



CRESTPOINT UNIVERSITY

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PLG-103-2607 Criminal Law Syllabus and Course Guide

The Criminal Law course meets 15 times over the course of the 8-week term in the Crestpoint Interactive classroom. Each session consists of about 60 minutes of online lecture by the course instructor. After the lecture, students may ask questions and make comments on the material being studied.

Classes for this course occur on Mondays and Wednesdays at 9:00 PM Eastern time, in accordance with the lecture schedule on this syllabus. The first class is on Monday, July 6, 2026.

All class sessions are recorded and may be viewed by students at any time.

Unless an extension has been taken pursuant to the Crestpoint Extensions Policy (see the end of this syllabus), all course assessments must be submitted by the course deadline which appears later in this syllabus. The deadline can also be found at the end of the syllabus or by clicking on the Course Name, then Progress Report. Generally, the course deadline is approximately 4 weeks after the last day of the course.

No extensions may be taken or granted unless the student has submitted one or more assignments or exams in advance of the original deadline. In addition, extensions are subject to grade penalties and are limited to no more than 15 days from the date of the original deadline.

Please note that students are strongly encouraged to do their work as the course progresses rather than waiting for the days or weeks before the deadline to do all of their work. It is also critically important that students realize that:

1. A grade of "Incomplete" is the same as an "F" and is a failing grade.
2. A grade of "Incomplete" will result in a reduction in the student's grade point average.
3. Student may have to pay to re-take or replace a course for which a grade of Incomplete is assigned.
4. Two consecutive Incompletes may subject the student to dismissal from the college under Crestpoint's chronic incomplete policy.
5. Students with a GPA of under 2.0 are not eligible to receive federal financial aid and cannot graduate until their GPA is at or above 2.0.

If you are having trouble completing the course, the student is strongly encouraged to contact his or her academic advisor or [Academic Support](#).

Please note also that:

- A student who receives an incomplete on his or her first course may be dismissed from Crestpoint.
- A student who fails to complete at least one weekly interaction during the first 14 days of the course will automatically be withdrawn from the course per Crestpoint policy. The student may re-join the class by prompt notification to Crestpoint and by prompt completion of an interaction shortly thereafter.

Course Instructor:

Dede Sandler (dede@crestpoint.edu)

Course Description:

This course is designed to introduce our students to the basic concepts of criminal law. The course will outline the definitions and elements of the common law crimes against persons, crimes against property, and the various legal defenses available to criminal defendants. In addition, certain topics in criminal procedure will be covered to highlight the constitutional safeguards and procedures involved from arrest through trial.

Course Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Describe the necessary elements for the prosecution of any crime.
- Determine whether a crime has been committed based on a fact pattern, and, if so, which crime has been committed.
- Describe the basic elements of the various common law crimes.
- Research and apply the elements of a crime in various state or federal jurisdictions.
- Research criminal codes and apply the elements of a crime in various state or federal jurisdictions.
- Prepare a memorandum with regard to a question of criminal law in a hypothetical fact pattern.
- Describe and apply the various defenses that are available under the criminal laws of different jurisdictions.
- Apply federal and/or state sentencing guidelines (where applicable) to convictions.

Textbook:

All reading assignments refer to the Crestpoint courseware, Cases and/or statutes that are specifically mentioned in the syllabus are required reading. The texts of these cases and/or statutes may be accessed directly from the courseware. In addition to the assigned courseware and cases, students should familiarize themselves with the various legal documents listed for each lecture. These documents can be

found on the Course Materials, under this course's materials, on the Crestpoint student website. Some, but not all, of these documents will be discussed in class. Reading assignments for each class should be completed prior to the class.

In addition to the courseware's electronic form, you may also view/print out a PDF version of the courseware that includes:

- 1) The courseware**
- 2) All lecture slides**
- 3) Selected sections from the Model Penal Code**
- 4) Selected sections from the United States Sentencing Guidelines**

See the course materials page for the link.

Weekly Interaction Requirement

To ensure that all students are involved, participating, and in compliance within the course, each student should complete one assessment each week. This requirement may also be met by attending a live session during a given week. Students who do not fulfill the requirement within a given week will be sent reminder emails. Students who fail to interact in multiple weeks may be subject to academic and financial aid consequences, in accordance with Crestpoint's Satisfactory Academic Policy and other school policies.

Course Structure

After logging into your Crestpoint student account, locate your enrolled course by scrolling down and clicking on the course name. Your course will expand, and you will find eight modules, each corresponding to one week of the course. Lectures, slides, documents, assignments, discussions, and exams for each week are organized within the respective module.

Assessments

Assessments may be in the form of discussion questions, assignments, and/or exams.

Exams are graded on a scale of 0-100 and must be done in 2-4 hours, depending on the exam. The start exam page indicates the length of time for each exam. Discussions and assignments should be completed in accordance with the assignment instructions. Assignment information can be found at the end of the course syllabus.

Please see the Grading Policy under School Links for specific details regarding the grading of assessments.

Crestpoint Academic Advisor

Each Crestpoint student is assigned an academic advisor upon enrollment. Your academic advisor is a resource that can and should be drawn on if you need academic assistance. This includes advice on studying, help with assignments, general academic questions, etc. You should have received an email from

your academic advisor upon enrollment. If you have not received such an email or do not know who your academic advisor is, please contact Anne Lewis at anne@crestpoint.edu.

Crestpoint Plagiarism Policy

All work done by Crestpoint students is expected to be their own work. In addition, Crestpoint students may not share their completed work, answer keys, or sample answers which they have obtained by any method with any other student. Students may NOT upload any sample answer (whether written by themselves or any other person) to any publicly available website or database.

Students are requested and encouraged to please review the [Academic Integrity and AI Use Policy](#). Students are responsible for complying with its terms.

Course Grades

Grades are issued on a classical A through F scale based on the grades scored on the assessments, per this syllabus.

Lesson Schedule

Module 1

Lecture 1: Monday, July 6

In the first class, we will go through an overview of criminal law and the American justice system. We will introduce and discuss the various reasons for the existence of criminal laws and the various rationales that exist behind punishing criminals. We will also discuss the framework of the criminal justice system, including some of the safeguards that are put into place to try to limit the chances of an innocent person being convicted.

Lecture 2: Wednesday, July 8

This class will begin with a focus on the basic legal definitions of “act” and “intent” that form the basis for all crimes. We will then take an in depth look at the various common law and Model Penal Code subcategories of intent and how they relate to different classes of crime. Finally, we will briefly examine the requirement of concurrence between the criminal act and the requisite intent.

Courseware Reading:

Chapter 1: Basic Elements of a Crime

- A. Actus Reus
- B. Mens Rea – Common Law
- C. Mens Rea – Model Penal Code
- D. Causation

Cases:*Robinson v. California*

This case, grounded in the Eighth Amendment's clause prohibiting "cruel and unusual punishment," held that no person can be punished for a crime unless he or she committed a criminal act. This forms the foundation for the discussion of what constitutes an actus reus for criminal law purposes. When reading this case, think about the purpose of the actus reus rule and when and if inaction can ever lead to criminal liability.

Complete Discussion 1

Module 2**Lecture 3: Monday, July 13**

This class will consist of a Lexis tutorial/ assignment walkthrough. The instructor will use a research assignment from a past or current course to demonstrate the way an assignment should be researched and composed.

The instructor will walk the students through the various Lexis databases and explain to students how to most efficiently use the Lexis system to complete research assignments. Various general aspects of navigating Lexis, including Shepardizing, seeking and finding appropriate search databases, getting a document by citation, etc., may be explored.

The instructor will also discuss how to most effectively plan, outline, organize and draft research assignments. Model answers and/or past student submissions may be used to illustrate what a "4" assignment looks like and how to compose one.

Lecture 4: Wednesday, July 15

This class will focus on the inchoate offenses (offense does not need to be completed) of solicitation, conspiracy and attempt. Specifically, we will focus on the basic elements of each crime and the scope of criminal liability for each crime. We will then examine the various kinds of conspiracy and the different ramifications that each kind of conspiracy has on prosecuting of the defendants. Finally, we will review the various defenses a criminal defendant has at his disposal, specifically focusing on the doctrine of withdrawal.

Courseware Reading:

Chapter 2: Inchoate Crimes

A. Solicitation

B. Conspiracy

C. Attempt

Cases:

United States v. Jackson

How far in a plan to commit a robbery does one have to go to be considered to have gone beyond “mere preparation” to the realm of attempt? In this case, the prestigious Federal Second Circuit Court of Appeals (which covers, among others, New York State) takes up this issue. We will look at this case specifically to discuss the interaction between the punishment for attempt and what constitutes attempt. For example, would it be fair to punish attempt as severely as the completed crime, if you also hold that attempt can be accomplished by simply preparing to commit the crime?

United States v. Bruno

In this case, the same Second Circuit was called upon to illustrate where to draw the line between a series of smaller agreements and one massive conspiracy. How closely related to each other do the components of a conspiracy have to be for the entire enterprise to be considered to comprise one conspiracy? Because the ramifications of the existence of a conspiracy can mean so much in terms of trial and sentencing, this is an important case to read and discuss.

Complete Discussion 2

Module 3

Lecture 5: Monday, July 20

In this class, we will begin our discussion of homicides. We will start with a general background look at the common law definition of homicide and segue into the modern and common law rules regarding the crime of murder. We will discuss the common law “malice aforethought” standard and the differences between first- and second-degree murder. We will also briefly focus on the death penalty and how it’s applied in the United States today. Finally, we will discuss the felony-murder rule, pursuant to which intent to commit a felony that results in death can make the felon (actor) guilty of murder.

Courseware Reading:

Chapter 3: Homicide

- A. Classifications: Common Law and Modern Law
- B. Murder

Cases:

Commonwealth v. Malone

Sometimes, the best way to examine the limits of legal doctrines is to look at extreme circumstances and see how the applicable legal rules apply in those cases. Here, the common law definition of murder is put to the test to determine if it applies to a child who killed his friend during a game of Russian roulette. We will discuss the limits of the “malice aforethought” rule and how it applies to cases like this.

NOTE: THERE WILL BE NO LIVE LECTURE ON WEDNESDAY, JULY 22

Complete Discussion 3

Module 4

Lecture 6: Monday, July 27 at 7:00 PM Eastern time

In this class, we will continue our discussion of homicide. We will also look at the lesser forms of homicide, including manslaughter and negligent homicide. We will look at the mitigating circumstances that reduce murder to voluntary manslaughter, the rules regarding involuntary manslaughter and when such a charge is appropriate.

Courseware Reading:

Chapter 3: Homicide

- C. Voluntary Manslaughter
- D. Involuntary Manslaughter
- E. Legal Definitions of Life and Death

Cases:

Commonwealth v. Redline

The felony-murder rule is a controversial rule to start with. The controversy becomes more complex when one must decide whether to apply it to cases in which one of the co-felons is the victim. This case discusses the extent of the felony-murder rule by analyzing the reasons for the rule and whether those apply to the “gray area” cases. While reading this case, think about whether the reasons for the rule itself are really all that compelling. Also, how far would you extend the rule if you were in charge of deciding how far to carry the felony- murder rule?

Complete Assignment 1

NOTE: THERE WILL BE NO LIVE LECTURE ON WEDNESDAY, JULY 29

Lecture 7: PRE-RECORDED

This class will focus on non-homicide crimes against persons. Specifically, we will focus on the basic elements of each crime as well as each crime’s classification as either general intent or specific intent. We will look at crimes such as assault, kidnapping, and rape and comparable crimes existing under many modern criminal codes.

Courseware Reading:

Chapter 4: Crimes against Persons

- A. Assault and Battery
- B. Mayhem
- C. Rape
- D. False Imprisonment
- E. Kidnapping

Cases:*Tyson v. State*

Aside from the obvious celebrity appeal of this case, boxer Mike Tyson's appeal of his rape conviction, there is also some interesting law analysis to be gleaned from this case. Consent is, of course, a defense against a charge of forcible rape. A requirement of this defense, of course, is that the mistake be reasonable. This case discusses what constitutes a reasonable mistake.

Documents for Review:

- Indictment –State

Complete Discussion 4**The Midterm Exam can be taken at this point**

Module 5**Lecture 8: Monday, August 3**

This class will continue our discussion of non-homicide crimes with a discussion of crimes against the "home." Specifically, we will look at the crimes of burglary and arson. We will focus on the common law definitions of those crimes and discuss how those definitions have changed over the years and how various states treat those crimes today.

Courseware Reading:

Chapter 5: Crimes Against the Home

- A. Burglary
- B. Arson

Cases:*Brown v. State*

This case discusses the level of "malice" required to sustain a conviction for arson. The crime of arson is one of only two crimes that requires "malice" under the common law (the other being murder). Is burning

a building for the purpose of saving on demolition costs considered “malice” to the extent that is required for an arson conviction? Read this case and find out.

Documents for Review:

- Indictment – Burglary– State

Lecture 9: Wednesday, August 5

This class will focus on crimes against property. Specifically, we will explore types of common law crimes that exist under what today would be the broad heading called “theft.”

Courseware Reading:

Chapter 6: Crimes Against Property

- A. Larceny
- B. Embezzlement
- C. False Pretenses

Cases:

People v. Caridis

This case is an oldie (1915), but it deals with an interesting issue. Can a person be convicted of larceny for stealing a winning lottery ticket when the lottery itself was illegal? This case becomes even more important because of the modern trend to assign sentences for theft crimes that are based on the amount of money stolen. Thus, assigning values to objects without inherent value becomes a more important question.

Complete Discussion 5

Module 6

Lecture 10: Monday, August 10

This class will continue our focus on crimes against property. We will look at other “theft” type crimes that involve something other than simply stealing. We will discuss robbery, extortion (including blackmail), and receiving stolen property.

Courseware Reading:

Chapter 6: Crimes Against Property

- D. Robbery
- E. Extortion
- F. Receiving Stolen Property

Cases:*Lear v. State*

Robbery is the stealing of property by force or violence or by the threat of force or violence. This case discusses what constitutes force. We will analyze this case to determine the applicability of robbery to pickpocketing when the victim can't feel the theft happening.

Documents for Review:

- Indictment – Robbery– State

Lecture 11: Wednesday, August 12

After having gone through the various crimes and their elements, we will devote this class to discussing various documents that are important to the criminal investigation and trial process. We will discuss a variety of documents, including criminal complaints, case information statements, extradition orders, search and arrest warrants, etc. For each document, we will discuss its role, how to draft one for a particular case and points to keep in mind when using the document.

Documents for Review:

- Documents for Review:
- Misdemeanor Complaint – State
- Criminal Complaint – State
- Criminal Summons – State
- Miscellaneous Felony Documents – State
- Criminal Case Information Statement
- Suspension of Prosecution– Order of Community Service – State
- Extradition Order – State

Complete Discussion 6

Module 7**Lecture 12: Monday, August 17**

This class will focus on the scope of accomplice liability. Specifically, we will concentrate on the acts and intentions required to convict a third party as an accomplice. We will also review how far an accomplice's guilt extends. Finally, we will focus on the various defenses that a criminal defendant has at his disposal.

Courseware Reading:

Chapter 7: Scope of Criminal Liability

- A. Accomplices: Common Law Classifications
- B. Accomplice Mens Rea and Actus Reus
- C. Scope of Criminal Liability for an Accomplice
- D. Defenses to Accomplice Criminal Liability

Cases:*Hicks v. United States*

In this case, the United States Supreme Court considered the question of just how much “encouragement” one must give to the perpetrator of the crime in order to be considered an accomplice to that crime. Although the guilt or innocence of an accomplice often turns on questions of fact which are decided by juries, the Supreme Court here ruled on what instructions and guidance a jury must be given in making this determination.

Lecture 13: Wednesday, August 19

In this class, we will begin our examination of the numerous defenses that can be mounted during a criminal trial. We will look at the defense of infancy (where a minor commits a crime) and discuss the juvenile criminal justice system. We will also pay special attention to the insanity defense and the different tests jurisdictions use to determine insanity. We will also focus on the related defenses of diminished capacity and intoxication.

Courseware Reading:

Chapter 8: Defenses

- A. Infancy
- B. Insanity
- C. Diminished Capacity
- D. Intoxication

Cases:*State v. Pike*

This case comes from the New Hampshire Supreme Court. The state of New Hampshire is the only state in the Union to have instituted the most lenient insanity test. Still, this is a great case to read because it provides an excellent summary of the common law rules regarding insanity (as they existed in the 19th century and still for the most part exist today). Also, the court weaves in an interesting discussion of the relationship between the insanity defense and the malice aforethought and premeditation elements of common law murder.

Module 8

Lecture 14: Monday, August 24

Tonight, we will continue our discussion of defenses. We will turn to the defense of mistake and analyze to what extent the old maxim “ignorance of the law is no excuse” is true. Then we will turn to some other defenses that existed under the common law and still exist today, including necessity, duress, entrapment, and consent.

Courseware Reading:

Chapter 8: Defenses

- E. Mistake of Fact
- F. Mistake of Law
- G. Necessity and Duress
- H. Entrapment
- I. Consent

Complete Assignment 2

Lecture 15: Wednesday, August 26

The final class will continue our discussion of defenses. We will spend most of the class on the defense of self-defense and related defenses. We will discuss when one may use deadly force in self-defense and when one must retreat before using deadly force. We will finish up with some other defenses, including protection of property and use of force to effectuate and arrest.

Courseware Reading:

Chapter 8: Defenses

- J. Self Defense
- K. Defense of Others
- L. Protection of Property
- M. Effectuating Arrests and Preventing Crime

The Final Exam can be taken at this point

All course assessments are due no later than Sunday, October 5, 2026, at 11:59 PM EASTERN TIME; that’s EASTERN time. That means 8:59 PM Pacific time, 9:59 PM Mountain time, 10:59 PM Central time, etc.

CRESTPOINT EXTENSIONS POLICY

- 1) Extensions that conform to the rules below may be requested from the course materials page on the student website.
- 2) The maximum possible extension allowed is 15 days, save for truly exceptional circumstances.
- 3) Students must complete one or more legitimate assignments or exams to be eligible for any extension at all.
- 4) Requested extensions are granted automatically. It is not necessary to give any reason for the request. However, for each day of extension you request, you may be penalized 0.6% of your course grade, per day of extension. This is necessary to compensate for the advantage that students who take more time to do their work enjoy over those who complete their work on time. This also means that a short extension (e.g., a day or two) is unlikely to affect your grade, but a long extension (e.g., two weeks) is guaranteed to affect your grade.
- 5) The penalty referenced in Paragraph 4 may be waived by the Director of Education in extreme cases only. Extreme cases include circumstances beyond the control of the student that caused the student to be unable to complete work for *a significant period of time*. Circumstances such as being busy at work or at home, vacations, family occasions or power or internet outages lasting a few days, are foreseeable life circumstances. Extensions may be taken for these reasons (or, for that matter, for any reason at all), but the grade penalty discussed above applies. However, please note that the course deadline cannot be extended more than 15 days for any reason at all except in the most extreme cases.

Course Assignments

Assignment #1

A homicide committed while acting in a reckless manner is manslaughter, not murder. An example of this is a death caused while driving while intoxicated. In most states, this is involuntary, or reckless, manslaughter. The question is, what if a killing is done intentionally while intoxicated? Is it still murder or only manslaughter?

For example: Abbott, a resident of Norfolk, Virginia, is angry at his boss, Costello, because he has just been fired. Abbott goes to a bar and drowns his sorrows in 4 pints of beer. Abbott leaves the bar with a new degree of "liquid courage." He goes into a hardware store and purchases a knife, and staggers straight to Costello's house. He bursts into Costello's house, hunts down Costello and kills him with the knife. Abbott is arrested and tried for first degree murder. The prosecution alleges that the murder was premeditated and announces that it will seek the death penalty for Abbott.

Abbott claims that although the murder was planned and voluntary, he was so drunk that he could not have properly formed the intent to kill and should therefore not be subjected to a murder charge.

Using Virginia case law, can you determine whether Abbott's argument is valid?

(Warning: A lot of the case law that you find in this area may be rather old. Don't worry about that. There's nothing wrong with using old case law; though all else being equal, newer is better.)

An IRAC-based essay is appropriate for this assignment.

Assignment #2

There is NO NEED to use case law for this assignment. This is not a research assignment. In this assignment, I am testing your ability to spot issues and apply the criminal laws, as you learned them in this course, to a fact pattern.

For each question:

- 1- state what the elements of the law are, based on the courseware and/or lectures;**
- 2- apply the law to the facts and;**
- 3- draw a conclusion.**

Again, there is NO NEED to cite cases and/or statutes for this assignment! There is also no need to "IRAC" each issue. Just answer this as you would a series of exam questions.

Please also note that this includes materials from classes 13 and 14. So you may want to wait until after those classes to complete this assignment.

It was a dark and stormy night and Snow White and three of the seven dwarfs, Happy, Doc and Bashful, were hatching a plan to get back at the Evil Queen for the whole poisoned apple episode. Snow White wants the whole gang to accost the Evil Queen as she is getting home from work and to grab all of her money and then run away.

They all go to the Evil Queen's house and camp out in her driveway. A while later, the Evil Queen, tired from a long day of doing all sorts of evil things, is driving home. She decides to stop off at a local bar and to let off some steam. She drinks a few shots of vodka and relaxes a bit. The Evil Queen gets drunk. She sees car keys on the counter that she assumes to be her own and takes them. She goes to the parking lot and, because of her state or drunkenness, she mistakenly enters the wrong car. Amazingly, the car she enters happens to be the car for which the keys work. The Evil Queen drives off.

On the way home, the Evil Queen, who has a blood alcohol content that is over the legal limit, loses control of the car and hits a bystander. Meanwhile, Snow White and the dwarfs are getting to be restless. Bashful, who does not like confrontation in any case, decides to go home. By the time the Evil Queen gets home, only Snow White, Happy and Doc are there.

With Doc and Happy hiding in the bushes, Snow White lunges at the Evil Queen and announces, "Give me all your money or I'll kill you." The Evil Queen, in a combative mood because of the alcohol in her, takes

out a poisoned dagger and says, "I may not have gotten you with the apple, but this will kill you." Fearing for Snow White's Life, Happy pulls out his gun and shoots at the Evil Queen, but misses. The Evil Queen then lunges at Snow White. Snow White eludes the stab and pulls out her gun and shoots the Evil Queen and hits her. The Evil Queen survives but sustains severe injuries.

Later, the police come, and Snow White and the dwarfs run away. Snow White visits another dwarf, Grumpy, and tells him the whole story. Grumpy agrees to dispose of the gun and he does so. Eventually, Snow White, Happy, Doc, Bashful, and Grumpy and the Evil Queen are all arrested.

Snow White is charged with attempted robbery.

Snow White and Happy are each charged with attempted murder of the Evil Queen.

The Evil Queen is charged with larceny of the car and assault on the bystander.

Happy, Doc, Bashful and Grumpy are all charged with accomplice liability for the robbery.

The parties employ the following defenses:

- Snow White asserts self-defense for the attempted murder of the Evil Queen.
- Happy asserts "defense of another" against the charge of attempted murder of the Evil Queen.
- The Evil Queen asserts intoxication as a defense to both of the charges against her.
- Finally, Happy asserts that he was only 15 years old at the time of the incident.

In your assignment, please discuss all of the charges against all of the above parties and if the charges will stick. You should also discuss whether the defenses raised are valid defenses.