

POSC 225: Prisons and Punishment

Spring 2024

Lecture: Mondays and Wednesdays 11:10am-12:20pm and Fridays 12-1pm
Classroom: Hasenstab 105
Professor: Prof. Adam J. Lê (he/him/his)
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Office: 310 Hasenstab Hall
Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 12:30-2pm or by appointment

Course Overview and Requirements

The United States prides itself on freedom, yet millions of “legal” and “undocumented” citizens live without it. Across federal and state prisons, county jails, private prisons, and undocumented detention centers, the mark of incarceration has a significant impact on American politics. We center this paradox throughout the course as we look at different aspects of incarceration and punishment. We analyze the United States criminal justice system through policy, public opinion, sociology, and political theory. By using an interdisciplinary approach centered in political science, together we will discover whether the relationship between freedom and domination is truly a paradox.

An additional note to consider is that our discussions will often weave in content that may be triggering for folks due to the nature and logic of carceral institutions. I will try my best to include specific content warnings for readings, and I will post lectures before class with content warnings.

Lectures will take place on Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:10am-12:20pm and Fridays from 12-1pm. Lecture slides for each individual class will be posted online at the end of the week.

Readings and Moodle

All course materials will be on the class’s Moodle page. This includes the course schedule, PDFs of readings, assignments, and announcements. Each class period will have its own module that contains all relevant material for the class.

Class Structure and Expectations

Assessment

Grading for this class will be based on three (but really 6) items:

1. **Participation (15%)** The participation portion of your grade reflects your active engagement in collective discussions. Most often, these discussions will occur during our scheduled class meetings. For those who are not comfortable speaking in public,

I invite you to challenge yourself to express your ideas verbally. For those who are comfortable speaking in class, you should challenge yourself to formulate your thoughts as cogently as you can, grounding yourself in the readings as much as possible. I also know that speaking up in class can be difficult. I will also take into consideration your expression of ideas in office hours and through email correspondence.

You will notice that there's a lot of readings for the class and relatively few assignments in comparison. I am doing this to emphasize what we talk about and learn *during* class, rather than assessing your memory or knowledge on multiple topics or laws. I care about learning and growth more than about evaluating knowledge. As such, consistent participation is heavily recommended.

2. **Memo (15%)** Students will choose two weeks from the course and will write a 3-4 page memo summarizing and connecting the readings both within and across the weeks. You will turn this assignment in at the end of the term. You can rewrite your memo for a max of one grade higher, but it needs to be on a different set of weeks. Since the due date is floating and this is one of three chances to read your written work before the final paper, you don't want to save this assignment for the last week.

3. **Final Assignment (70%)**: Students will write a 6-10 page paper at the end of the term that provides an argument based on the topic they choose. Students are expected to conduct outside research (i.e. consulting literature and forming it into an argument, not original qual/quant analysis). The final paper will consist of:
 - (a) A one-page paper proposal where you describe your argument and provide a detailed outline of how your argument will progress over the paper (10%),
 - (b) A first draft of the paper with at least 1/3 of the paper written and the rest of the paper outlined (20%),
 - (c) A "creative" presentation of your project that takes on a medium besides a written essay (15%),
 - (d) A final draft of the 6-10 page paper that utilizes the feedback given (25%).

Assignment	Total
Participation	15%
Memo	15%
Final Assignment	70%
Total	100%

Table 1: Summary of assignments and points, final assignment not broken down.

Assignment	Total
Participation	15%
Memo	15%
Paper Proposal	10%
First Draft	20%
Creative Presentation	15%
Final Draft	25%
Total	100%

Table 2: Summary of assignments and points, final assignment broken down.

Letter	Percent	Letter	Percent
A	93-100	C	73-76.9
A-	90-92.9	C-	70-72.9
B+	87-89.9	D+	66-69.9
B	83-86.9	D	60-65.9
B-	80-82.9	F	0-59.9
C+	77-79.9		

Table 3: Grade scale.

Communication

I will send out all course announcements and communications over Moodle announcements.

The best way to reach me with questions is email. Please include the course title (POSC 225) in the subject of your email, along with some indication about the email’s contents (e.g., “POSC 225: Question about Lecture”).

I will respond to all emails within 48 hours. If you do not hear back within that time, feel free to send another email — although it is rare, sometimes emails do get lost. Please only message me through email.

I will be holding regular, weekly office hours. You are encouraged to come to office hours to talk to me about the material, your project, or anything else. Often times, it is easier for me to help you in office hours than it is over email.

Office Hours

Most students only attend office hours immediately before papers or exams are due or after grades are returned. Due to the fixed supply and increased demand, at such times instructor availability may be limited. I am available to answer questions about exams or papers up until the due dates, when availability permits, but I strongly urge you to use office hours throughout the rest of the semester to discuss the course and your progress. Because this is a survey of a large area of study, we cover a broad range of material in a short time. As a result, there may be topics that you wish were covered in more detail. It is important that

this course enriches your educational experience and fosters your curiosity and interest in the field. I hope that you will visit during office hours, or at other times by appointment, whenever you think discussion on an individual basis would be helpful. Take responsibility for your learning and ask for individual attention when you need it.

Additionally, I keep a dog in my office. If you do not want to be near a dog (e.g. for personal reasons, allergies, etc. - any reason is valid), let me know and I will prepare accordingly for our office hour meeting.

Additional Grading Policies, Extensions and Late Work

Students can request an extension for any assignment by filling out an [extension request form](#). All extensions are granted unless the student is told otherwise. (I do not update the deadlines on Moodle in real time.) Students must name a new due date and are then held to that due date. Each assignment may receive only one extension and the extension may not be for more than 5 days without instructor approval. This is to ensure students don't fall behind. All assignments will close and lock seven days after they are assigned. I can and will reopen them on a case-by-case basis, but only after students have communicated with me and we have made a plan for you to not fall behind.

Paper chunks turned in late (whether according to the original due date or an extended due date) will lose one step in grade for each calendar day they are turned in after the due date (whether original or extended). This means that if an assignment is due on Monday and receives an A, the student will receive an A- if they turn it in on Tuesday, a B+ on Wednesday, and so forth. In the case of extenuating and unexpected circumstances – extended personal or family illness, death in the family, etc. – students should communicate with me as soon as they are able so that we can discuss further extensions. Please note that I do not require details or evidence of these circumstances and you are not required to describe them to me.

Students are encouraged to plan ahead of time to assure their assignments are done on time, because late assignments can easily pile up.

Grade Disputes

Any student wishing to dispute a grade should submit a one-page memo, typed or handwritten, explaining, clearly and concisely, why points were taken off, why the student believes the points should not have been deducted, and how many additional points the student believes they should receive. All regrades can result in one of three outcomes: a grade decrease, the grade staying the same, or a grade increase.

Grade Changes

No grades will be changed after final grades are submitted to the registrar.

Anxiety, Panic, and Withdrawing/Disappearing

Every semester a handful of students get behind on their work for some reason, panic, conclude they will fail and/or cannot get a good grade, and either withdraw or disappear entirely without withdrawing. It is almost always true that a student's grade can be salvaged if they come talk to me. If at any point in the semester you end up feeling like this, please email me or come talk to me in office hours and we can assess how you are doing and try to come up with a plan to make the rest of your semester successful and manageable. You do not have to tell me why you fell behind and you don't need to defend yourself. I am here to help you, not to judge you. I want all of you to succeed, but I can't help you if you withdraw and/or disappear without talking to me.

(That is not to say you should not withdraw. But if you think you need to withdraw, please talk to me first to see if that's really true. I won't try to convince you either way, but I can help you make a more accurate assessment of how you're doing in the class. You definitely, definitely should not disappear without withdrawing if it can possibly be helped. That is never a good idea.)

Accommodations (Disability and Otherwise)

Carleton College is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Office of Accessibility Resources (Henry House, 107 Union Street) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. If you have or think you may have a disability (e.g., mental health, neurodivergence, chronic health, traumatic brain injury and concussions, vision, hearing, mobility, or speech impairments), please contact OAR@carleton.edu to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

Some accommodations that *I've* used in the past that have worked well for *me* have been extended deadlines, more time to write on in-class assignments (especially on hand-written stuff), access to slides, and sitting closer to the professor. I should hopefully have all these covered as blanket accommodations, but these could be helpful for other classes. They're not unreasonable at all.

I also understand that many diagnoses are difficult to obtain, especially for historically marginalized groups across the axes of race, class, gender, class, and sexuality. For many students, a diagnosis is a scary process. It was for me. If you ever want to talk about mental health or neurodivergence, what accommodations are reasonable to ask for (within this class and beyond), and how to navigate college, please let me know - I am happy to talk with you.

A few blanket accommodations within this class:

- All slides should be readable by screen reader, meaning that all images should have an alternative text that can be read. If this doesn't work or you think a slide is missing the alternative texts, it is probably an oversight on my part, and I will appreciate it if you can please let me know.

- I offer automatic extensions on deadlines. See [Late Work and Extensions](#).

Additionally, if there is anything I can do or provide to you to make the class more accessible, please ask.

Technology in the Classroom and Taking Notes

You are responsible for taking notes in class by computer or by pen and paper. Additionally, I understand that some students may not be able to afford a computer and instead use their phone. There are options, and we can talk about different resources for you to obtain a computer if needed. Computers in class are a helpful tool for both students and teachers, but they can also be distracting. As such, I expect you to be responsible in your use of electronic equipment in class by limiting social media use and unrelated internet browsing, which can be extremely distracting to fellow students and to me. Please refrain from using your phones if possible during class. Individuals who abuse the use of their electronic devices will have their participation grade reduced and/or will be asked to move to the last row of the classroom. Please turn your computer/phone's sound off during class.

I ask that nobody record class lectures without an accommodation. I can see how this can be useful as an accommodation, but folks can feel more apprehensive about sharing if their comments are recorded directly. It also makes professors feel a little on edge, especially when a class has a controversial topic such as this one. I know you can still *secretly* do it, but technically you're not supposed to. COVID relaxed these rules a little bit, but please don't audio or video record unless an accommodation is given. Pictures of slides are fine, but I post them online, so there shouldn't be a need.

How To Read For This Class

Types of readings: All reading is mandatory unless indicated otherwise in bold **Further Reading**, **Further Listening**, and/or in **plum**. The idea behind the readings is not that you be able to remember and comprehend every component of the article or chapter (although if you do, great!), especially when they use statistical tools or terminology we have not yet covered. The idea is that you can identify and think through how the concepts and materials we are discussing are used in practical work and how they agree with or contradict other things we've read or other things you're feeling. Please read the assigned articles, think about and jot down some thoughts, and come to class prepared to discuss them in small and large group discussions.

Class Schedule

Unit 1: Intake

Week 1

Monday, March 25

[Ear Hustle, Excuse Me On The Tier](#)

Introductions, Syllabus, and Questions

Wednesday, March 27

Monica Bell, [“What Happens When Low-Income Mothers Call the Police,”](#) (2016).

Friday, March 29

Joe Soss and Vesla Weaver, “Police Are Our Government: Politics, Political Science, and the Policing of Race-Class Subjugated Communities.” *Annual Reviews of Political Science* 20, pp. 565-591 [26]

Week 2

Monday, April 1

[Ear Hustle, The Gray Goose.](#)

[Ear Hustle, The Five Senses](#) TW: Nudity, violence

Tom S. Clark et al, “Are Police Racially Biased in the Decision to Shoot?” (2023). *JOP* 85(3).

Wednesday, April 3

Forrest Stuart and Ava Benezra, “Criminalized Masculinities: How Policing Shapes the Construction of Gender and Sexuality in Poor Black Communities,” (2017). *Social Problems* 65(2), pp. 174-190.

Friday, April 5

Michael Leo Owens and Hannah L. Walker, “The Civic Voluntarism of “Custodial Citizens”: Involuntary Criminal Justice Contact, Associational Life, and Political Participation,” (2018). *Perspectives on Politics*.

Michael Leo Owens, “The Urban World is a World of Police,” (2020). *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and the City* 1, pp. 11-15.

Week 3

Monday, April 8

[Ear Hustle, Cracked Windshield](#) TW: Policing, police violence, SA

Philip Goodman, “‘It’s Just Black, White, or Hispanic’: An Observational Study of Racializing Moves in California’s Segregated Prison Reception Centers” (2008). *Law & Society Review* 42(4), pp. 735-770.

Wednesday, April 10

Michael L. Walker, *Indefinite*, Intro, pp. 1-23 [23] TW: Suicide, solitary confinement, death

Friday, April 12

Possible roundtable/wrap-up (TBD)

Forrest Stuart, *Down, Out, and Under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life in Skid Row*, (2016). Intro, pp. 1-33.

Paper Proposal Due

Unit 2: Incarceration

Week 4

Monday, April 15

[Ear Hustle](#), [Tray](#), [Tumbler](#), [Spork](#) TW: Food, eating disorders

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (1975). Chapter 1, pp. 3-31 [32]

Wednesday, April 17

Andrew Dilts, “To Kill a Thief: Punishment, Proportionality, and Criminal Subjectivity in Locke’s ‘Second Treatise,’” (2012). *Political Theory* 40(1), pp. 58-83.

Friday, April 19

No class

Week 5

Monday, April 22

[Ear Hustle](#), [Future On Ice](#)

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Chapter 1, pp. 20-58 [39]

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Chapter 5.

Wednesday, April 24

Jill McCorkel, *Breaking Women*, Chapter 1, pp. 21-50.

Friday, April 26

Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and its Afterlives*, (2013). Chapter 6, pp. 125-157 [28] TW: Solitary confinement, violence, animal abuse

First Draft Due

Week 6

Monday, April 29

No class, mid-term break

Wednesday, May 1

Ear Hustle, *The SHU* TW: Murder, solitary confinement, sensory deprivation, nudity, sexual encounters

Keramet Reiter, *23/7*, (2016). Intro and Chapter 1, pp. 1-33 [34] TW: Solitary confinement

Friday, May 3

Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and its Afterlives*, (2013). Chapter 1, pp. 3-22 [20] TW: Death, solitary confinement

Week 7

Monday, May 6

Ear Hustle, *That World*

Jill McCorkel, *Breaking Women*, Chapter 2, pp. 50-70.

Wednesday, May 8

Michael Gibson-Light, *Orange-Collar Labor: Work and Inequality in Prison* (2023). 3-4, pp. 26-66.

Friday, May 10

Lee, Porter, and Comfort, "Consequences of Family Member Incarceration: Impacts on Civic Participation and Perceptions of the Legitimacy and Fairness of Government," (2014). *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 651(1).

Unit 4: On the Outside, Reform, and Revolution

Week 8

Monday, May 13

[Ear Hustle, August 21, 1971](#) TW: Death, suicide, carceral violence, nudity
Attica demands

Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003). Chapter 1, pp. 9-21 [12]

Foucault, “The Masked Assassination”

Wednesday, May 15

Angela Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, Chapter 4: “On Palestine, G4S, and the Prison-Industrial Complex” (2016). pp. 51-61.

Friday, May 17

Keramet Reiter, *23/7*, Chapter 8, pp. 194-205.

Week 9

Monday, May 20

[Ear Hustle, Transitional](#)

Garrick Percival, *Smart on Crime: The Struggle to Build a Better American Penal System*, (2016). Chapter 1, pp. 3-29 [26]

Wednesday, May 22

Amy E. Lerman and Vesla M. Weaver, *Arresting Citizenship: The Democratic Consequences of American Crime Control*, (2014). Chapter 9, pp. 231-260 [29]

Friday, May 24

Jonathan Simon, *Mass Incarceration on Trial*, Chapter 6, pp. 133-154.

[Ear Hustle, Snack Money](#) TW: death

Week 10

Monday, May 27

[Ear Hustle, What’s Dangerous About Trees](#) TW: sex

[Ear Hustle, Tell Christy I Love Her](#) TW: Violence, death, suicide, police violence, drug use. **This story is pretty intense, special caution.**

Josh Page, *The Toughest Beat*, (2012). Chapter 8, pp. 194-220.

Wednesday, May 29

Victor Rios, *Punished*, (2012). Conclusion, pp. 157-169.

Friday, May 31

NO CLASS

Final Paper Due

Other Policies

Mental Health and Stress Management

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. Carleton College services are available to assist you. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Student Health and Counseling: <https://www.carleton.edu/student-health/>.

If you feel like you are struggling in class because of mental health reasons, please get in touch with me: Trust me, I've been there. You do not need to provide any details or explain yourself, but I am typically able to work with students if these issues become problems.

This class is also very heavy. I want to stress more than usual to take care of yourself and put yourself first. If the discussion becomes too heavy at any point, you are totally fine to leave class or leave to take a break. Please let me know if there's any way I can help, whether it's navigating resources, talking through how you feel, or anything else. I'm here for you.

Assistive Technology Resources for Students

The Assistive Technologies program brings together academic and technological resources to complement student classroom and computing needs, particularly in support of students with physical or learning disabilities. Accessibility features include text-to-speech (Kurzweil), speech-to-text (Dragon) software, and audio recording Smartpens. If you would like to know more, contact aztechs@carleton.edu or visit <https://go.carleton.edu/aztech>.

Writing Support

The Writing Center a space with peer writing consultants who can work with you during any stage of the writing process (brainstorming to final proofreading). Hours and more information can be found on the writing center website: <https://www.carleton.edu/writing-center/>

Grading and Transcripts

For information about translation from letter grade to points on transcript, please refer to: https://apps.carleton.edu/handbook/academics/?policy_id=21464&a=student.

Scholastic Dishonesty

You are expected to do your own academic work and cite sources as necessary. Failing to do so is scholastic dishonesty. Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or

examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. For additional information, please see: <https://www.carleton.edu/writing/plagiarism/>.

Increasingly, students are turning to AI and algorithmic software that write their papers for them. This is considered academic dishonesty and will be reported to the university. From personal experience, these papers are really easy to detect, and I hope that if you are struggling you reach out to me instead of trying to plagiarize papers to meet deadlines. I am flexible, and we can find a solution that incorporates your original work.

Appropriate Student Use of Class Notes and Course Materials

You may not distribute course notes, course videos, or other course materials *outside of the course* without the explicit written approval of the professor.

Sexual Harassment

“Sexual harassment” means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work or academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or academic environment in any College activity or program. Such behavior is not acceptable in the College setting. For additional information, please consult Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response:

<https://www.carleton.edu/sexual-misconduct/>.

Equity, Diversity, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action

Equal opportunity for all is an essential part of Carleton’s recognition that diversity expands the Carleton community’s intellectual horizons and enriches the teaching, working, living and learning environment. Carleton College is committed to the principle that its educational facilities, activities and employment opportunities shall be offered without regard to race, color, creed, ethnicity, religion, gender, national origin, marital status, veteran status, actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, status with regard to public assistance, disability or age. Carleton College prohibits discrimination against or harassment of any student, applicant, visitor or employee because of race, color, creed, ethnicity, religion, gender, national origin, marital status, veteran status, actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, status with regard to public assistance, disability or age. For more information, visit

https://apps.carleton.edu/handbook/governance/?policy_id=955843.

Title IX

Carleton is committed to fostering an environment free of sexual misconduct. Please be aware all Carleton faculty and staff members, with the exception of Chaplains and SHAC staff, are “responsible employees.” Responsible employees are required to share any information they have regarding incidents of sexual misconduct with the Title IX Coordinator. Carleton’s goal is to ensure campus community members are aware of all the options available and have access to the resources they need. If you have questions, please contact Laura Riehle-Merrill, Carleton’s Title IX Coordinator, or visit the Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response website:<https://www.carleton.edu/sexual-misconduct/>.