and then answer a short number of questions (usually around 3 to 4) about those data. Two attempts are allowed. Your best attempt will be recorded for your grade.

Research Project Assignment: This assignment requires you to write and submit a paper between 500-1,000 words discussing wrongful convictions and capital punishment based on data you collect. Additional details and a rubric can be found in Canvas.

Discussions: Students will participate in assigned online discussions. Questions will be posted by your instructor that involve considering and responding to important crime and criminal justice topics.

Each discussion assignment will be eligible for a maximum of 15 points.

There will be 1 “Introduce Yourself” discussion (ungraded) and 5 Unit discussion forums for a maximum of 75 possible points. You will be graded on your original content (level of critical thought/analysis, quality of factual support for your position) and quality of writing (spelling, punctuation, grammar). If any information that is not an original thought of yours is included in a discussion response, regardless of where it came from, that information needs to be cited using APA format. If you are unfamiliar with APA, please refer to the APA Writing Style Guide (located in the Modules section within the “Start Here” tab). Please make sure to proofread your work before submitting.

Each student will be required to participate in 5 discussions throughout the course. These discussions will first require you to **post** an answer to the questions posed by me. Be clear and detailed in answering the questions. These posts must be at least 250 words in length. **This portion of the assignment is referred to as “Post.”**

You are also required to *appropriately and professionally* **respond** to at least two other students’ posts for every discussion board (i.e. one post by you and two responses from you to your classmates). Your response to another student’s post must be at least 100 words in length, relate to the subject of the initial post and demonstrate evidence of critical thought. Consider: what makes sense about your classmate’s post? What flaws can you see in the post? A simple statement of agreement or disagreement with the initial post is insufficient. Furnish a thoughtful response and support it. Content, structure,

grammar, spelling and punctuation will be taken into consideration when awarding the grade for your discussion entries.

Students are only permitted **one** attempt on discussion assignments. Students are required to submit their discussion post prior to viewing the post or replies of other students. Meaning, the post must be submitted before the responses. This standard method is to ensure all students are practicing academic honesty and not drawing their discussion post information from the work of other students. For this reason, **we only grade the first discussion post submitted by students, and students cannot delete a submission from our view.** If you submit a blank post or an incomplete post first, it will still be graded as your post submission regardless of subsequent posts. However, if you have any technical issues with your discussion submission, please email myself or Ms. Fuller ASAP. Do not wait until grades have been posted to notify us of technical issues.

See next page for the discussion assignments rubric.

**All citations, references and sources are to be made in APA format.*

***You must cite any sources you use when constructing your discussion board responses, whether it is the course textbook, a scholarly journal, a website, a television show, etc.*

Rubric for Discussion Assignments

Content	Participation	Length	Editing (spelling and grammar)
Excellent 4 points All of the required components of the post were adequately addressed with full explanations	Excellent 4 points Student submitted 2+ substantive participation responses with full and supported explanations	Excellent 4 points Discussion post exceeded required length, 2 participation responses were posted that also exceeded required length	Excellent 3 points If there were any spelling or grammar errors they were insignificant
Good 3 points A minor required component of the post was missing, or there was not good explanation for at least one of the required major components	Good 3 points Student submitted 1-2 substantive participation responses with supported explanations	Good 3 points Discussion post met required length, 2 participation responses were submitted - one response met the 100 word count requirement, one did not	Good 2 points There were a few spelling or grammar errors that were noticeable but did not detract from the discussion post/response

Fair 2 points Important required components of the post were missing or there were a few components not fully explained	Fair 2 points Student submitted 1-2 substantive participation responses. Additional explanation or support was needed	Fair 2 points Discussion post was at or right below required length, 2 responses were submitted, but neither met the 100 word count requirement or 1 response was submitted that met the 100 word count requirement	Fair 1 points There were a few spelling or grammar errors that were noticeable and detracted somewhat from the discussion post/response
Poor 1 points Not all of the required components of the post were addressed, nor were they fully explained	Poor 1 points Students submitted 0-1 substantive participation responses	Poor 1 points Discussion Post was at or below required length, 2 responses were submitted; 1 substantive response was posted that did not meet the 100 word count requirement	Poor 0-1 points There were a number of spelling and grammar mistakes that detracted from the discussion post/response
Failing 0 points The content of the response was inadequate with limited coverage of required elements and very little if any explanation of required components	Failing 0 points There were no substantive participation posts submitted.	Failing 0 points Discussion response was at or below the required length and there were no substantive participation posts	Failing 0 points There were a great number of spelling and grammar mistakes that detracted greatly from the reading of the paper, such that it was difficult to read

Make-Up Policy

There will be no opportunities to make up any missed coursework with the exception of authorized absences according to university policies prescribing authorized absences in certain situations. I reserve the right to consider extreme circumstances and modify this rule. Students should notify me prior to missing an assignment, if possible. Those in athletics, those who are absent for religious holidays, and/or those involved in other school supported activities that require being absent from class will be allowed to make up assignments if proper procedures are followed in requesting an excused absence. I must have written documentation in advance that you will be away from class for the absence to be excused.

Authorized Absences

Absences are authorized only in cases of participation in school sponsored activities and/or religious holidays. For an excused absence due to a school sponsored activity, students must be approved in advance by the department chair and academic dean. Within three days after the absence, students must obtain authorized absence cards from the Dean of

Students for presentation to instructor. Students who wish to request an excused absence for religious holidays can do so and will be excused from class as long as they make a request within the required time frame set by the University (see the most recent undergraduate catalog). Notification must be in writing so that I may have it for my records. You must arrange to make up any work missed during the excused religious absence or school sponsored activity.

Academic Dishonesty/Integrity

All students are required to conduct themselves with utmost honesty and integrity in all aspects related to this course. Any act of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and may result in failing the course. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating on a test, plagiarism, and collusion – the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing work offered for course credit.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)

In this course, I want you to engage deeply with the materials and develop your own critical thinking and writing skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools [e.g., Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini] is not permitted. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment, exam, or coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the [Student Academic Integrity policy](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003) (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>).

Grade Appeals

Please keep all your graded work. You cannot, under any circumstance, dispute a grade on an exam or assignment if you cannot provide the original copy. Should you have any discrepancy with a grade you receive, you must submit a written complaint and meet with me within one week of receiving the grade. Bring the original copy of the exam or assignment to this meeting. Written complaints must address specific comments and/or grading criteria. Filing an appeal does not guarantee that your grade will be changed.

Grades are not verbally negotiable.

SPOT Participation

The SPOT evaluation is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available to you at the end of the semester, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. I am very interested in the feedback I get from students, as I work to continually improve my teaching. I consider the SPOT to be an important part of your participation in this class.

Student Behavior and University Policy

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be referred to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012>

Participation and Online Behavior

To be successful at learning and understanding the material in this class, it is essential that you read and complete the assigned material and engage in thoughtful online discussions. Your active participation, along with your willingness to engage in thoughtful discussions regarding the course material will be taken into account at all times during the semester.

An online classroom, at least during times of online discussion, is a place to express ideas, opinions, and engage in thoughtful discussions. It is expected that students will respect the views and opinions of others at all times. Each student brings unique insight and perspectives, and that can make for a very interesting and lively discussion forum, but we all must be appropriate and respectful of others. **Please review the undergraduate catalog concerning conduct which adversely affects the university community.**

Syllabus Changes

I reserve the right and have the discretion to change this syllabus. While every effort will be made to follow this syllabus as closely as possible, it is sometimes the case that the syllabus must be modified. In the case that the syllabus needs to be adjusted, I will announce such adjustments to the class. I will make every effort to ensure that any changes to the syllabus benefit the class as a whole. It is the student's responsibility to check announcements/email so that any and all syllabus changes are documented. Failure to obtain syllabus changes because of failure to check and read announcements does not constitute a defense against missed assignments, test dates, and other applicable changes.

Office of Disability Accommodation

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. To request accommodations, you must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) by completing an application for services and providing documentation to verify your eligibility each semester. Once your eligibility is confirmed, you may request your letter of accommodation. ODA will then email your faculty a letter of reasonable accommodation, initiating a private discussion about your specific needs in the course.

You can request accommodations at any time, but it's important to provide ODA notice to your faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. Keep in mind that you must obtain a new letter of accommodation for each semester and meet with each faculty member before accommodations can be implemented in each class. You are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding your accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty have the authority to ask you to discuss your letter during their designated office hours to protect your privacy. For more information and to access resources that can support your needs, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access) website (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>).

*** A course schedule can be found in a separate file in Canvas**