

Course Syllabus
CRIJ-1306.001 – Spring, 2026

Instructor Information

- **Instructor:** Michael Ferguson, MS
- **UTT Email:** mferguson@uttyler.edu
- **Office Telephone:** 903.730.3927
- **Office Location:** CAS 134
- **Office Hours:** MWF from 10:15a - noon. For those who wish to meet via Zoom rather than F2F, click [THIS](#) link and use the passcode indicated in Canvas. I will be logged into Zoom during my MWF office hours, so there's no need to arrange an appointment beforehand on those days. If you need to meet on T/Th, send me an email to arrange a time after noon that works for both of us.

Course Catalog Description

This course serves as an introductory examination of the structure of the court system and criminal case processing in the American judicial system, at the local, state, and federal levels. There is a strong emphasis on the organizational structure of the courts, and the adjudication, sentencing and appellate processes. Students will be introduced to case law, the development of legal argument, and the process in which the Supreme Court of the United States hears and rules on cases based on constitutional issues. This course serves as a prerequisite to CRIJ-3327, *Advanced Court Systems and Practices*.

Course Rationale

This course provides you with an overview of the United States' judicial system. Students will learn the "who, what, when, where, why, and how" of the court system and its actors. This course will give you the basic information you need to understand the complexities of our judicial system and why it is the way it is today.

Course Time and Location

- **Dates:** 01/12/2026 - 05/01/2026
- **Meeting Days:** Monday, Wednesday, and Friday
- **Time:** 9:05 AM to 10:00 AM
- **Location:** CAS Room 104

Student Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Describe the significant Constitutional amendments, doctrines, and other sources of law in the American judicial system.
2. Describe the American judicial systems (civil, criminal, and juvenile), their jurisdiction, development and structure.
3. Identify judicial processes from pretrial to appeal.
4. Analyze the function and dynamics of the courtroom work group.

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Textbooks

Required Textbook

1. Hemmens, C., Brody, D., and Spohn, C. (2023). *Criminal courts: A contemporary perspective*. Sage. **Please note: an e-textbook for this course is available through the library at no cost.** Please visit this page to access the textbook for free after logging into your UTT library account: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uttyler/detail.action?docID=7105878>.

Recommended Textbook

1. (2019). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. ISBN: 978-1-4338-3217-8. **NOTE: you can obtain all of the information from the *Publication Manual* for free online.**

Technology Requirements

Students must have access to a computer or tablet with internet access to use UT-Tyler's Canvas LMS. Assignments and quizzes will be handled through Canvas. Additionally, students must have access to, and use of, a word processor (e.g., MS Word or Apple Pages) and presentation software (e.g., MS PowerPoint or Apple Keynote). Lastly, students must have access to a mind-mapping application. Work uploaded to Canvas must be in one of the following file formats:

- **Documents:** .docx, .doc, .pages, or .pdf (.pdf is the preferred format)
- **Presentations / graphs:** .docx, .doc, .pptx, .ppt, .key, or .pdf (.pdf is the preferred format)

Attendance

You can't learn if you're not in class. You must **attend and participate** in the class to earn credit. I understand that life happens, but you need to be in class to learn the material we're covering. **Attendance will be taken each class session and will count as a major exam grade when determining your final course grade. Your attendance grade will be based on your attendance in class. Each day you miss counts as a zero and each day you're late to class will result in a 50% reduction in that day's attendance grade.**

Course Assignments

It is the student's responsibility to keep track of due dates. Please note that quizzes, assignments, and tests will be available for several days, so missing a due date for any given quizzes, assignments, or tests will translate into a score of zero. There will be no extra credit or extensions to complete a missed quiz, assignment, or test.

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- **Anti-Plagiarism Certificate (5%):** You must complete the free, online anti-plagiarism course for which I will provide a link. Upon completion of the two required modules, you must upload a copy of your completion certificate to Canvas. This certificate is worth 5% of your grade and is required for successful completion of the course.
- **Quizzes (50%):** Reading the assigned chapters puts concepts into action. To help with retention and comprehension of the material, you will complete short quizzes each week. Quizzes will consist of multiple choice and true/false questions.
- **Activities (25%):** Your class consists of multiple topic units. You will complete various activities, including in-class discussion, over the course of the semester.
- **Exams (20%):** There are two exam grades: your attendance average and your final exam. The final will consist of true/false and multiple-choice questions taken from the material covered during the semester. Your attendance average counts as a major exam grade, so missing a class or arriving late to class will lower that average.

Assignment/Grade Information

- **Quizzes:** Quizzes will be based on the reading and lecture material. You will have quizzes at the end of each section. Your quizzes will be given via Canvas. You may take each quiz only once and they are timed. Quizzes submitted after the posted due date (11:59p on Sunday night of the day it's due) will be accepted, but will have a 50% deduction in points. Questions on the quizzes will be multiple choice or true/false.
- **Assignments:** You will have occasional written assignments based on material from class. An example is a case brief on an important SCOTUS case. These assignments will be submitted via Canvas and will be checked via Turnitin. Spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc, will all be considered as part of the grade. Assignments submitted after the posted due date (11:59p on Sunday night of the day it's due) will have a 50% deduction in points.
- **Final exam:** The final exam will cover all of the material you've learned over the course of the semester. Studying your quizzes and unit exams will make a HUGE difference in how well you do on the final. Questions on the exam will be multiple choice or true/false. The final exam will be given using SCANTRON forms and will be taken in class during finals week. There are no makeup dates for a missed final exam, so please don't "forget" that you have a final exam!

Activities and Learning Objectives

Below are the learning objectives for each online activity. More detailed instructions are provided to you on the respective assignment page in Canvas.

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Case Brief

- You will review a SCOTUS case and complete a case brief.

Reaction Paper

- You will provide a one- to two-page reaction paper based on a film shown in class.

Census Date

The census date for this summer class is **01/26/2026**. Drops/withdrawals after Census Date and before the Last Day to Withdraw will result in a grade of W. Courses dropped prior to Census Date will not appear on the student's record or the transcript.

Artificial Intelligence Policy

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

The work submitted by students in this course will be generated by themselves. This includes all process work, drafts, brainstorming artifacts, editing, and final products. This extends to group assignments where students must collaboratively create the project. Any instance of the following constitutes a violation of UT Tyler's Honor Code: a student has another person/entity do any portion of a graded assignment, which includes purchasing work from a company, hiring a person or company to complete an assignment or exam, using a previously submitted assignment and/or using AI tools (such as ChatGPT).

Student Resources and UT-Tyler Policies

[Student Resources](#)

[University Policies and Information](#)

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Course Schedule

- **WEEK 1:** 01/12/2026 - 01/16/2026
 - CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: LAW AND THE JUDICIAL FUNCTION
 - Chapter Quiz
 - Anti-Plagiarism Certificate
- **WEEK 2:** 01/19/2026 - 01/23/2026
 - Note: **University closed on Monday, January 19, for MLK Day**
 - CHAPTER 2 SOURCES OF LAW
 - Assignment: Case Brief
 - Chapter Quiz
- **WEEK 3:** 01/26/2026 - 01/30/2026
 - Note: **Census date is Monday, January 26.**
 - CHAPTER 3 TYPES OF LAW
 - Chapter Quiz
- **WEEK 4:** 02/02/2026 - 02/06/2026
 - CHAPTER 4 COURT ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE
 - Federal Courts
 - Chapter Quiz over federal courts
- **WEEK 5:** 02/09/2026 - 02/13/2026
 - CHAPTER 4 COURT ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE
 - State Courts
 - Chapter Quiz over state courts
- **WEEK 6:** 02/16/2026 - 02/20/2026
 - CHAPTER 5: PROSECUTORS
 - Chapter Quiz
- **WEEK 7:** 02/23/2026 - 02/27/2026
 - CHAPTER 6: DEFENSE ATTORNEYS
 - Chapter Quiz
- **WEEK 8:** 03/02/2026 - 03/06/2026
 - CHAPTER 7: JUDGES
 - Chapter Quiz
- **WEEK 9:** 03/09/2026 - 03/13/2026
 - Note: **Spring Break - no class this week**
- **WEEK 10:** 03/16/2026 - 03/20/2026
 - CHAPTER 8: CRIMINAL DEFENDANTS AND CRIME VICTIMS
 - Chapter Quiz
- **WEEK 11:** 03/23/2026 - 03/27/2026
 - CHAPTER 9: THE JURY
 - Chapter Quiz

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- **WEEK 12:** 03/30/2026 - 04/03/2026
 - **Note: 03/30/2026 is the last day to withdraw from one or more 15-Week courses.**
 - CHAPTER 10: PRETRIAL PROCEDURES
 - Chapter Quiz
- **WEEK 13:** 04/06/2026 - 04/10/2026
 - CHAPTER 11: THE CRIMINAL TRIAL
 - Reaction Paper: *Trial by Jury* video
 - Chapter Quiz
- **WEEK 14:** 04/13/2026 - 04/17/2026
 - CHAPTER 12: SENTENCING
 - Chapter Quiz
- **WEEK 15:** 04/20/2026 - 04/24/2026
 - CHAPTER 13: THE APPELLATE PROCESS
 - Chapter Quiz
- **WEEK 16:** 04/27/2026 - 05/01/2026
 - Final exam