

SYLLABUS
TRANSFORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES: CRIMINAL JUSTICE INSIDE-OUT
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA LEVIN COLLEGE OF LAW
FALL 2025 – LAW 6930 (19471) – 3 CREDITS

INSTRUCTOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION:

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Office Hours: Thursdays 2-4 p.m.

CLASSROOM AND CLASS TIME:

Tuesdays from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. The class meets weekly for three hours at Lancaster Correctional Institution in Trenton. Law students should account for travel time and processing in and out of the facility. Transportation to and from the facility will be by van, departing from the law school at **4 p.m.**

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

This course brings together students from UF Law and students incarcerated at Lancaster Correctional Institution to collaboratively examine the criminal justice system. As part of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, the course challenges students to bridge theoretical frameworks with lived experiences, deepening their understanding of legal systems through critical inquiry and human connection. Participants will explore the causes and impacts of crime, the development, rationale, and critique of current criminal justice policies, along with community-based and restorative alternatives to incarceration. The course encourages students to critically evaluate entrenched legal and societal structures and consider alternative paths through dialogue, reflection, and rigorous analysis. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Evaluate the theoretical foundations and practical functioning of the criminal justice system;
- Integrate doctrinal legal knowledge with lived experiences to interrogate the assumptions, policies, and practices underpinning criminal law and corrections;
- Cultivate the skills necessary for respectful and rigorous dialogue across significant social, economic, and experiential divides;
- Develop the ability to conceptualize and promote innovative approaches to criminal justice, including restorative and community-based alternatives.
- Enhance written and oral advocacy skills through reflective, analytical, and solution-oriented assignments and group projects;
- Foster lasting skills in leadership, empathy, and civic involvement to create a more just society.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By actively participating in readings, discussions, and collaborative projects, students will develop a range of professional skills essential for studying and practicing law. The learning outcomes outlined below emphasize critical thinking, integration of interdisciplinary knowledge, advanced legal writing and oral advocacy, leadership across differences, and the ability to contribute thoughtfully to systemic change. By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Examine and evaluate current criminal justice doctrines and practices by applying legal theory and lived experiences;
- Synthesize interdisciplinary readings, case law, and experiential learning into sophisticated, solution-oriented written work;

- Demonstrate advanced skills in respectful dialogue and collaborative problem-solving across various backgrounds and viewpoints;
- Design and present policy or legal reform proposals grounded in legal analysis and informed by restorative or transformative justice principles;
- Exercise leadership in group settings by facilitating inclusive discussions and working together to create final projects;
- Reflect on the lawyer's role as both a participant in and an agent for reform within the criminal justice system.

REQUIRED READING MATERIALS:

Please make sure to register for the Canvas course and bring all required materials with you to the prison. Also, please note that no electronic devices, including laptops, phones, or watches with cellular capabilities, are permitted. It's your responsibility to regularly check your Canvas page and the email linked to it for any announcements or updates.

- Larry Miller, *Jump: My Secret Journey from the Streets to the Boardroom* (2022)
- James Forman, Jr. *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (2018)
- David Brooks, *How to Know a Person* (2023)
- Premal Dharia and James Forman, Jr. *Dismantling Mass Incarceration: A Handbook for Change* (2024)
 - Patrick Sharkey and Rogé Karma *How Cities Can Tackle Violent Crime Without Relying on Police* (2020)
 - Taylor Pendergrass and Somil Trivedi *Beyond Reform: Four Virtues of a Transformational Prosecutor* (2021)
 - Rachel Barkow *Can Prosecutors End Mass Incarceration?* (2021)
 - Community Justice Exchange, CourtWatch MA, Families for Justice and Healing, Project NIA, and Survived and Punished NY *Abolitionist Principles and Campaign for Prosecutor Organizing* (2019)
 - Raj Jayadev *1,862 Fewer Years in Prison* (2015)
 - Dashka Slater *North Dakota's Norway Experiment* (2017)
 - Clint Smith *Restoring Pell Grants—and Possibilities—for Prisoners* (2021)
 - Lori Pompa *The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program: Its Origin, Essence, and Global Reach* (2021)
 - Adrian Horton *Reginald Dwayne Betts on His Groundbreaking Prison Library Project* (2021)
 - Piper French *A Future for Susanville* (2022)
 - Judge Frederic Block *United States v. Chevelle Nesbeth* (2016)
 - Lawrence Bartley, Crystal Mourias-Juan, and Rahsaan Sloan *A Conversation About Second Chance Employment* (2023)
 - Zachariah Oquenda *The Case for a Fair Chance Housing Act: From a Brother's Perspective* (2021)
 - Kira Lerner *D.C. Residents Are Voting from Prison This Week* (2022)
 - James M. Binnall *The Time I Was Called for Jury Duty...and What Happened Next* (2023)
 - Ben Fleury-Steiner *Rights Restoration Success Stories* (2023)
- Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy* (2014)
- Lifers Inc. at SCI-Graterford, *Ending the Culture of Street Crime* (2004)
- Maurice Chammah, *The Future of Prisons?* (2024)
- Jeffrey Bellin, *Mass Incarceration Nation: How the United States Became Addicted to Prisons and Jails and How It Can Recover* (2022)

The reading workload for this course is substantial. We won't always have the chance to discuss every reading, but they are always crucial to the day's topic. Additional readings may be distributed throughout the semester, and students are encouraged to share current events and issues in the criminal justice system with the class.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND GRADING EVALUATION:

For this course, you will earn a total of three (3) credits. Outside students will be graded according to standard law school grading policies. Inside, students will complete the same assignments and choose how they want to be graded and receive feedback, whether at the high school, college, or post-secondary level. All students are expected to submit their papers on time. Late papers without a valid excuse will be penalized.

Your final grade will be based on the following: 50% coursework (including reading assignments, class preparation, and written reflections) and 50% class participation, which includes the small group Final Project.

1. COURSEWORK: 50% of final grade

Reflection papers and class readings challenge you to think critically and develop opinions about the functioning of the criminal justice system.

Weekly Reflection Papers

Students will write weekly reflection papers based on the previous week's class discussion and upcoming readings. Papers are due each week in class. Note to outside students: Do not email or upload papers to me before or after class. Please bring them with you.

Papers may be typed or handwritten and should be a maximum of three pages in length. If you type, double-space your papers. If you write by hand, write clearly. Include your name and the date on the first page of your reflection paper, but do not include your name on any other pages. Identify the paper on page 1 by number (e.g., Reflection Paper #1, #2, etc.). I will read your papers and may comment in the margins, but I won't provide detailed feedback.

I will distribute a copy of everyone's papers to the class the following week. Students have reported that reading one another's reaction papers is a highlight of the class and a way to continue the conversation beyond the classroom walls.

Your reflection papers should demonstrate that you have carefully read and thoughtfully considered the issues presented. Each paper should consist of two sections:

- Section One: Observation and reaction to class discussion
- Section Two: Analysis and integration of readings

Section One: Observations and Reactions:

Identify at least one thing you observed during our class session. Observations can include anything that caught your attention, such as specific interactions between people, interesting issues or common themes that arose, or your insights about group dynamics. Explain why each observation was significant to you.

In addition to your observation, write about your emotional reaction—how you felt during and after class. Explain in detail how the experiences and exercises in class affected you emotionally. Instead of simply saying the class made you feel sad or happy, discuss what specifically caused those feelings, how long they lasted, what those feelings are like, whether others noticed them, and when they ended. Exploring

your feelings in this way requires courage and strength. Writing can help you examine emotions that you might usually ignore. Be honest about your feelings. Write about them, then let go.

Section Two: Analysis and Integration:

In this section, you shift from reflecting on the last class session to preparing for the next one. You will do this by reflecting on and analyzing the topics raised by the readings. Integrate the week's readings, including at least one relevant passage (with citations) from those texts.

If you're struggling to begin this part of the paper, these prompts might be helpful:

- What themes, points, or issues did you find interesting?
- Which reading did you disagree with, and why?
- Which reading would you want to share with a friend or family member, and why?
- Does the author's argument align with your life experiences? If so, how? Does the author's argument provide insight into recent news events? If so, how?
- Does a specific article or set of articles make you reconsider your beliefs? Does it strengthen them? If so, how?
- How does the reading connect or conflict with readings from earlier weeks?

A few pointers when writing this section:

- Instead of addressing multiple issues, choose one (or maybe two) of these issues or themes to focus on in your writing.
- You might only have room to respond to one of the readings. That's perfectly okay.
- Create your own analysis of the issue or theme you choose. What do YOU think about what you read?
- Use quotations or excerpts from the readings and examples from the reading to support your analysis or to highlight the limitations of your analysis.

2. CLASS PARTICIPATION AND FINAL GROUP PROJECT: 50% of final grade

The classes will include a guided discussion on the specific topic of the week in both the large group and smaller subgroups. This format will make our discussions more productive and engaging. Our course structure offers us unique opportunities and responsibilities. We must follow the rules of the facility and our class, and most importantly, treat each other with respect. Please remember the I-O rule of semi-anonymity and ***use only first names in all written assignments and in class***. Contact outside of class between Inside and Outside students is not allowed under the rules of the Inside-Out International Prison Exchange Program.

Final Group Project:

All students will participate in a group project toward the end of the course. I will provide additional details about the group project later in the semester.

Journaling:

I will give each student a writing journal. Please bring it to class every week. You can use this journal to jot down notes or thoughts during class or when doing the reading. I encourage you to spend a few minutes each day or a few days each week writing in your journal. It's a great place to explore, observe, describe powerful moments, and track difficult problems. *I will not read your journal.*

A Thing of Beauty:

Starting with our first joint meeting, two of us will bring something to class that brings beauty into your life. This can be almost anything—a photo, a book, a poem, a piece of music, a picture, a story, an inspirational quote, a cartoon, a drawing, or anything else. You name it. If it is beautiful to you and you

want to share it, it can be your thing of beauty. I'll go first, along with another student, and students will sign up for one day throughout the semester.

A Word on the Process: Your final grades will reflect your preparation for class, your written work, and your class participation, including your small group Final Project. It's unfortunate that classes have to end with grades. Please keep in mind that grades are an imperfect and heavy-handed way to judge things that are difficult to judge.

Closing Ceremony:

The class will culminate in a closing ceremony. We'll discuss the details of the closing ceremony later in the semester.

CLASS ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION, AND MAKEUP POLICY:

Attendance in class is required by both the ABA and the Law School. The class is three hours long. It is dialogue-based and, therefore, highly interactive. Given the unique nature of this class, it is essential that each student attend and fully participate in every session. If, due to serious circumstances, you are unable to attend one of the sessions, please contact me in advance. Any absence will change the dynamics of the group, as well as disappoint other members of the class. Depending on the circumstances, missed classes may affect your grade in the class.

For outside students, please arrive on time at the designated meeting place for the carpool or facility. Your lateness can cause difficulties at the gate and will delay the class for everyone. Inside students can contact the instructor through the FDC staff liaison. Unexcused absences from class will result in a 5-point deduction from the final grade (on the 100-point scale) for each missed class. Students who fail to meet the attendance requirement will be dropped from the course. The school's attendance policy can be found [here](#).

Active participation is essential in this class. We will discuss challenging and controversial topics, and you might disagree with others. Share your thoughts, even if they are unpopular. For this to be a meaningful learning experience, each of you must take responsibility for the direction and depth of the discussion. Since we'll be meeting in an unfamiliar environment, everyone will need to work on becoming comfortable enough to take the risks involved in fully engaging in discussions. While listening is important, simply sitting back and listening is not acceptable. Everyone must be actively involved for this to succeed.

UF LEVIN COLLEGE OF LAW STANDARD SYLLABUS POLICIES:

Other information about UF Levin College of Law policies, including compliance with the UF Honor Code, Grading, Accommodations, Class Recordings, and Course Evaluations, can be found at [this link](#).

ABA OUT-OF-CLASS HOURS REQUIREMENTS: ABA Standard 310 requires that students devote 120 minutes to out-of-class preparation for every "classroom hour" of in-class instruction. Each weekly class is approximately three hours, requiring at least six hours of preparation outside of class, including reading the assigned materials, writing reflection papers, and developing your final project.

COURSE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

This unique course comes with heightened responsibilities. We will review these in more detail during our first class session.

- This course is not an opportunity for human subject research. We are building a community of inside and outside students.

- This course is not about providing legal representation, charity, or volunteering. Those are essential endeavors, but this course is different. This class is about creating a learning community.
- All students must abide by all rules of the Florida Department of Corrections.
- All Inside-Out classes operate on a first-name basis. Students may not contact one another outside of class, including after the class has ended. Students may not share emails, cell phone numbers, social media contacts, etc. Please don't hesitate to ask me if you have questions about this rule or how to interpret it.

DRESS CODE:

Outside students will wear black matching “Inside-Out” t-shirts and must comply with additional dress code rules specified by the Florida Department of Corrections.

COMMUNICATION COURTESY AND CIVILITY:

Please follow the rules of common courtesy in all class discussions. I reserve the right to lower your final grade if you engage in behavior that disrupts the learning environment for your classmates.

COURSE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

This syllabus is offered as a guide to the direction of the course. Our pace will depend in part on the level of interest and the level of difficulty of each section and is subject to change.

Week 1: Introductory Session for Inside Students	Lancaster CI	Tues Aug 19th
Week 2: Introductory Session for Outside Students	UF Law	Tues Aug 26th
Week 3: First Combined Meeting - Introductions	Lancaster CI Reading: <i>How to Know a Person</i> by David Brooks (entire excerpt in course materials) and <i>Jump</i> by Larry Miller (pages 1-49)	Tues Sept 2nd
Week 4: Crime and Punishment in the US. Why do People Commit Crime? What are Prisons for?	Lancaster CI Writing Assignment: Turn in Reflection Paper #1 at start of class Reading: <i>Jump</i> by Larry Miller (pages 51-173)	Tues Sept 9th
Week 5: Why Does Crime Happen?	Lancaster CI Writing Assignment: Turn in Reflection Paper #2 at start of class	Tues Sept 16th

	Reading: <i>Jump</i> by Larry Miller (pages 175-287) and <i>Ending the Culture of Street Crime</i> by Lifers Inc. at SCI-Graterford	
Week 6: An Analysis of the Criminal Justice System	<p>Lancaster CI—<i>Tour for Outside Students before class</i></p> <p>Writing Assignment: Turn in Reflection Paper #3 at start of class</p> <p>Reading: <i>Locking Up Our Own</i> by James Forman Jr. (pages 3-150, note there are lots of skipped pages in the excerpted course materials)</p>	Tues Sept 23rd
Week 7: Myths and Realities of Prison Life	<p>Lancaster CI</p> <p>Writing Assignment: Turn in Reflection Paper #4 at start of class</p> <p>Reading: <i>Locking Up Our Own</i> by James Forman Jr. (pages 185-239, note there are lots of skipped pages in the excerpted course materials) and <i>The Future of Prisons?</i> by Maurice Chammah</p>	Tues Sept 30th
Week 8: Punishment and Rehabilitation	<p>Lancaster CI</p> <p>Writing Assignment: Turn in Reflection Paper #5 at start of class</p> <p>Reading: <i>Dismantling Mass Incarceration</i> by P. Dharia, J. Forman Jr. and M. Hawilo (pages 27-213, note there are lots of skipped pages in the excerpted course materials)</p>	Tues Oct 7th
Week 9: Victims and Victimization	<p>Lancaster CI</p> <p>Writing Assignment: Turn in Reflection Paper #6 at start of class</p> <p>Reading: <i>Dismantling Mass Incarceration</i> by P. Dharia, J. Forman Jr. and M. Hawilo</p>	Tues Oct 14th

	(pages 364-446, note there are lots of skipped pages in the excerpted course materials)	
Week 10: Restorative Justice	<p>Lancaster CI</p> <p>Writing Assignment: Turn in Reflection Paper #7 at start of class</p> <p>Reading: <i>Just Mercy</i> by Bryan Stevenson, chapters 1-7 and <i>Mass Incarceration Nation</i> by Jeffrey Bellin</p>	Tues Oct 21st
Weeks 11-12: Group Project	<p>Lancaster CI</p> <p>Writing Assignment: Turn in Reflection Paper #8 at start of class</p> <p>Reading: <i>Just Mercy</i> by Bryan Stevenson, chapter 8-end of book</p>	<p>Tues Oct 28th</p> <p>Tues Nov 4th</p>
NO CLASS	VETERANS DAY	Tues Nov 11th
Week 13: Final Closing Ceremony and Celebration	Lancaster CI	Tues Nov 18th