

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Sociology 220

Spring, 2001 Dr. Robert Agnew
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Course Description

The course is divided into four sections, with each section being organized around one or more major questions about delinquency.

I. The Nature and Extent of Delinquency. The first section will deal with some basic "facts" about delinquency. We will answer four questions: 1) What is delinquency and, in particular, how does it differ from adult crime? 2) How much delinquency is there? 3) Is Delinquency Increasing?, and 4) What types of people tend to commit delinquent acts?

II. Theories of Delinquency. After answering the above questions, we will focus on what is probably the most frequently asked question about delinquency: "What causes juveniles to break the law?" We will examine the three major sociological theories or explanations of delinquency: strain, social learning, and control theory.

III. Research on the Causes of Delinquency. We will then examine research inspired by or at least compatible with the above theories. This research examines the extent to which delinquency is caused by individual traits (e.g., impulsivity, irritability), family factors (e.g., "broken homes," poor discipline), school factors, delinquent peer groups and gangs, and other factors.

III. The Control and Prevention of Delinquency. In the final section of the course, we will ask "How can we control or prevent delinquency?" We will spend the first part of this section examining what the juvenile justice system (police, juvenile court, juvenile correctional agencies) does to control delinquency. Three questions will guide our analysis: 1) How do these agencies operate -- what do they do to control delinquency? 2) To what extent do these agencies violate the rights of individuals and groups in their efforts to control delinquency? and 3) How effective are these agencies and what can they do to be more effective? We will then examine four general strategies to control delinquency: the "get tough" strategies of deterrence and incapacitation

and the "liberal" strategies of rehabilitation and prevention.

Course Goals

There are four major course goals.

1. Introduce you to the major research on juvenile delinquency, as outlined above. This goal will be achieved primarily through the readings and class lectures and discussions.
2. Introduce you to the methods that criminologists use to study delinquency. How do criminologists determine how much delinquency there is, whether some factor like "broken homes" causes delinquency, or whether some policy like imposing a curfew reduces delinquency? We will examine some of the methods that criminologists use to answer questions about delinquency. In particular, we will examine how criminologists estimate the extent of delinquency and trends in delinquency, how they determine whether various factors cause delinquency, and how they determine whether certain policies or programs reduce delinquency. A basic knowledge of these methods will prove invaluable to you, since they will help you evaluate the accuracy of many of the claims you hear about delinquency and other topics (claims from friends and family, politicians, the media, etc.).
3. Get you to apply course materials. It is not enough to simply memorize certain facts and theories about delinquency. Such facts and theories are useless unless you can apply them to your own lives and the larger community. In particular, the materials in this course can help you better understand your own behavior and that of the people around you; better raise your children if you decide to have children; better evaluate the claims you hear about delinquency from others; and better work toward the control of delinquency in your community. We will achieve this goal through a number of class exercises and demonstrations. Also, all of the "Active Learning Exercises" described in the next section are designed to get you to apply course materials.
4. Increase your commitment to work toward the reduction of delinquency. Almost everyone in the field of juvenile justice feels that we can do much more to control delinquency. This course will help you better formulate your own views on controlling delinquency and will encourage you to act on your views. This goal will be achieved through reading and discussing the literature on delinquency, through presentations by individuals from the juvenile justice field, and through several of the Active Learning Exercises -- such as the field trips and participation in volunteer activities.

Grading

There will be four exams, one for each section of the course. Exams will consist of multiple choice and short answer/essay questions. Sample exam questions will be placed on the course web site at least one

week before each exam (click on assignments). I strongly recommend that you review them to guide you in your studying and prepare for the exams. Each exam is graded from 0 to 100 (93+=A, 90-92=A-, 88-89=B+, 83-87=B, etc.) and counts for 20% of your grade.

The remaining 20% of your grade is determined by your completion of several Active Learning Exercises. These exercises are listed below, with additional details to be provided in class. Each exercise is worth a certain number of points, indicated in parentheses. You can pick and choose among the exercises (although no more than 50 active learning points can be earned for the same type of activity -- like field trips, film reviews, reviews of outside speakers, exam questions, or reviews of my text). At the end of the semester, I will sum the point values for the exercises you successfully completed to determine your grade. Your grade may range from 0 to 100 (same grading scale as above). The completion of each exercise will be graded on a pass/fail basis (if you pass, you get the full point value; if you fail, you do not get any points). You may redo failed exercises for a passing grade. **ALL EXERCISES MUST BE TYPED, DOUBLE SPACED.** Pay special attention to due dates. Two points will be deducted for each weekday that an assignment is past due and **NO ACTIVE LEARNING ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER APRIL 30.**

Active Learning Exercises:

1. Participate at least five times in a discussion on crime/delinquency on our course web site -- click on "communication," then click on "discussion board" (20 points). Participate at least ten times in our web discussion (30 points). Each instance of participation must involve a "meaningful" comment -- that is your comment must reflect a thoughtful consideration of the topic under discussion and draw on course materials where relevant. Your participation might assume anyone of several different forms: a brief description of and comment on a news item related to delinquency, an incident on campus, a personal experience, a field trip, etc.; thoughts on how to better control delinquency in general or a particular type of delinquency; reactions positive and/or negative to the readings and class lectures/discussions; etc. The TA and I will sometimes post questions or case studies for discussion. You should feel free to do the same (they will count as participation).

Note: We will only count web comments occurring before the last day of class, and no more than three web comments occurring after April 16 will be counted.

2. Participate in a field trip and write a 2-3 page report (typed, double-spaced) describing the trip and your reactions to it (e.g., was it what you expected, do you think the program/agency you visited is doing a good job, what changes would you make in it). To the extent possible, relate the trip to course materials. The report should be turned in no later than Monday, April 30. (30-50 points, depending on the field trip)

3. Write a 3 page report on at least three Internet/World Wide Web sites related to juvenile delinquency. (20 points.) Indicate a) who

runs the site, b) the type of information on the site, c) where the information comes from, d) how the site is related to course materials, and e) your impressions of the site. If you are unsure where to start, I would suggest beginning with the site run by Cecil Greek for the Florida State University Criminal Justice Program -- it contains links to numerous other sites (<http://www.criminology.fsu.edu/cj.html> -- a link is available on our course web site, click on "external links," then click on "guides to delinquency links"). This report is due no later than Monday, April 30.

4. Participate in an APPROVED volunteer activity related to crime/delinquency. Write a 2-3 page report (typed, double-spaced) describing the activity, the dates and times you worked, and your reaction to the work. To the extent possible, relate the activity to course materials. Several possible activities will be described in class. My approval is required if you would like to do volunteer work in an organization not described in class. ANYONE WANTING ACTIVE LEARNING POINTS FOR VOLUNTEER WORK SHOULD GIVE ME A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF WHERE YOU WILL BE WORKING, THE WORK YOU'LL BE DOING, AND THE NUMBER OF HOURS YOU'LL BE WORKING BY MARCH 2. The report itself is due no later than Monday, April 30. (20 points if you work at least 3 hours during the semester, 30 points for 6+ hours, 40 points for 12+ hours, 50 points for 24+ hours)

5. Take a juvenile justice professional to lunch. (25 points.) Invite a police officer who works with juveniles, a juvenile probation officer, an attorney who represents or prosecutes juvenile offenders, a counselor working with juvenile offenders, etc. to lunch (you treat). I can supply you with the names of interested people (mostly workers at the DeKalb County Juvenile Court), if you like. Talk with the person about their job. Do some background reading to prepare (e.g., read the course materials on juvenile court if you're taking a probation officer to lunch). Also, try to schedule the lunch after we have talked about your lunch guest's agency in class. Finally, prepare some questions in advance (e.g., what do you do during a typical day, what impact do you think you have on the juvenile offenders you work with, how has your job changed over the past 10 or 20 years, how would you change your job, what do you think are the causes of delinquency, what do you think we should do to control delinquency, etc.?). Write a 2-3 page report summarizing the interview and your reactions to what was said. To the extent possible, relate your guest's comments to class materials. The report should be turned in no later than Monday, April 30.

6. Turn in five multiple-choice questions for an exam. (10 points per exam, you can turn in questions for each exam if you like). The questions should be turned in at least five days prior to the exam in question. I especially like questions that call for the application of course materials, rather than those that simply test on memorization. You will receive 3 additional "active-learning" points for each of your questions that I use on an exam.

7. Critique a chapter in my textbook. (25 points) Write a 2-3 page report that discusses a) what you like and dislike about the chapter

and/or b) provides suggestions for improvement. You may do things like point to sections that are unclear or boring or too difficult, discuss topics that you think receive too little or too much coverage, suggest examples that will better illustrate materials in the chapter, etc. This is more than an academic exercise; I may actually use your comments to improve the book (and the authors of especially useful comments will receive recognition in the acknowledgments section of the book. Due by Monday, April 30.

8. Attend an outside lecture or presentation related to delinquency (I must approve the lecture/presentation in advance). Write a 2-3 page report that briefly describes the lecture/presentation and relates it to course materials. (20 points). Due by Monday, April 30.

9. Review a fictional or nonfictional film related to delinquency. (20 points) Write a 3 page report, the first page of which should briefly describe the film and the remaining two pages should relate the film to course materials. In particular, describe how the film illustrates course materials – like material on the characteristics of delinquents, theories of delinquency, research on the causes of delinquency, juvenile justice system (police, courts, corrections), or strategies for controlling delinquency (deterrence, incapacitation, rehabilitation, prevention). Note areas where the film seems to contradict course materials. Due by Monday, April 30.

10. Some activity of your own design. See me for approval and determination of point value (the activity might involve a brief class presentation, a report on some article or book, a film review, work in a campus organization, etc.)

11. Other activities, to be described in class.

Your final grade is the average of your four exam grades and the sum of your active learning exercises (maximum sum=100).

Extra-credit: Individuals who score below 70 on one of the exams should see me for an extra credit assignment that will allow you to raise your grade to 70. Extra-credit work will not be permitted in other cases, so study carefully for each exam.

Make-Up Exam Policy. My permission is needed to take the make-up for Exams #1 -- #3 (NOTE: having another exam on the same day as our exam will not get you my permission). Individuals taking the make-up for Exams #1 – #3 should come to the first class after the regularly scheduled exam. We will try to work out a mutually convenient date for the make-up at this class (if we cannot, the date for the make-up will be determined by a vote of those present). The make-up will consist of several essay questions. If you are unable to take the make-up on the date we decide, your make-up will consist of a short paper on a topic of my choice. Exam #4 will be given on the final exam date, May 4, and make-ups for this exam will only be given to individuals who have obtained permission from the Dean.

Textbooks

Juvenile Delinquency: Causes and Control, by Robert Agnew. Available at the Emory Bookstore.

Code of the Street, by Elijah Anderson. Available at Emory Bookstore.

How to Do Well in This Course

1. Come to class on a regular basis. I will describe the essential things you should get from the readings, elaborate on the readings, and present new materials. I will also "pull things together," describing how the different topics we're studying are connected. At least half of all exam materials will come from class. If you miss more than a few classes you will experience serious difficulties, even if you borrow someone's notes. In particular, you will have trouble following the course organization and doing well on exams.

2. Come to class on time. If you come late, you may have trouble following the lecture. Also, other students and I find it distracting.

3. Do the readings on time and take notes on each reading. In particular, read each chapter, highlighting key points. Then go back and write an outline of the chapter in your own words. This will dramatically increase your recall and comprehension of the chapter.

It is not necessary to take detailed notes on the "Code of the Street" book. Focus on the major points being made, especially as they relate to the impact of the social environment on delinquent/criminal behavior. Related to this, try to apply course materials the book -- like the theories of delinquency and the research on the causes of delinquency.

4. If something is unclear, ask me during or after class, during my office hours, or email me at bagnew@emory.edu. Also feel free to consult with the TA. I encourage you to ask questions or make comments at any time.

5. Do the Active Learning Exercises throughout the semester -- don't save them all for the end of the semester. Among other things, doing them early in the semester will give you the opportunity to redo any failing exercises for a passing grade. There is no good reason why anyone should score lower than 100 on the Active Learning Exercises.

6. Review the sample exam questions on our web site. Study with others for each exam -- asking each other questions and evaluating each other's answers.

Class Schedule

I. Nature and Extent of Delinquency

Jan. 17 Introduction and Survey

Jan. 19-22 What is Delinquency? Agnew, Chapter 1

Jan. 24 How is Delinquency Measured? Agnew, Chapter 2

Jan. 26 NO CLASS – attend "Restorative Justice Approaches to Violence" session in Winship Ballroom from 3:15-5:15

Jan. 29 How Much Delinquency is There? Agnew, Chapter 3
Is Delinquency Increasing?

Jan.31-Feb. 9 Who is Most Likely to Engage in Delinquency? Agnew, Chapter 4
Anderson, Intro & Chapter 1

Feb. 12 EXAM #1

II. Theories of Delinquency

Feb. 14-16 How Do We Know If Something Causes Something Else? Agnew, Chapter 5
Read Anderson, Chapters 2-6
by Exam #2

Feb. 19 Strain Theory Agnew, Chapter 6

Feb. 21 Social Learning Theory Agnew, Chapter 7

Feb. 23 Control Theory Agnew, Chapter 8

Feb. 26 Labeling and Other Theories Agnew, Chapter 9

Feb. 28 Applying the Theories: Understanding Violence Against Women

Mar. 2-5 Applying the Theories, continued

March 7 EXAM #2

III. Research on the Causes of Delinquency

March 9 No Class

March 12-16 SPRING BREAK

March 19 Individual Traits Agnew, Chapter 10

March 21 The Family Agnew, Chapter 11

March 23 The School Agnew, Chapter 12

March 26 Delinquent Peer Groups and Gangs Agnew, Chapter 13

March 28 Religion, Work, Mass Media Agnew, Chapter 14, pages 186-91

March 30 The Larger Social Environment Agnew, Chapter 14, pages 191-99

April 2 Delinquent Situations, Drugs, and Guns Agnew, Chapter 15

April 4 Pulling It All Together Agnew, Chapter 16

April 6 EXAM #3

IV. The Control and Prevention of Delinquency

April 9-11 How Do We Determine if Some Policy is Effective in Controlling/ Preventing Delinquency? Agnew, Chapter 17
Read Anderson, Chapters 7-8
by Exam #4

April 13 The Police Agnew, Chapter 18

April 16-20 Juvenile Court and Corrections Agnew, Chapter 19

April 23 Does the Juvenile Justice System Discriminate Agnew, Chapter 20

April 25 Deterrence and Incapacitation Agnew, Chapter 21

April 27 Prevention and Rehabilitation Agnew, Chapter 22

April 30 So What Should We Do to Control Delinquency? Agnew, Chapter 23

May 4 EXAM #4, 9:35-10:25 in our classroom

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PLEASE NOTE: MY NEW EMAIL ADDRESS IS BAGNEW@EMORY.EDU

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