

SOC 270 Corrections in America
Course Syllabus: Fall 2014
MW 8:55-10:05 a.m. PPHAC 338

Instructor: Joyce Dougherty, Ph.D.

Office: PPHAC Room 310

Office Hours: MW 8:30-8:50 a.m. and by appointment

**Contact Information: doughertyj@moravian.edu
joycedoughertyphd@gmail.com**

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines issues surrounding the status of correctional systems in America. In 1973 the prison incarceration rate in the United States was 96 out of 100,000. By 2011 that rate grew to exceed 500 out of 100,000 giving the U.S. the highest incarceration rate in the world. Students will explore how this trend toward “mass incarceration” came to be, and what the future holds for corrections in America today. There are two required texts: Stohr, Walsh and Hemmens’ Corrections: A Text/Reader; and Heinlein’s Among Murderers: Life After Prison.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this course, a successful student will be better prepared to participate in and intelligently contribute to the larger public conversation about crime, punishment, and corrections in America today. Assignments are designed to build and/or strengthen all of the following core skills:

- Analysis and Problem Solving Skills
- Interpersonal and Leadership Skills
- Project Management and Organizational Skills
- Research and Information Management Skills
- Self- Management and Work Habits
- Written and Oral Communication

ATTENANCE AND PARTICIPATION: THE CLASSROOM AS COMMUNITY

This course is structured in a format that blends lectures, discussions, and student presentations. As a student in this class, you become a part of an intellectual community actively involved in exploring issues relating to crime, punishment, and corrections. While consensus on every issue may not be possible, the expectation is that the classroom will be a safe, supportive environment in which ideas and differences can be shared in a respectful and positive way. **Attendance and active participation in class discussions will be worth 10 percent of the final grade.**

It is essential that everyone faithfully attend and come to class on time and prepared. More than two (2) unexcused absences (missing one week of class) will impact the attendance and participation portion of your final grade. More than four (4) late arrivals will count as one unexcused absence. For an absence to be considered “excused” (other than the four late arrivals unexcused absence) an email must be received prior to the class with an explanation as to why you cannot attend (i.e., illness, family emergency, etc.) and proper documentation must be received upon your return to

class. Notes from the College's Health Center must be signed by someone from the Health Center staff to be considered valid excuses.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Short Papers and Class Discussions: Students will be expected to write three (3) short papers (two to three pages maximum, double-spaced, 12 point font, not including a bibliographical reference list) and come to class prepared to discuss each paper. The quality of the writing, thoughtfulness of each paper and how effectively you express your opinions will all be taken into consideration. **Each paper will be worth 15 percent of the final grade.** In-class discussions of the papers will constitute "active participation" and will be taken into consideration when assessing the attendance and participation portion of your final grade. While students may incorporate independent research into each paper, the expectation is that specific references from the Stohr, Walsh and Hemmens' text must be included in each paper. Citations should follow the American Psychological Association (APA) format. The expectation is that all students abide by the established norms of academic honesty and the College's specific academic honesty policy when writing these papers.

Each paper will be due on the following dates via email no later than 6 a.m. Students also must bring a hard copy of each paper to class and be prepared to discuss their work on these dates:

- Paper #1 on the justification for punishment: Briefly review the justifications for punishment (Section I in Stohr, Walsh and Hemmens and the introduction in Heinlein) and identify which you think is the most "appropriate" justification for punishment given crime in America today and why (defend your choice): **Due September 15**
- Paper #2 on the application of punishment – sentencing: Briefly review the different types of sentencing (Section IV in Stohr, Walsh and Hemmens) used to apply punishment. Focusing specifically on habitual offender statutes (e.g., "three strikes you're out", "life without parole", etc.) answer the following question: Do you think these kinds of statutes are an effective way to deal with career criminals? Why and why not (i.e., examine both the positives and the negatives, then take a position based on that assessment): **Due October 6**
- Paper #3 on the legal rights of prisoners: Briefly review the legal rights and laws surrounding individuals convicted of sex offenses (Section IX in Stohr, Walsh and Hemmens). Answer the following questions: Do you think the civil commitment of sex offenders is a good idea? Why or why not? And do you think "chemical castration" laws violate any of the legal rights of sex offenders? Explain. **Due November 3**

Major Group Project – Written and Oral: Students will be assigned small groups by the instructor. Once in the group, students will be expected to agree upon who in the group will be assigned to one of three parts of the group's final paper based on an assessment of their core skills. Part one of the paper must explore the issues facing corrections today and identify different reform strategies. Part two of the paper must examine a specific reform strategy the group agrees would have the most positive impact on offenders, their families, and the general public and why. And part three of the paper must explain how the strategy chosen by the group might have impacted the experience of the three formerly incarcerated men in Heinlein's book. Each section of the paper should be 5 to 6 pages maximum (double-spaced, 12 point font), making the final paper no longer than 18 pages (not including the bibliography). Each section must incorporate class reading, lecture material, and independent research, using the APA format for in-text citations and the bibliography. **Each section**

of the paper will be worth 15 percent of the final grade of the person responsible for that section and the final paper, in its entirety (as a group project), will be worth 10 percent of the final grade.

A draft copy of each section will be **due on in class on October 20**. The drafts will be reviewed, but not graded, with particular attention paid to the organization of each section, the quality of writing, scholarship, and articulation and defense of positions taken. Proper citation of all sources will be critical; the expectation being that all group members abide by the established norms of academic honesty and the College's specific academic honesty policy when writing each section of the paper. Each group will be expected to set up an appointment with the instructor to review the draft and any suggested revisions. All group members must attend this appointment. **The revised final version of the group project is due November 24.**

A one page **progress report** from each group (**worth 10 percent of the final grade**) will be due and presented in class on **September 22**. This report must identify who is responsible for each of the three sections of the paper and why that person was determined to be best suited for that assignment based on an assessment of that person's core skills. The report also will need to include a timetable that demonstrates how the group plans to ensure the draft of the paper and the final paper itself will be completed on time.

Each group will be expected **present their work in class** beginning on **December 1**. The presentation will be worth **10 percent of the final grade**. The goal will be to convince the rest of the class that your group has identified the most effective strategy to address the most pressing issues facing corrections in America today. All students will be expected to complete a group self-evaluation, and each group presentation will be evaluated by the class, with those completed evaluations making up part of the "active participation" portion of the final grade.

EXTRA CREDIT:

This course does not require that students take regular tests, the emphasis being on improving core skills. However, for extra credit students may opt to take a final exam (during the regularly scheduled final exam period on **Tuesday, December 9 at 8:30 a.m.**) that focuses on key concepts presented in each class and in each of the readings in the Stohr, Walsh and Hemmens' text. Taking this test will give students the option of dropping their lowest paper grade and will be worth 15 percent of the final grade. All of the papers must be completed for this option to apply. In other words, choosing not to do a paper because you plan on taking this test is not an option! Students must decide on whether they intend to take advantage of this extra credit option by **November 19**.