**General Education Opt-In Template**

Preamble: This template is required for all courses opting into General Education. Please fill it out and submit it to Krissy Brissett by the October CCC agenda deadline, so that the CCC members can review your request at the November CCC meeting.

**Division: \_\_\_\_\_ Communications \_\_\_\_\_Humanities \_\_\_\_\_Math \_\_\_\_\_ Science \_\_\_\_\_ Social Science\_\_\_\_ / Discipline\_\_\_Criminal Justice**

**Course Title: Criminal Justice in the United States**

**Course Prefix: CCJ Course Number: 1020 Current Completed Course Outline: \_\_\_\_\_Yes (attach) \_\_\_\_\_ No**

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**Gen Ed Principles:** Does this course, when added to the Gen Ed Program:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Contribute Significantly to the Gen Ed Outcomes | Satisfy the mission of the College | Rely on a specific faculty member for instruction | Focus on a specific occupation | Transfer to an upper division program | Have a prerequisite that is not a Gen Ed course |
| Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| X |  | X |  |  | X |  | X | X |  |  | X |

**Assessment of Gen Ed Outcomes:** Please select both a primary and secondary contribution and provide a bulleted list of how you will assess for the outcomes.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Gen Ed Outcomes | Cultural and Historical Understanding | QuantitativeReasoning  | Scientific Reasoning  | Interpersonal Communication | Oral Communication | Written Communication | Ethical Responsibility | Information Literacy | Critical Thinking |
| Primary contribution |  |  |  |  |  | Yes | Yes | Yes |  |
| Secondary contribution |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Narrative of Contribution to Gen Ed:**

This course will contribute to the general education requirements by developing in students’ a greater sense of ethical responsibility, information literacy, and written communication skills. Additionally, students taking this course will develop a greater understanding of the philosophical foundation for a criminal justice system, understand the history of policing in America, understand and recognize how to exercise their constitutional rights in the criminal justice process, understand the competing philosophies that support different forms of sanctions, and be able to critically assess the ethical, moral, and legal legitimacy of the criminal justice system as a whole.

Legitimacy in the criminal justice system is critical for a democratic, free market society to flourish. Without legitimacy, government authority is weakened and vigilantism increases, not just in the cruder forms we associate with tit-for-tat retaliation, but in its extreme form, vigilantism can devolve into a completely alternate layer of extra-legal justice. This may sound a bit outrageous in the United States, but it is not far from the truth in some communities. In extremely poor, crime ridden communities, where the disenfranchised, poor, homeless, and mentally ill reside, street justice is often recognized as the only legitimate form of justice. Though this extra-legal justice may not always be “just”, it is nonetheless, swift and certain. Unfortunately, this form of “street” justice is anathema to a nation that promotes the rule of law.

It is important to understand that in the United States, many people question the legitimacy of the police and the criminal justice system. The reasons vary, but for groups who have experienced a disproportionate number of contacts with the police (e.g., the poor, the young, minorities, the mentally ill, and men), that were negative or were perceived as harassing, trust in the police within those populations is low, and the perceived legitimacy of the police is weak. These sentiments regarding the police are consistently reaffirmed in Gallup polls, which show that minorities are more distrustful of the police than non-minorities. As we have seen in recent months, these sentiments have been on full display in the media as protestors have taken to the streets to protest real and/or perceived police mistreatment of minorities. It may be easy to write off these protests as simply a fad, but these protests are actually part of a larger cycle of protests. Eventually, it is not inconceivable to believe that the protests and distrust in the police and the criminal justice system will no longer be episodic, but rather the normal condition of a fragmented and conflicted society.

This idea to add Criminal Justice in the United States as a social science general education course came to me after speaking to several leaders within the criminal justice community in Central Florida, as well as from my own observations. From the criminal justice practitioners, I heard exasperation in their voices about the public’s perceived ignorance of the dangers faced by the police, as well as a lack of understanding of the complexities and imperfections within the criminal justice system as a whole. In the minds of the police, changes need to occur in two directions. The police recognize that reform is needed, but they also feel the public needs to become more aware of the strengths, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies of the criminal justice system in the United States, and the larger social forces that contribute to crime. Sadly, most people have very little contact with the police. For those who do, their contact may be one-dimensional and not representative of policing in general or the criminal justice system. Likewise, for most people, the impressions they have of the police are informed by social media, various news sources, and from friends…most of which are skewed, politicized, incorrect, or misinformed. Bad information damages the legitimacy of the police more than a single bad contact with the police, because it multiples that contact a million times.

It is hoped that this course will broaden the perspective of students so they have a more informed understanding of the criminal justice system in America. Students should be able to sort through the background noise of social media and other forms of information in order to distill the truth from amid the rubbish. A democracy depends on educated citizens, and the criminal justice system in the United States is an important part of our democracy. Unless the criminal justice system is trusted, legitimacy is weakened, crime increases, officer safety decreases, and society as whole suffers. This class meets an important general education need for our students. It is important to remember, most criminal offending and victimization occurs between the ages of 16-24, the age range of most of Valencia’s students. It is likely that a significant percentage of our students will have some form of contact with the criminal justice system, either as an offender or as a victim. Adding this course as a general education social science course would provide our students with a good understanding of the criminal justice system.

Though I feel I have made a strong statement in support of my proposal to add this course as a general education social science course, I think one more benefit must be made clear. As I have stressed throughout my comments, the legitimacy of the criminal justice system is critically important for society to flourish. When the criminal justice system is perceived as “just,” people are more willing to comply with the law and with law enforcement officers, and accept the outcomes of the judicial process. Of course, the opposite holds true when the system is perceived as “unjust.” I deliberately used quotations to denote “just” and “unjust” because those two terms have different meanings to different people. It is hoped that after students complete this course, they will better understand what the term, “justice,” actually means in our criminal justice system. Many of my students tend to view justice as an outcome, one that is a normatively derived definition dependent on an individual’s own value system. Consequently, when a criminal justice outcome aligns with a person’s notion of what is fair or right, then the outcome is perceived as “just.” Conversely, when the decision runs counter to a person’s expectation of a “just” outcome, the outcome is viewed as “unjust.” A norm derivative definition of justice is problematic because it undermines legitimacy when the outcome is perceived as unfair, or “unjust,” which occurs in most every criminal case depending on your position on the matter. For instance, an offender might find an exoneration in a criminal case as “justice,” whereas a victim, the victim’s family, or society might feel the exoneration was an “injustice.”

In this course, students will walk away with an understanding that the criminal justice system in United States is a processed-based model that is agnostic to outcome, principally because it is assumed that a fair process will produce a “just” outcome if all parties follow the same set of rules. Now, in reality, not all defendants brought before the court or who come under police scrutiny have the same advantages available to them in order to ensure equal treatment under the law. It is during this discussion on the issue of “justice” where students must really apply ethical reasoning. Hopefully, students will appreciate the ethical dilemmas faced by actors within the criminal justice system, as well as the ethical and moral foundation that supports a process-based system over an outcome-based system. Such an appreciation will allow students to make sense of seemingly “unjust” outcomes, such as the George Zimmerman verdict, even if they do not agree with it. If they can at least appreciate that the system is designed to protect the due process rights of the defendant (i.e., Zimmerman), and if they can see that the case was fairly adjudicated in a transparent manner, then the outcome must be viewed as “legally just.” Students have a hard time with this concept, but it is important to clarify the issue of “justice” because it is emotional, visceral and it powerfully influences perceptions of fairness in the system.

My proposal for this course is for it to be a Gordon Rule course.