

RETHINKING CRIMINAL JUSTICE AS PUBLIC HEALTH

Course description

The health of the U.S. population is inextricably connected to the country's criminal-legal system, which physically confines millions of Americans, surveils and polices tens of millions more, and undermines the wellbeing of the population as a whole.

Instead of summoning the resources and ingenuity to solve substance addiction and mental illness, we exacerbate these thorny challenges by misconstruing them as 'crimes'. We struggle with a high prevalence of some infectious diseases—from hepatitis C to COVID-19—in part because we fail to manage them in the hotbeds of our jails and prisons. And our societal response to violence, which primarily takes the form of violence of its own, often perpetuates the problem it is meant to prevent.

In this course, we will consider the history of our society's conceptions of crime, the way they have shaped our societal responses to entrenched social ills, and how they differ from the values and practices of public health. We will examine the counterproductive harms that spring from this disconnect. Drawing on the instructor's reportage as well as extending beyond it, we will identify and explore public health interventions that could ultimately replace our architecture of punishment.

Course objectives

- Assess varying conceptions of crime, and the way they shape our society's response
- Describe the criminal-legal system including its history and constituent parts, and evaluate the evidence of its effectiveness
- Explore how the criminal-legal system perpetuates violence, mental illness, poverty, and infectious disease
- Examine the role that mental illness, addiction, environmental exposure, and other factors play in crime
- Evaluate public health measures for addressing crime, from drug courts to cognitive behavioral therapy to unarmed emergency responders to restorative justice

Course Structure, Guest Participants, and Assigned Readings

The class will meet from 1:30-5:30pm from Monday to Friday, June 14-18 — a total of 20 hours. Class time will be a mix of structured lecture and moderated discussion.

- Day 1 (Mon. June 14): *What is "crime", why is our current response dominated by punishment, and what differences (and overlaps) are there with a "public health" approach?*

Guest: Brandon del Pozo, drug policy/public health researcher; former Chief of Police, Burlington, VT

Readings (65 pages):

- Moore, M. H. (1995). "Public Health and Criminal Justice Approaches to Prevention." *Crime and Justice* 19: 237-262.
- Del Pozo, Brandon. (2021). "Talking about Police Accountability." [PublicEthics.org](https://publicethics.org).
- Alexander, Michelle. (2010) *The New Jim Crow*, Chapter 5.

- Day 2 (Tues. June 15): *How does the existing criminal justice system harm individual and population health?*

Guest: Rachael Bedard, Director of Geriatrics & Complex Care Services, NYC Correctional Health Services

Readings (17 pages):

- Dumont DM, Brockmann B, Dickman S, Alexander N, Rich JD. Public health and the epidemic of incarceration. *Annu Rev Public Health*. 2012 Apr;33:325-39.
- Williams BA, Sudore RL, Greifinger R, Morrison RS. Balancing punishment and compassion for seriously ill prisoners. *Ann Intern Med*. 2011 Jul 19;155(2):122-6.
- Bedard, Rachael. (April 10, 2020). "I'm a doctor on Rikers Island. My patients shouldn't have to die in jail." *Washington Post*.

- Day 3 (Wed. June 16): *How do social and environmental factors contribute to crime?*

Guest: Fernando Trujillo, Policy Fellow, Bold Futures New Mexico and Hancy Maxis, graduate of the Bard Prison Initiative and Project Manager, Montefiore Health System

Readings (22 pages):

- Krinsky, Miriam and Leo Beletsky. (March 5, 2021). "Why It's Time to Abandon Drug Courts." *The Crime Report*.
- Moore KE, Roberts W, Reid HH, Smith KMZ, Oberleitner LMS, McKee SA. Effectiveness of medication assisted treatment for opioid use in prison and jail settings: A meta-analysis and systematic review. *J Subst Abuse Treat*. 2019 Apr;99:32-43.
- Sampson RJ, Raudenbush SW, Earls F. Neighborhoods and violent crime: a multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*. 1997 Aug 15;277(5328):918-24.

- Day 4 (Thurs. June 17): *How far have we come in developing non-carceral, "public health" responses to crime, and how far do we still have to go?*

Guest: Elizabeth Glazer, former director of the New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice

Readings (70 pages):

- Friedman, Barry. (Forthcoming). "Disaggregating the Police Function." *U. Pa. L. Review*.
- Glazer, Elizabeth. (April 15, 2021). "To Fuel public safety reform, cities must build their civic muscles." *Washington Post*.

- Day 5 (Fri. June 18): *What is the most strategic and fruitful path for remaking our criminal justice system?*

Guest: Clinton Lacey, President & CEO of Credible Messenger Mentoring Movement; former Director of Youth Rehabilitation Services, Washington, DC

Readings (20 pages):

- Austria, Ruben and Julie Peterson. (Jan. 2017) "Credible Messenger Mentoring for Justice-Involved Youth." *The Pinkerton Papers*.
- Schiraldi, Vincent. (March 23, 2021). "How 'Technical Violations' Drive Incarceration." *The Appeal*.

Prerequisites

A basic knowledge of public health concepts is recommended.

Instructor

Ted Alcorn is a journalist and a lecturer at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. He has reported on topics of health and justice for The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and other national publications, and has expertise in gun violence prevention policies and programs. He was previously the founding research director of Everytown For Gun Safety, and he served as a policy analyst in the Office of the Mayor of New York City.

