

47:202:466:Q1
THEORIES OF CRIME
Fall 2025 Syllabus

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Class Time: Tuesdays (in person) and Fridays (virtual), 1:00-2:20
Class Location: 201 Englehard Hall (in person) and instructor's Zoom room (virtual)
Office Hours: Tuesdays (in person) and Fridays (virtual), 10:00-12:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course in advanced criminology that surveys the history of thought on the explanation of crime and victimization. Theories of crime differ as to whether they seek to explain (1) differences across nations, states, or localities in crime rates; (2) differences across individuals in their risk of criminal victimization or their involvement in criminal offending; and (3) differences in situational settings that can attract or deflect criminal behavior. Theories also differ as to whether they explain so-called "street crime" or whether their focus is on crimes of the powerful, such as corporate crime or environmental crime.

The course will consider these and other distinctions across theories, trace contemporary versions of the original theories, and devise a "family tree" of theories that share common intellectual roots. Different theories arise in specific sociopolitical contexts, and have different implications for crime prevention or intervention. The course thus also seeks to understand the wider historical and social context in which prominent criminological theories emerge, as well as to carefully consider their policy implications.

This is a hybrid course that will meet in person on Tuesdays, and virtually (via Zoom) on Fridays.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Articulate the major schools of thought that contribute to an understanding of the origin of criminal law and criminal behavior, and the specific theories and theorists associated with them.
- Distinguish the scope of different theories of crime and the criminal justice system, with respect to what they purport to explain and the chief construct(s) they use as explanation.
- Describe the chief societal responses to crime linked to different schools of thought.

Course Prerequisites

A prerequisite for this course is English Composition (21:355:102) or Honors English Composition (21:355:104). Basic knowledge of criminology and criminal justice is assumed but will not be required. This comprises the equivalent of the material covered in Introduction to Criminology (47:202:102) and Introduction to Criminal Justice (47:202:103).

COURSE MATERIALS

Learning Management System

The main resource for this course is Canvas (<https://canvas.rutgers.edu>). Here, you will find course announcements and reminders, alerts about adverse weather or course changes, feedback from the instructor on student performance, and links to material requiring completion.

Required Textbook

Snipes, Jeffrey B., Thomas J. Bernard, and Rick Trinkner. (2024). *Vold's Theoretical Criminology*. 9th edition. Oxford University Press.

A digital access code for this textbook is available for purchase from the Rutgers-Newark Bookstore (<https://newark-rutgers.bncollege.com>). The search terms to identify the course and retrieve the access code are: Term = Fall 2025; Department = 202; Course # = 466; Section = Q1. Note that this does not purchase a physical textbook, even though that will seem to be the case when you check out. Instead, after purchase, a digital access code will arrive via email from bookstore staff. This will allow you to access the e-book on Perusall, which is a collaborative annotation program on which all reading assignments will be completed.

Perusall is a reading tool to help students become active rather than passive learners, and is designed to transform reading from a solitary experience into a collective one. Students engage with course readings (and with each other) by commenting, requesting clarification of difficult-to-understand concepts, posting responses to classmates' questions, "upvoting" insightful comments, linking outside material with the reading content (e.g., relevant books or articles, newsworthy events), etc. Because annotations are anonymous to other students (but not to the instructor), students can ask questions or make comments about the material without feeling self-conscious.

COURSE GRADING

Course grading will be based on the following criteria and percentages, with each described in more detail below:

Class attendance and discussion ==>	15%
Weekly textbook annotations ==>	35%
Weekly portfolio entries ==>	40%
Final theory portfolio ==>	10%
TOTAL ==>	100%

The grading scale that will be used for the final semester grades is as follows:

A	90.0% to 100%
B+	87.0% to 89.9%
B	80.0% to 86.9%
C+	77.0% to 79.9%
C	70.0% to 76.9%
D	60.0% to 69.9%
F	59.9% or below

Class Attendance and Discussion

Because this course is a seminar, attendance during the scheduled class period is mandatory. It is imperative that students be present and ready to participate in discussion about the prevailing topic, and students should anticipate being called on by the instructor to contribute. Discussion will focus on the textbook readings and students' portfolio entries as well as on contemporary discourse about crime and punishment that students might have encountered in news media or in their personal lives.

Attendance will be recorded for each class. Absences are considered excused when students advise the instructor prior to a class that will be missed. Two absences during the semester will be allowed without any penalty (nor will an excuse be demanded by the instructor), beyond which 0.50-percentage point will be deducted for each unexcused absence. Late arrivals will also not be tolerated, and students who arrive more than 15 minutes late to class risk forfeiting 0.25-percentage point of their participation grade for each occasion.

Weekly Textbook Annotations (× 13)

Prior to each in-person class meeting, students are required to read and annotate a textbook chapter on Perusall, each of which is about 25-30 pages in length. Perusall grades are based on "quality scoring," which is an assessment of the student's level of engagement with the reading material. The quality scoring for the annotations is as follows:

Full credit = High-quality engagement with the reading.

2/3 credit = Medium-quality engagement with the reading.

1/3 credit = Low-quality engagement with the reading.

No credit = Did not do the assigned reading.

Annotation grades are assigned on a 0-10 scale, and average the quality scores of the five best annotations—this means students should aim to contribute more than five annotations, since they stand to boost their quality score. An example of how annotations are scored is available here: <https://perusall.com/downloads/scoring-examples.pdf>. Although quality scoring is performed by an algorithm, the instructor may override the assigned grades and students may appeal their scores to the instructor. For additional information, see the tip sheet written by Dr. Sara Wakefield at the end of this syllabus, used with her permission.

Important benefits of Perusall annotations are (1) ensuring students come to each class prepared for discussion having read the material for that day; (2) aiding comprehension since some class time can be spent on aspects of the readings that were confusing; (3) helping students become better and more engaged readers of academic material over time; and (4) giving students who might be naturally quiet in a classroom setting the opportunity to show what they know.

Perusall annotations are due by 12:00 pm (noon) on the same day they are required. This gives the instructor an hour before class to review comments and confusion reports ahead of the class meeting. Annotations will not be allowed after the deadline. To be clear, students who fail to complete an annotation by the deadline will not be permitted to submit it late for partial credit, even for excused absences.

Weekly Portfolio Entries (× 10)

This is a writing-intensive course, and as such, there will be weekly writing assignments. Prior to each virtual meeting, students are required to submit a theory portfolio entry on Canvas. The entries should each be 300-500 words, and address the following five criteria:

1. What are the central propositions about the causes of crime that are unique to the theories included under this perspective? Describe the chief cause or causes of crime and the purpose of punishment.
2. What is the explanatory scope of the theory? Clarify whether the theory explains all crimes or only certain kinds of crime; whether it speaks to the making and enforcement of laws or instead to the breaking of laws; and with respect to law breaking, whether it pertains to the explanation of aggregate crime rates or individual criminal offending.
3. Who are the key theorists and what are the key theoretical concepts they proposed?
4. What is a specific crime-control policy that is informed by the theory? Provide some detail about how the policy works.
5. What is one question that you can propose for in-class discussion about the theory? You should be prepared to be called on to ask this question in class.

It is forbidden to quote material directly from the textbook or some other source, and instead students must provide a written description in their own words. As a model, the first portfolio entry covering material from Chapter 2 is provided in this syllabus. Students are allowed to either use this sample entry verbatim or modify it to suit their own preferences or write it in their own voice.

Students are permitted to use large language model (LLM) tools such as ChatGPT for things such as brainstorming, outlining, or editing their portfolio entries. However, it is unacceptable (as well as unethical) for students to directly copy LLM output and present it as their work. The university's academic integrity policy covers the use of LLMs, and stipulates that work submitted in a course be "the student's own and created without the aid of impermissible technologies, materials, or collaborations." Students who do use LLM tools are required to disclose its use, ensure their writing remains original, and use the tools ethically and responsibly. Proper disclosure of an LLM includes the organizational author (e.g., OpenAI), the date prompted, the name of the model (e.g., ChatGPT), the version of the model (e.g., o1-preview), the text of the prompt used, and the URL (if applicable) in a bibliography.

The theory portfolio entry can be thought of as a first draft of a section of the final theory portfolio. The instructor will provide critical feedback on the theory portfolio entries, which students must incorporate into their final theory portfolio. Feedback will be geared toward improving the quality of students' writing as well as students' ability to organize and synthesize content. When needed, students will be referred to writing support tools such as Grammarly.

Theory portfolio entries are due by 12:00 pm (noon) on the same day they are required. Portfolio entries submitted after that deadline will be penalized one percentage point.

Final Theory Portfolio

The course will culminate in the submission of a final theory portfolio rather than a final exam. The final portfolio must have 12 entries, and cover the theoretical perspectives from Chapters 2-13 in the textbook, as listed in the course schedule. It should incorporate revisions to the theory portfolio entries from earlier in the semester, based on critical feedback from the instructor, and combined into a single document. To that end, the final theory portfolio should be a tracked changes version

of all of the entries submitted earlier in the semester, with the addition of the final entry that will not be submitted in advance.

COURSE SCHEDULE

All readings textbook chapters available on Perusall, and are expected to be annotated by 12:00 pm on the day of the class they are to be discussed. All theory portfolio entries are to be submitted by 10:00 pm on the day prior to the class they are to be discussed.

Class	Class Topic	Readings and Assignments Due
Tue, Sep 2 Fri, Sep 5	Course Introduction	No Assignment Due No Assignment Due
Tue, Sep 9 Fri, Sep 12	Overview of Theory I Overview of Theory II	Due Sep 9 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 1 Annotations No Portfolio Due
Tue, Sep 16 Fri, Sep 19	Legalistic Perspectives I Legalistic Perspectives II	Due Sep 16 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 2 Annotations No Portfolio Due
Tue, Sep 23 Fri, Sep 26	Biological Perspectives I Biological Perspectives II	Due Sep 23 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 3 Annotations Due Sep 26 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 3 Portfolio
Tue, Sep 30 Fri, Oct 3	Psychological Perspectives I Psychological Perspectives II	Due Sep 30 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 4 Annotations Due Oct 3 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 4 Portfolio
Tue, Oct 7 Fri Oct 10	Modernization Perspectives I Modernization Perspectives II	Due Oct 7 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 5 Annotations Due Oct 10 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 5 Portfolio
Tue, Oct 14 Fri, Oct 17	Strain Perspectives I Strain Perspectives II	Due Oct 14 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 6 Annotations Due Oct 17 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 6 Portfolio
Tue, Oct 21 Fri, Oct 24	Ecological Perspectives I Ecological Perspectives II	Due Oct 21 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 7 Annotations Due Oct 24 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 7 Portfolio
Tue, Oct 28 Fri, Oct 31	Learning Perspectives I Learning Perspectives II	Due Oct 28 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 8 Annotations Due Oct 31 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 8 Portfolio
Tue, Nov 4 Fri, Nov 7	Control Perspectives I Control Perspectives II	Due Nov 4 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 9 Annotations Due Nov 7 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 9 Portfolio
Tue, Nov 11 Fri, Nov 14	Conflict Perspectives I Conflict Perspectives II	Due Nov 11 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 10 Annotations Due Nov 14 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 10 Portfolio
Tue, Nov 18 Fri, Nov 21	Radical Perspectives I Radical Perspectives II	Due Nov 18 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 11 Annotations Due Nov 21 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 11 Portfolio
Tue, Nov 25 Wed, Nov 26	NO CLASS (THURSDAY SCHEDULE) Catch-Up Class	No Assignments Due No Assignments Due
Tue, Dec 2	Feminist Perspectives I	Due Dec 2 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 12 Annotations

Fri, Dec 5	Feminist Perspectives II	Due Dec 5 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 12 Portfolio
Tue, Dec 9	Life-Course Perspectives	Due Dec 9 @ 12:00 pm: Chap 13 Annotations
Fri, Dec 12	NO CLASS (SEMESTER COMPLETED)	No Portfolio Due
TBD	COMBINED AND FULLY EDITED THEORY PORTFOLIO DUE, INCLUDING ENTRIES FOR THEORIES COVERED EACH WEEK FROM CHAPTERS 2-13 (WITH TRACKED CHANGES), AS WELL AS A NEW ENTRY FOR LIFE-COURSE PERSPECTIVES	

Portfolio Entry for Friday, September 19

Note: Students are to use this as the first entry in their theory portfolio, and may either use it in full or edit or add material to it as they see fit. It covers material from Chapter 2 of the textbook. It also provides a model for how students should approach writing the remaining entries in their final theory portfolio, covering Chapters 2-13. The final edited portfolio, including all entries, will be due on the designated date of the final exam.

Legalistic Perspectives (Chapter 2)

Legalistic perspectives fall under the umbrella of the so-called Classical School of criminology. A key proposition of the Classical School is that all behavior is freely chosen (“free will”)—crime is neither coerced nor caused by forces beyond an individual’s control. This class of theories emphasizes the incentive structure for crime by focusing on its “utility,” and proposes somewhat circularly that the chief cause of crime is its expected consequence. Because of this, the fundamental purpose of punishment is to dissuade illegal behavior, by increasing the “costs” of crime so they outweigh its “rewards”—in other words, the goal of punishment is to disincentive illegal behavior—while maintaining proportionality between the seriousness of the behavior and the severity of the punishment.

Legalistic or utilitarian perspectives seek to explain all crime from the perspective of free will—in truth, all behavior, including non-criminal behavior. However, in practice, theories are much more specific and provide an explanation of “direct contact predatory crime,” such as robbery, burglary, and theft. So while they are capable of explaining white-collar crime, they tend to be restricted to certain forms of street crime. They also explain variation in crime rates (e.g., routine activity) as well as individual involvement in criminal behavior (e.g., perceptual deterrence).

Key theorists include the Enlightenment scholar Cesare Beccaria and the British legal reformer Jeremy Bentham, who proposed the basic concepts of deterrence theory. Deterrence theory emphasizes the certainty, severity, and celerity of punishment, which theoretically prevent crime by the punished individual (specific deterrence) as well as crime in society at large (general deterrence). Economist Daniel Nagin expanded deterrence theory to focus on perceptual deterrence, or the linkage of individual beliefs about punishment risk with individual criminal offending. These include the perceived certainty, severity, and celerity of punishment. Sociologists Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson proposed a routine activity theory, emphasizing the situational convergence of a motivated offender with a suitable target in the absence of a capable guardian.

An example of a crime-control policy is focused deterrence, which leverages criminal justice resources to prevent crime by individuals and groups known to be high-rate offenders. This policy uses tailored messaging and coercive surveillance to convince targeted individuals they have a high

probability of detection and prosecution if they continue committing crime, and will subsequently be incarcerated for a long period of time if caught.

Discussion question: What is the theoretical limit of punishment severity, and in particular, is it possible for punishment to be too severe from the perspective of deterrence?

COURSE POLICIES

Class Announcements

As needed, e-mail will be utilized to post course announcements (e.g., class cancellation due to inclement weather) as well as to occasionally provide links to items that are relevant for the topics covered in this course (e.g., newspaper articles, journal articles).

Classroom Climate

Disruptive behavior in the classroom cheats other students of the opportunity to learn. Examples include arriving late to class, leaving and re-entering the classroom during the seminar, talking excessively, using cell phones, eating, reading outside material, and persisting in speaking without being recognized. The instructor reserves the right to ask disruptive students to leave the classroom.

Academic Integrity

The instructor will uphold Rutgers University policies concerning ethical behavior and academic integrity, and students are expected to familiarize themselves with these policies. The relevant principles, policies, and disciplinary procedures can be accessed from the university's website at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>.

ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT STATEMENT

Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students and the University as a whole. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

For Individuals Experiencing Disability: The Office of Disability Services (ODS) works with students with medical, physical, and/or mental conditions who encounter disabling barriers in order to determine reasonable and appropriate accommodations for access. Students who have completed the process with ODS and have approved accommodations are provided a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) specific to each course. To initiate accommodations for their course students must both provide the LOA to and have a conversation with the course instructor about the accommodations. This should occur as early in the semester as possible. More information can be found at the RU-N ODS website (ods.newark.rutgers.edu). Contact ODS at (973) 353-5375 or via email at ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals Who Are Pregnant: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy. Students may contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance at (973) 353-1906 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Short-Term Absence Verification: The Office of the Dean of Students can provide assistance for absences related to religious observance, emergency or unavoidable conflict (illness, personal or family emergency, etc.). Students should refer to University Policy 10.2.7 for information about expectations and responsibilities. The Office of the Dean of Students can be contacted by calling (973) 353-5063 or emailing deanofstudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals with Temporary Conditions/Injuries: The Office of the Dean of Students can assist students who are experiencing a temporary condition or injury (broken or sprained limbs, concussions, or recovery from surgery). Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury should submit a request using the following link: <https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu>.

For Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance can assist students who are experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking. Students can report an incident to the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance by calling (973) 353-1906 or emailing TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. Incidents may also be reported by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm. For more information, students should refer to the University's Title IX Policy and Grievance Procedures located at <https://uec.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/60-1-33-current-1.pdf>.

For Support Related to Interpersonal Violence: The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance (VPVA) can provide any student with confidential support. The office does not have a reporting obligation to Title IX. Students can contact the office by calling (973) 353-1918 or emailing run.vpva@rutgers.edu. There is also a confidential text-based helpline available to students; students can text (973) 339-0734 for support. Students do not need to be a victim/survivor of violence; any student can receive services, information and support.

For Crisis and Concerns: The Campus Awareness Response and Education (CARE) Team works with students in crisis to develop a plan of support plan and address personal situations that might impact their academic performance. Connect with the CARE Team by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNCARE or emailing careteam@rutgers.edu.

For Stress, Worry, or Concerns about Well-Being: The Counseling Center has confidential therapists available to support students. Students should reach out to the Counseling Center to schedule an appointment: counseling@newark.rutgers.edu or (973) 353-5805.

Additional support is available to any RU-N student through Uwill services:

- Umatch: Teletherapy with flexible scheduling, starting with a free account.
- Uhelp: Crisis support at 833-646-1526 (available 24/7/365).
- Urise: Wellness-based video collection with a free account.

Access Uwill@RUN at <https://my.rutgers.edu> using your netid. Services are confidential and free.

For emergencies, call 911 or contact Rutgers University Police Department (RUPD) by calling (973) 353-5111.

Understanding Perusall: Tips, Tricks, and Resources

by Dr. Sara Wakefield

(used with permission)

General Information

- Perusall uses an algorithm to evaluate annotations, comments, and responses to peers in terms of quality and engagement. We spot check them for every student throughout the course (and we can see your grades while we are commenting within the platform to modify them as needed).
- People have a tendency to dislike algorithms (for good reason) but there are also good reasons to dislike a small number of (imperfect) human beings evaluating you. The idea with Perusall is that all of you have an algorithm PLUS two human beings evaluating you. I've been using Perusall for several years now and have yet to find a case where the TA and I disagree with the algorithm (but we spot check it just in case).
- If you are interested in learning more about how the platform algorithm works, check this out: <https://perusall.com/downloads/scoring-details.pdf>
- **You should not worry about getting a perfect 10 score on every assignment**, you are aiming for something in the 8-10 range. It is relatively difficult to get a perfect score every time but perfection is not required in order to do well on this.
- Comments/replies are evaluated on a 0-3 scale and you receive additional credit for things like reading time, comments that are spread throughout the text, and engaging with your peers. All of these components are factored in to produce an overall score between 0 and 10 points per assignment.
- Remember that the purpose of Perusall is to give us a forum for discussion and asking questions. Don't get too stuck on the grades unless you're consistently struggling with it (reach out to the instructor if you are consistently scoring a 5 or below). The point is for us to connect with and help one another.
- Some students prefer to "get in early" on an assignment and comment first while others prefer to wait a bit and spend more time responding to comments from peers or the instructor. It doesn't matter what kind of student you are and you can do well following either strategy or a mix of both. Assignments are released at the same time every week so plan your Perusall time according to your preference.
- Perusall offers me a chance to answer questions outside of class as well as have a sense of what is interesting or confusing to you. If you have a question, feel free to @ the instructor in Perusall (either within the text as a highlighted comment or in the general discussion section). I will receive a notification and respond as soon as I am able.
- Perusall offers a variety of settings to increase accessibility. Links are provided [here](#) and please speak to the instructor as soon as possible if you have additional needs.

- Your Perusall comments/annotations/questions **MUST BE YOUR OWN REFLECTIONS**. If you find a useful outside source, include the link in your comment and refer the rest of the class to it. If you use an outside source to produce an annotation, you must include a link and cite it. Perusall annotations are also covered by the course student conduct policy.
- Finally, while you should aim to write clearly using full sentences in your annotations, you are not being graded on your ability to use big words and jargon. A simply put annotation that is insightful will often be graded more highly than a confusing one using big words and jargon.

Tips for Improving Your Engagement Score:

The first Perusall assignment in Module 1 is **for practice**. It will not count towards your final grade and I leave the grading “open” so that you can watch your score change as you annotate (I will not do this on future assignments).

If you’re looking to improve your engagement score following the first practice round, try the following:

- Do more than the minimum number of annotations (the required number will depend on the length of the reading but is always listed in the assignment description) and remember that doing the minimum is not the same as A+ work (this is why a C stands for average but is still passing). You must do the minimum to receive a score but only doing the minimum is unlikely to achieve a high score.
- Perusall will grade your “best” annotations to come up with your summary score so if you are looking to improve, more high-quality questions, responses, and comments will help. If the assignment requires 7 annotations and you complete only 7, Perusall will grade those 7. If you do 15 annotations, however, Perusall will use your highest scoring 7 annotations among all 15 when calculating your grade.
- Comments, questions, and responses are treated the same in Perusall. The main purpose of Perusall is to generate discussion and to allow students to teach one another so replies are great! A reply or response should include analysis, however, just like a first comment. For example, a reply that says “that’s a great point” is kind but not necessarily analytical engagement. If you turn that reply into “That’s a great point and it makes me think of (another example),” you’ve demonstrated engagement (and kindness!). You’ll also receive a higher score for the second version of a comment.
- Say **WHY** you are highlighting something. A comment that highlights an important definition is fine (“important!”) – but a comment that also offers examples of that concept or asks questions about it is better (“this definition is important because it tells us how to evaluate a survey study”).
- Simply saying *something* the required number of times will not yield a high score unless what you say demonstrates engagement with the material. Think of your comments as responding to the text, rather than simply marking up important points (though you can do a bit of that too for your own note-taking, Perusall also has a notes section that does not count towards your grade but allows you to complete notes for yourself).
- Try responding to peer or instructor questions.

- Comment throughout the article. Comments that are clustered on the first page will score lower than comments that are spread throughout the document (and as an FYI, Perusall can tell whether or not you read the whole thing).
- Check your Perusall grades in the Perusall gradebook. If you click on your score, you'll see how you were graded in detail (number of comments, average quality score, and additional information).
- Play around with the first Perusall assignment. The gradebook for the first practice assignment (and only this assignment) is open so you can check your score as you comment to learn how it works.