JUVENILES IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM  
PSYC 6342 – Special Topics in Psychology and the Law  
Spring 2024

COURSE INFORMATION  
CRN: 27460  
Meeting Location: Worrell Hall, Room 205 → MOVED to Vowell Hall 3rd floor conference room  
Meeting Day/Time: Wednesdays, 9:00am – 11:50am

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION  
Professor: Dr. April Thomas  
Email: athomas5@utep.edu *This is my preferred mode of communication  
Office: Jack C. Vowell Hall, Room 205  
Office hours: by appointment (request via email); available via Zoom or in person

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES  
Each year, increasing numbers of children and adolescents around the world encounter the legal system as victims, witnesses, and/or defendants. These youth encounter a system designed with adults in mind. This course is intended to provide graduate students with an overview of how the fields of developmental psychology and law intersect. By the end of this course, you should understand how developmental characteristics, capacities, and limitations affect juveniles’ ability to participate effectively in the legal system; how developmental research and theory can be applied to legal issues; and how legal decisions and policies affect the direction of psychological research concerning children and adolescents. Students will have acquired specific knowledge about the intersection of developmental psychology and the legal system with respect to several topics, including the interrogation of juvenile suspects, developmentally appropriate punishment, how juveniles come to form their attitudes and understanding of the legal system, and the culpability of juvenile offenders. Research relevant to this seminar is interdisciplinary. Thus, this seminar is relevant for students whose research concerns legal psychology/law, developmental psychology, and/or criminology. The course will cover three general areas:

1. Adolescent Development  
   Guiding questions: What is adolescence? What are the major areas of development that occur during adolescence? What can development tell us about why adolescents take risks and commit crimes? Is delinquency normal?

2. Juvenile Delinquency  
   Guiding questions: Why do juveniles commit crimes? What is the age-crime curve? Are juveniles as responsible for their crimes as adults are?

3. The Juvenile Justice System  
   Guiding questions: How are delinquent youth treated in the justice system? What special needs do justice-involved youth have? How does the juvenile justice system differ from the criminal justice system? Is the system effective at reducing delinquency? Does the system treat juveniles in ways that are developmentally appropriate?
Syllabus subject to change

COURSE MATERIALS
There is no textbook requirement for this course. Readings assembled for this seminar include empirical, theoretical, and review articles, book chapters, and legal materials (e.g., amicus briefs, legal cases). The readings were selected to sample from various disciplines (e.g., psychology, law, criminology); article types (e.g., empirical research, review articles); and research strategies (e.g., laboratory analogs, file reviews, field work). Please be sure to read the assigned readings before the associated class date. The readings will be accessible via SharePoint on the following link:

Student Grades and Course Requirements
Grades will be assigned according to the following:

90% and above = A
80 to 89% = B
70 to 79% = C
60 to 69% = D
59% and below = F

1. Attendance and participation (25%)
   All students are expected to come to class prepared, having read the assigned readings ahead of time and ready to engage in active discussion of the course material. This course is largely discussion-based; therefore, students are expected to contribute to the discussion in a thoughtful manner that is respectful of other students’ views. Students must read the assigned material prior to each class and participate in class discussion.

2. Weekly discussions and questions (25%)
   Class meetings will focus on reading, thinking critically about, and integrating the readings to understand key developmental principles and topics in juvenile justice and delinquency. To encourage critical thinking and engagement with the material (not just passive absorption of it), students will be required to write at least 1 question or comment about each of the assigned readings. These questions must be posted to the appropriate SharePoint folder by 9am on the day before class and should be integrative and thoughtful, demonstrating that students have not only read the material but attempted to synthesize the ideas. It is encouraged to tie in prior week’s topics, other related content, or your own area of research focus in the discussion questions/comments.

3. Writing assignment (40%) – Due April 30, 2024
   a. I do not believe in writing assignments that do not meaningfully contribute to your CV or push you forward in your academic/career goals; therefore, I am granting flexibility in the assignment so that it best meets your needs. However, the assignment format and topic must be submitted to me in writing (due by February 28, 2024) for approval. You should indicate which journal or grant you will be submitting to (if appropriate).
   b. The topic must relate to the class in some way; however, you are encouraged to connect the course content to your own research area as much as possible.
   c. Select format from options below:
      i. Literature review for journal submission. Select a topic related to juvenile delinquency or juvenile justice and conduct a thorough literature review. Prepare a written review for submission according to journal guidelines.
      ii. Grant proposal. Identify an appropriate funding mechanism and follow the guidelines established for that mechanism. Propose a project related to juvenile delinquency or juvenile justice.
iii. **Manuscript for journal submission.** Using a dataset (your own, your advisors, mine, a public dataset), you will develop and test a research question and hypothesis relevant to juvenile delinquency or juvenile justice. Identify a journal and prepare a publication-ready manuscript including standard APA sections (Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review, Method, Results, Discussion, References).

iv. **For the above options:** Aim for 20-30 pages double-spaced (including tables, figures, and references).

v. **FOR UNDERGRADS ONLY:** Write a blog post about an issue relevant to the course content. For this blog post, you will need to review the literature on your selected topic (the review should be in depth – you must include 10 or more citation) and summarize the literature in language suitable for a general audience. The blog post should be 8-10 pages double spaced.

4. **Presentation of Research Project (10%) – Due May 1, 2024**
   a. In the final course meeting, each student will give a 15-minute oral presentation of their project and research summary, using visual aids (e.g., PowerPoint).

**POLICIES**

**Illness Precautions**
Please stay home if you are ill or have symptoms of a communicable illness. If you are feeling unwell, please let me know as soon as possible, so that we can work on appropriate accommodations (I am open to allowing students to attend virtually, via Zoom, if they feel well enough).

**Late Work Policy**
I strongly suggest that you submit your work with plenty of time to spare if you have a technical issue with the course website, network, and/or your computer. Make-up work will be given only in the case of a documented emergency. Note that make-up work may be in a different format than the original work, may require more intensive preparation, and may be graded with penalty points. If you miss an assignment and the reason is not considered excusable, you will receive a zero. It is therefore important to reach out to me—in advance if possible—and explain with proper documentation why you missed a given course requirement. Once a deadline has been established for make-up work, no further extensions or exceptions will be granted.

**Course Drop Policy**
I will not drop you from the course. However, if you feel that you are unable to complete the course successfully, please let me know and then contact the Registrar’s Office to initiate the drop process. If you do not, you are at risk of receiving an “F” for the course.

**Recording of classes**
No student may record any classroom activity that I provide without express written consent from me (unless you have an accommodation that specifically permits this). Further, no student may share any of the class recordings that I provide. Doing so may result in disciplinary action. If you have (or think you may have) a disability such that you need to record or tape classroom activities, please contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services.

**Diversity and Inclusion**
I recognize that within the class we each bring forth our own experiences and perspectives from our lived experiences. I aim to create a learning community in which those diverse thoughts and experiences are valued. I aim to value and respect your unique identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.). If you feel comfortable sharing, please let me know your preferred pronouns.
Syllabus subject to change

and/or if you have a name that differs from the official course record. I realize we are living in tumultuous times and there may be times when your life outside the class affects your performance within the class. I encourage you to be open with me when you are struggling so I can be a resource for you. I want each student to be successful in this class and will do my best to support you.

Content Warning
In this class, we will learn about sensitive topics that may be emotionally challenging for some individuals (for example, rape, domestic violence, hate crimes, mass shootings/violence, racial injustice, etc.). Some of the content may make you feel uncomfortable or challenge your current way of thinking, which can be difficult. If you feel any of our course topics may cause you undue distress, please let me know in advance so I can try to work with you.

Academic Dishonesty
Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on laboratory reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another as one's own. Collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. All suspected violations of academic integrity at The University of Texas at El Paso must be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR) for possible disciplinary action. To learn more, please visit HOOP: Student Conduct and Discipline.

Guidance on Artificial Intelligence
Some AI technologies or automated tools, particularly generative AI such as ChatGPT or DALL-E, can be beneficial during the early brainstorming stages of an activity, and you are welcome to explore them for that purpose for your major course writing assignment (AI may not be used for generating your discussion questions though). However, keep in mind that AI-generated ideas are not your own and may hinder your ability to think critically and creatively about a problem. It is also important to remember that these technologies often “hallucinate” or produce materials and information that are inaccurate or incomplete—even providing false citations for use. That said, you are not allowed to submit any AI-generated work in this course as your own. If you use any information or materials created by AI technology, you are required to cite it like you would any other source. Consider how this will affect your credibility as a writer and scholar before doing so. Any direct use of AI-generated materials submitted as your own work will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR).

Plagiarism Detecting Software
Some of your course work and assessments may be submitted to SafeAssign, a plagiarism detecting software. SafeAssign is used review assignment submissions for originality and will help you learn how to properly attribute sources rather than paraphrase.

Incomplete Grade Policy
Incomplete grades may be requested only in exceptional circumstances after you have completed at least half of the course requirements. Talk to me immediately if you believe an incomplete is warranted. If granted, we will establish a contract of work to be completed with deadlines.

Accommodations
The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students who become pregnant may also request reasonable accommodations, in
*Syllabus subject to change

according to state and federal laws and regulations and University policy. Accommodations that constitute undue hardship are not reasonable. To make a request, please register with the UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS). Contact CASS at 915-747-5148, email them at cass@utep.edu, or apply for accommodations online via the CASS portal.

Course Resources
UTEP provides a variety of student services and support. Please refer to the QR code below for a listing of campus resources.

DISCUSSION GROUND RULES
1. **Respect each other.** To create a climate for open and honest dialogue and to encourage the broadest range of viewpoints, it is important for class participants to treat each other with respect. Name calling, accusations, verbal attacks, sarcasm, and other negative exchanges are counterproductive to successful teaching and learning about topics.

2. **Discuss with the purpose of generating greater understanding.** The purpose of class discussions is to generate greater understanding about different topics. The expression of the broadest range of ideas, including dissenting views, accomplishes this goal. However, in expressing viewpoints, students should try to raise questions and comments in a way that will promote learning, rather than defensiveness and conflict in other students.

3. **Don't personalize the dialogue.** Keep the discussion and comments on the topic, not on the individual. Don’t personalize the dialogue. Rather than personalizing the dialogue, please direct challenging comments or questions to the instructor or the entire class.

4. **Agree to disagree.** Remember that it is OK to disagree with each other. The purpose of discussion is not to reach a consensus, nor to convince each other of different viewpoints. Rather, the purpose of dialogue in the classroom is to reach higher levels of learning by examining different viewpoints and opinions.

5. **Participate and share.** Everyone is expected to share. Keep in mind that the role of the instructor is to make sure that everyone’s voice is heard in class.
COURSE AGENDA & ASSIGNED READINGS

Week 1 – Introduction & A Brief History on the Juvenile Justice System (January 17)

Week 2 – Adolescent Development and Juvenile Delinquency (January 24)

Week 3 – Developmental Patterns of Crime Across the Lifespan (January 31)

Week 4 – Juvenile Legal Culpability (February 7)

**Week 5 - Emerging Adults in the Justice System (February 14)**


**Week 6 - Juvenile Transfer to Criminal Court (February 21)**


**Week 7 - Juvenile Competence & Legal Knowledge (February 28)**


**Syllabus subject to change**

**Week 8 – Juvenile Legal Decisions & Plea Bargaining (March 6)**


**SPRING BREAK (March 11th – March 15th)**

**Week 9 - Juvenile Confessions & Interrogations: Age as a Risk Factor for False Confessions (March 20)**

*This is the week of APLS*


**Week 10 - Consequences of Justice Involvement on Youth – Part 1 (March 27)**


Week 11 – Consequences of Justice Involvement on Youth – Part 2 (April 3)
3. ADD MORE BASED ON STUDENT AREAS OF INTEREST

Week 12 – Student Choice (April 10)

Week 13 – Student Choice (April 17)

Week 14 - Juvenile Justice Reform and The Future of the Juvenile System (April 24)

Week 15 – Student Presentations of Research Projects (May 1)
No readings this week. Come prepared to present in class.

FINALS WEEK – NO MEETINGS, READINGS, OR COURSEWORK

*Note: Final grades are due to the Registrar by May 15.

Options to modify course to student needs/interests:
- Option to skip class the week of APLS if most students will be attending the conference that day
- Cover additional topics of interest to students (see some ideas below)

Callous-Unemotionality and Psychopathy

Juvenile Sentencing

Trauma and Crime

Social Support and Visitation During Justice Involvement

**School to Prison Pipeline**


**Inequality in the Juvenile Justice System (Race, Gender, and Mental Health)**

