

SYLLABUS for CJA 497  
**The Death Penalty in America**

**General Information**

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**Required Texts**

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Prejean, H. (1993). *Dead man walking: An eyewitness account of the death penalty in the United States*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage (ISBN # 0-679-75131-9).

Acker, J.R., Bohm, R.M., & Lanier, C.S. (eds.) (2003). *America's experiment with capital punishment*. Carolina Academic Press: Durham, NC (ISBN # 0-89089-064-1).

**Philosophy**

The primary goal of attending the university is educational attainment. In pursuit of this goal, an objective of this course is to create an atmosphere conducive to critical thinking. It does **not** exist to provide a forum for the continuation of unenlightened beliefs nor for the expression of rhetorical dramaturgy. *The primary objective of this course is to learn critical thinking skills in a criminological context.* Here you will be exposed to different issues involving capital punishment.

It is my philosophy that real learning takes place outside the classroom. The purpose of the classroom is to **help** focus on major issues, to assist in the synthesis of knowledge, to engage in constructive criticism, and to interject material not found in the reading assignments. The burden of becoming educated lies with you. To be successful in this course, you will need to engage in active learning.

You will be held to high standards of achievement. **Grades will not be given; they will be earned.**

**Course Objectives**

This course is a survey of issues involving the death penalty. It seeks to:

1. provide information about the application of the death penalty in the U.S.;
2. assist in developing an informed position on capital punishment;
3. enhance critical thinking, writing, and other communication skills;
4. facilitate critical consumption of published research;

5. stimulate intellectual curiosity not only about crime, criminals, and the criminal justice system, but about the world around you;
6. produce a better understanding of society via the study of capital punishment.

**This is not a class in political correctness. That is, your views on capital punishment do not have to conform to mine in order to be successful. Instead, your success will be measured in terms of your record of academic achievement.**

## Evaluation

Performance evaluation for students consists of four components:

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1. Two examinations -- 30%
2. Two writing assignments -- 40%
3. Internet assignments -- 20%
4. Online discussions -- 10%

Final grades are based on the following scale:

A+ = 97-100    B+ = 87-89    C+ = 77-79    D+ = 67-69    F = 59<  
A = 93-96        B = 83-86        C = 73-76        D = 63-66  
A- = 90-92        B- = 80-82        C- = 70-72        D- = 60-62



Acceptable performance in this course is predicated on the following requirements: (1) comprehension of assigned reading material prior to class; (2) regular class participation; (3) copious note taking; (4) avoidance of “cramming” prior to an examination; and (5) evidence of substantial effort expended completing the writing project.

## Examinations

The format of both examinations may include multiple choice, short answer, and essay. Arrangements will be made to take the exams online at a [proctored site at BSU](#) (4<sup>th</sup> Floor of the Education Building). We may be able to make arrangements for off-campus testing, but significant advance notice (and perhaps additional cost) are required. For additional information, please follow the link from [Extended Studies](#).

## Internet Assignments

Throughout the session, you will be required to complete a number of assignments via the Internet. You will also need access to an Internet browser (Netscape or Explorer) with audio capabilities (*RealPlayer*) as assignments and *PowerPoint* presentations will be available through the Web. These assignments will be evaluated on the basis of completeness and timeliness. Internet assignments will **NOT** be accepted late.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Writing Assignment - Research Paper

Each student is required to submit a paper entitled “\_\_\_\_\_ and the Death Penalty.” You are to supply the missing part of the title. All topics must be submitted to me for approval by **June 8**.

This assignment must be typewritten, double spaced, with 1" margins. Your work must be error free (no typographical errors, no visible corrections), and must conform to the conventions of the English language and to the requirements outlined in the latest version of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. The assignment is due **July 6** and will not be accepted after this date.

There is no minimum page requirement – I encourage you to keep in mind the scope of the writing assignment and the practice of writing until you have completely informed the reader about your topic as your personal guide to page length.

☞ Remember that you are writing for a social science audience. This type of writing requires that you organize your manuscript into three major sections: (1) statement of the problem; (2) review of the literature; and (3) summary and conclusions. Essay-style organization of your manuscript must be avoided!

☞ **NOTA BENE** -- It is part of my philosophy that if you perform the minimum amount of work then you should not expect the maximum reward. This philosophy applies not only to the above assignment but also to classroom participation.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Writing Assignment

Each student will be required to complete Prejean’s *Dead Man Walking* at his or her own pace. After you have finished reading this work, select the ***three most important ideas*** presented in the work relative to your position on capital punishment. In a well-written essay, **briefly** discuss these ideas while providing support for why they are important. Be sure to discuss the values and assumptions underlying your selection. What is the potential impact of these ideas for society’s understanding of capital punishment?

The essay should be written for a general audience, and should be organized in terms of an introduction, which includes the thesis statement, the main body, and a summary **and** conclusion.

All writing, including this essay, **must** conform to the conventions of the English language, **must** be typed, and error free. It is due by **June 18**, and will not be accepted after that date. The essay will be evaluated (in order of importance) on the basis of content, organization, and writing style.

Both writing assignments must be submitted using Blackboard’s Digital Drop Box in Microsoft Word format (not MS Works).

## Miscellaneous

This syllabus does not constitute a contract. It is possible that changes may be made to fit changing circumstances. In the event of modifications, students are responsible for updated information.