



Sociology 3379f (570)
Crime, Punishment, and Popular Culture
Fall/ Winter 2026-2027

Instructor: M. Elliott
Email: mellio57@uwo.ca

Course Information

Calendar Description:

This course critically examines how crime and punishment are represented in film, television, music, books, and other forms of popular culture. We investigate how these depictions shape - and reflect - our understandings of crime and impact criminal justice policy.

Prerequisite(s): [Sociology 2266A/B](#), and third or fourth year standing in a Sociology or Criminology module.

Extra Information: 3 hours.

Course Weight: 0.50
Breadth: Category A
Subject Code: SOCIOLOG

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

King's University College
Sociology 3379F (570)
Crime, Punishment, and Popular Culture
Fall 2026

Course Information:

- **Instructor:** Professor Melissa Elliott
- **Email:** mellio57@uwo.ca
- **Office Hours:** students are always welcome to approach me for informal chats during breaks or after lecture. Where more privacy or a longer conversation is needed, email me with your availability and I will get back to you within 48 hours with an appointment time. This is to ensure every student is accommodated regardless of their schedule.
- **Teaching Philosophy:** I strive to foster a classroom environment based on fairness, mutual respect, empathy, and mentorship. At the same time, learning is a two-way street. Students enrolled in this course should be willing to commit to those same principles, with an understanding of the tenacity, autonomy, and discipline required to succeed in both an upper-year and essay credit.
 - On my part, I recognize that sometimes life happens. We are human beings with roles and responsibilities that keep us busy beyond the classroom. If you are ever needing support or feeling concerned about your ability to succeed in the course, please don't hesitate to reach out. Together, we can work out a path forward that is equitable, accommodating, and fair with respect to your peers.

Course Description: This course critically examines how crime and punishment are represented in film, television, music, books, and other forms of popular culture. We investigate how these depictions shape – and reflect – our understandings of crime and impact criminal justice policy. The course encourages regular engagement and participation, aiming to develop students' communication, professionalism, and critical thinking abilities. Refining these skills prepares one for success in a variety of settings, while also allowing students to cultivate a meaningful understanding of themselves as responsible and well-educated global citizens.

Course Learning Outcomes: By the end of the term, successful students will:

- Understand how representations of crime, punishment, and justice in media may be researched, highlighting ethical concerns and methodological approaches;
- Establish linkages across disciplines, levels of analysis, and various forms of popular culture to broaden criminological perspectives;
- Connect contemporary social issues to the criminal legal system while drawing out how these social forces impact processes of criminalization and victimization;
- Identify, apply, and evaluate various approaches to knowledge production, particularly where these frameworks relate to crime, corrections, and justice;
- Contribute to an inclusive, supportive, and collegial classroom environment;

- Develop self-confidence in their mastery of the material and their ability to convey that knowledge to an audience of their peers; and
- Present criminological research, theories, and interpretations in a clear, coherent, and accessible manner using relevant technologies and/or other creative modes of delivery.

Mode of Instruction: In-person.

Course Materials: Course readings will be available on our Brightspace site; thus, no purchases are required on the student's part. Assigned reading begins in Week 2.

Method of Evaluation:

The five components described below are each *essential requirements* for the course.

1) Participation and Engagement (20% of final grade):

This portion of your grade is earned on a **regular, weekly** basis, though it takes a different form depending on the 'phase' of the course we are in:

Phase 1: for the first two-thirds (around 8 weeks) of the course, students complete a brief (about 150 words), low-stakes writing activity designed to build upon the week's lecture material. There is typically some in-class time provided to complete the activity, though submissions are accepted until the following week's lecture to maximize accessibility and accommodation.

Phase 2: for the last third (around 4 weeks) of the course, classes are largely led by students as we make our way through everyone's presentations. As you will learn further below, one component of the presentation is generating engagement and interacting with your audience. To help incentivize that engagement from your peers, your mark for the week is earned by participating in at least one of the day's presentations. While this does mean participation becomes dependent on attendance, (a) this alleviates some of your workload at one of the busiest points in the semester, and (b) there are always a handful of makeup/bonus opportunities offered.

2) In-Class Midterm Examination (20% of final grade):

The midterm examination is scheduled for **Friday, November 6, 2026**. Students will have 2.5 hours of in-class time to write. The exam covers all course material from our first meeting to the last class held before the midterm on Friday, October 30, 2026.

The midterm format is typically balanced between multiple choice and short answer questions. There may also be some true-and-false, fill-in-the-blank, or matching concepts and definitions. Further details will follow in lecture as we approach the exam date, leaving room for small adjustments in accordance with student feedback and class progression.

3-Stage Collaborative Learning Plan (60% of final grade; see breakdown below):

The 3-stage collaborative learning plan is a project that requires students to complete a critical analysis or 'case study' of some specific crime- or punishment-related popular

culture. While the completion of **all three stages** is required for success, students are offered some flexibility as they may determine the weight distribution between their presentations and final papers. Students are encouraged to carefully assess themselves in terms of their busy schedules, personal strengths, and general preferences. The weight of the presentation and the final paper must add up to 50% in total, with neither component weighing less than 15% or more than 35%. Students must formally declare their weighting scheme to the professor over email no later than **Friday, October 9, 2026**. Students who do not make a declaration by this date will automatically default to a 25% weight for each assignment.

3) Stage 1: Research Outline (10% of final grade)

The research outline is due by **11:59 pm on Friday, October 23, 2026**. The assignment is a brief document (can be as short as one double-spaced page, **excluding** your references page) that establishes your preliminary plans for the final project.

Outlines must: name the piece of popular culture you intend to analyze and explain why; identify at least **one** course reading and at least **two** high-quality external references that will develop your analysis; and describe how you intend to combine these elements into a compelling, unique, and in-depth argument. The strongest outlines will have a (working) thesis statement and clearly demonstrate to the reader why this is an important avenue for sociological and/or critical analysis.

4) Stage 2: Presentation (up to 35% of final grade)

During the second week's lecture, students will sign up for one of four possible presentation dates (November 13, November 20, November 27, or December 4). The presentation serves as a stepping stone between the research outline and the final paper, ensuring that your analysis is being developed well before the end of the course. Presentations should fall somewhere between 15 and 20 minutes, accomplishing each of the following objectives:

- (1) Outline the key takeaways of the reviewed literature, incorporating the assigned reading you selected, lecture content where appropriate, and at least **two** high-quality external references;
- (2) Explain how these materials contribute to your argument about your selected piece of popular culture. Ask yourself: what kind of perspective did this author bring to this form of popular culture? How might our understanding become more insightful through the lens of these readings? Are there competing viewpoints that must be considered?
- (3) Draw connections between your subject, your argument, and the real world. Are there any memorable events (historical or contemporary) that we can now understand better through the lens of your presentation? In other words: what makes your analysis matter? What are the important lessons that others should take from your work?
- (4) Generate interaction and/or engagement with your audience. This has most typically taken the form of critical discussion questions, but it absolutely can be accomplished through more creative means as well (e.g. Mentimeter.com, Kahoot.com, etc.).

5) Stage 3: Final Paper (up to 35% of final grade)

The final paper is due by **11:59 pm on Sunday, December 6, 2026**. As the last stage of the collaborative learning plan, the essay is the fullest evolution of your critical analysis. Where

the presentation leans more heavily on organization, effective communication, creative delivery, and your ability to engage the class, the paper is more dependent on your skills in research, criticism, and deep analysis. Your chosen piece of crime- or punishment-related popular culture remains the subject, though the expectation is that your thesis statement from the earlier stages is most fully established, explored, and developed for your reader. The overall criminological and/or sociological takeaways should be underscored clearly.

Academic Integrity and Generative AI (GenAI) Policy (adapted with credit):

Scholastic offences are taken seriously. Students are directed to read [Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students](#) and more specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence at the link provided. In this course, the use of **any** GenAI platform or tool is **not permitted** to generate ideas, write content, or create any material submitted for evaluation. Unauthorized use of GenAI will be subject to academic discipline no different from any other scholastic offence. We will expand upon this during our first lecture, but this policy is established for several important reasons:

1. This course is an essay credit, and therefore, it provides an opportunity for you to develop your writing skills. That cannot happen without practice and a sincere commitment to your own academic growth.
2. GenAI platforms were developed through stolen intellectual property and are specifically designed to produce output that is predictable, banal, unoriginal, and so obvious that it will inevitably please the user. Good writing is the opposite of these things.
3. GenAI is a major contributor to environmental harm, as they consume massive amounts of electricity, water, and other crucial resources (see: [The Associated Press](#), [The Guardian](#), [Scientific American](#), and the [Wall Street Journal](#)).
4. GenAI is eliminating good jobs (see: [Blood in the Machine](#)) and increasing labour exploitation (see: [Columbia Journalism Review](#), [The Conversation](#), [Time Magazine](#), [The Washington Post](#), and [Wired](#)).
5. Ultimately, a safe, secure, and accessible post-secondary education is a privilege. Even so, it remains an expensive pursuit. Whether it is being funded by you, your family, loans, or scholarships, it would be a loss to cheat yourself of the opportunity to learn and grow. At the same time, refraining from the use of GenAI upholds our values as we reject and resist the environmental damage and human cost involved (for more resources to help, see: [Consumer Reports](#) and [TechCrunch](#). To learn more about why GenAI is being aggressively pushed upon us, see: [Blood in the Machine](#). For a final point of inspiration, see this from [Kathy Hepinstall Parks](#)).

To be clear, I too adhere to this policy in my administration of the course.

Turnitin Notice

Assignments are subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

**KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
2026-27**

1. Academic Accommodations (Accessibility)

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found at [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

2. Academic Consideration for Student Absences

Students must be approved to write a makeup exam or for an extension of the assignment deadline. If you need to miss an exam or the deadline for the assignment, please follow these instructions.

There are two ways to seek academic consideration:

(i) Academic consideration based on medical or compassionate grounds

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate grounds), they should contact the Academic Advising Office. As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration.

For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is the appropriate documentation. The SMC is available at <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf>

- King's students: The Academic Advising Office website is located in DLH 104. The Academic Advising website is <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising>.
- If your home faculty is Huron or at Western, please submit your documentation to your faculty's academic counselling office.
- Requests must be made as soon as possible, and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

You may submit requests for academic consideration through the **Student Absence Portal**, linked on this website: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising/academic-consideration-requests-and-student-absence-portal>.

(ii) Academic consideration through an undocumented absence

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per half-course (0.5) weight.

- Note that instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline to confirm this which assessment has been designated as requiring documentation for consideration (that is, exempt from undocumented absences).
- Undocumented absences can not be used as the basis for academic consideration for December or April exams.

If an instructor has built flexibility into their assessments (e.g., “complete 8 of 10 quizzes”), this flexibility will already address consideration needs and thus academic consideration may be denied.

For further information on the academic consideration policy, please see

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

c) Absences from Final Exams

If you miss the Final Exam, **contact your Academic Advising Office** as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the “Special Examination” (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a multiple exam situation (i.e., you are scheduled to write more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under [Special Examinations](#)).

d) Religious Accommodations

Students should consult the University’s list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and their Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

3. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King's University College:

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/accessibility-services>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/campus-life/student-supports/>

Good2talk is an online and phone resource for students, available 24/7, with services in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options on how to obtain help:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental-health/index.html>

Academic Support Services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/academics/academic-supports/>

4. Statement on Gender-Based Sexual Violence

King's and Western are committed to reducing incidents of gender-based sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: [Mental Health and Wellness at King's](#).

You can reach supports at King's by emailing care@kings.uwo.ca or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a Social Worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western's Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by email (health@uwo.ca) or by calling 519-661-3568. Additional support services can be found <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/support/index.html>

5. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Use of Electronic Devices: Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom: King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see https://kings.uwo.ca/sites/2025/assets/files/campus/Kings_Code_of_Student_Conduct.pdf

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

6. Statement on Academic Offences

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.pdf

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. **Check with you instructor to check which tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in each course.** Note that although some courses may permit the use of such tools, it does not mean use of such tools is permitted in other courses.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system; see https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality_Reports_-_TurnItIn.html.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

7. Copyright of Course Material

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

8. Use of Recordings

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

9. Policy on Attendance

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.