

A - New Course Proposal V. 7.2022 : Entry # 3550**DEAN Decision**

Approved

Date

09/10/2025

Is this course intracollegiate or intercollegiate?

Intercollegiate

DEAN Comments

We are in need of DIS courses for the spring

SCHOOL EPC Decision

Approved

Date

10/01/2025

GEC Decision

Approved

Date

10/24/2025

APIRC Decision

Approved

Date

10/31/2025

Begin Form**Today's Date**

09/09/2025

Your Name:

JOEY FINK

Your Email:jfink@highpoint.edu**Are you a Department Chair?**

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Yes

By checking below, I certify that my department chair has seen and approved the new course that I am proposing.

Yes

Please select the appropriate school overseeing this proposal:

Humanities and Behavioral Sciences

When should this proposal take effect?

Other

Information for the Registrar**Choose the department designator from the list below.**

DIS

Proposed Course Number?

1000

Is this course cross listed?

No

Does this course replace a current course?

No

What is the title of the new course?

Crime and Punishment in America, Past and Present

Write the catalog description of your proposed course:

This course examines historical case studies to understand and analyze how Americans at different times and places have defined crime and administered punishment to deter, punish, rehabilitate, and achieve justice. Each case study from the past allows us to investigate factors that influenced ideas about crime and means of punishment, through a variety of scholarly approaches and frameworks (legal/constitutional, social history, religion, economic theories, scientific, medical). We will also grapple with questions like: how can a community balance the rights of the individual with the interests of the public good? What constitutes “good” evidence and sources? What can we learn from the past that will help make our present more peaceful and just? 4 credits.

How many credit hours will this course be?

4

How will the course be graded?

Letter grade

Please select the course repeat option for this course:

Not repeatable for credit

A - New Course Proposal V. 7.2022 : Entry # 3550**What is the offering cycle for this course?**

Fall semester

Does your course have any prerequisites?

No

Is this new course being proposed because of a new or revised major or minor proposal?

n/a

Please note that Dean Elston asked me to submit this proposal to address an urgent need for DIS sections in Spring 2026. I used to teach this class as an FYS. I offered to submit a proposal for it to count as a DIS for the new gen ed, and if it can be fast tracked, I can teach 2 sections of it in Spring 2026.

Any other comments for the Registrar at this time?

Dean Elston asked me to submit this proposal to address an urgent need for DIS sections in Spring 2026. I used to teach this class as an FYS. I offered to submit a proposal for it to count as a DIS for the new gen ed, and if it can be fast tracked, I can teach 2 sections of it in Spring 2026.

Gen Ed and Academic Programs**Is this course part of Gen Ed?**

- Yes

Does your course count in the general education core (one of the core classes that cannot be double-dipped in your major or minor)?

Intellectual Discovery [DIS]

Does this course count towards a major or a minor?

No, it does not count toward any particular major or minor

Please list the Major / Minor and if it is Required or Elective

n/a

Is this course part of an academic program?

- This course does not fulfill academic program requirements

Does this course include any community engagement?

No

Does this course participate in the GoGlobal Program?

No

Information for Curriculum Review

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Rationale and evidence for new course's consistency with departmental mission:

Dean Elston asked me to submit this proposal to address an urgent need for DIS sections in Spring 2026. I used to teach this class as an FYS. I offered to submit a proposal for it to count as a DIS for the new gen ed, and if it can be fast tracked, I can teach 2 sections of it in Spring 2026.

When I taught this course as an FYS, it was effective and popular. The topic/theme of crime and punishment easily grabs attention, especially with the rise of "True Crime" podcasts and documentaries. This 'built-in buy-in' is very helpful for an Intellectual Discovery course, when many first-year students aren't sure why they need to take a class that doesn't count for anything their major.

It is also an inherently interdisciplinary course. As we examine case studies in American history, students are exposed to and engaged with a variety of scholarly approaches and frameworks (legal/constitutional, social history, religion, economic theories, scientific, medical).

This proposed DIS course aligns with the purpose of Intellectual Discovery courses. It utilizes the disciplinary expertise of the History instructor while delivering an interdisciplinary learning experience. Students will discover & acquire historical knowledge and directly apply that historical knowledge to a variety of issues and topics in current news to better understand the present. There will be multiple opportunities for teamwork, reflection, and synthetic thinking.

List all student learning outcomes for this course.

Course Goals

Our goals for the semester are grouped under HPU Lead learning outcomes for Intellectual Discovery courses (#1 and #2) and course-specific objectives (#3-6):

1. Teamwork: Demonstrate the ability to operate in a constructive team environment.
2. Integrative Learning: Synthesize concepts, theories, or frameworks of fields of study and apply them to situations or problems.
3. Discuss, debate, and reflect on complex historical/contemporary issues of crime and punishment to strengthen communication skills, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence.
4. Evaluate the authority of information and the credibility of sources.
5. Produce evidence-based explanations and analyses of definitions of crime and means of punishment in historical case studies (U.S.).
6. Conduct research and present on research findings on an issue of crime and/or punishment in contemporary U.S. that relates to an historical case study.

List any units or content areas that will be required for all sections of this course.

Unit 1

Topic/theme: Money Crimes

In this unit, we explore the origin and evolution of two kinds of crimes related to money: fraud (con artists; scams; pyramid or ponzi schemes) and poverty-based criminality (debtors' prisons; cash bail system; fines and fees justice; bankruptcy). This unit starts in the 19th century, with the call to reform/abolish debtors' prisons and the emergence of a new kind of crime "confidence crime."

We'll trace the evolution of "confidence crime" from the mid-19th century through the late 20th century, as we also examine the emergence of "de facto" debtors' imprisonment after the abolition of debtors' prisons (individuals jailed for failing to pay fines, fees, or court-ordered payments).

Questions/issues we'll consider:

Why did "confidence" or fraud crimes emerge when they did? As they evolved with technology and social change, what elements of the "con game" have stayed the same? What is new/different?

What are the benefits and problems of criminalizing poverty? What is or is not just and fair about connecting punishment for crimes to economic assets?

How are "con artists" portrayed in contemporary media and pop culture? What do those portrayals reveal about our society/culture's values, norms, anxieties, desires, etc?

A - New Course Proposal V. 7.2022 : Entry # 3550

Unit 2

Topic/theme: Murder in a Changing America

In this unit, we'll focus on the crime of murder and look at 3 high-profile cases in the United States at a time of unprecedented change (late 19th – early 20th century), when industrialization, urbanization, immigration, the women's suffrage movement, and labor unrest swept the country. The 3 murder cases are Lizzie Borden (1892, tried for murdering her parents in Massachusetts); Joe Hill (1914-1915, tried for murdering a shop owner in Utah); and Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti (1920-1927, tried for robbery and murder in Massachusetts). We'll follow these case studies from investigation to arrest to trial to outcome.

Questions/issues we'll consider:

How did factors such as class, ethnicity/nationality, sex, religion, and politics shape the investigation, arrests, trial, and outcome in these murder cases?

What does the media coverage of the time reveal about how Americans were wrestling with anxiety and/or hope at a time of great social, economic, and political change?

What do these trials reveal about change and continuity in constitutional rights in America?

Unit 3

Topic/theme: Wars On Drugs

In this unit, we'll examine how Americans have defined and categorized drugs, and when and why certain drugs have been criminalized. We'll devote considerable time to Prohibition (the 13-year prohibition against alcohol), then explore how the "war on drugs" has evolved since the 1920s. We'll conclude this unit by examining the opioid crisis in late 20th – early 21st century America.

Questions/issues we'll consider:

What has shaped Americans' assumptions/understandings about what drugs are dangerous and what drug activity is criminal?

What are the tensions between drug policing and constitutional rights?

How as the "War on Drugs" in the 20th century affect America? What have been the benefits and problems? What are the benefits and problems with decriminalization of certain drugs?

List any assignments, tests, or other assessments that will be required for all sections of this course.

The sample syllabus has a table that connects methods of assessment to outcomes/objectives and provides clearer picture of the kind of coursework. Here's the bare bones of it:

Active Learning and Professionalism (15%)

3 Unit Exams (60%, or 20% each)

Collaborative Final Project & Presentation to the Class This will be an opportunity to build life skills like teamwork, strengthen research and communication skills, synthesize knowledge gained this semester, and dig deeper into one of the topics/case studies we investigated this semester to learn more and make strong connections between past and present. This project work begins in Week 14 and is scaffolded (broken down into steps) with feedback and guidance at every step. (15%)

Peer and Self-Evaluations Each student will complete a peer and self-evaluation in Blackboard, in which they provide feedback on the other groups' presentations and self-evaluate the work their own group did and their contributions to the group's project. (10%)

List any readings or other materials that will be required for all sections of this course.

Assigned readings and materials will be provided by the instructor (Open Source, Public Domain, HPU library holdings, journal articles, etc.). Assigned readings can and should vary to keep the course materials fresh and relevant; to discourage academic dishonesty, and to respond to student feedback and peer evaluations of teaching.

List any course policies that will be required for all sections of this course.

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Course policies will be clearly articulated in the syllabus. These can and do change to adjust to university policies and other factors.

If you would like to specify how requirements for contact hours must be met for all sections of this course, please indicate below. (e.g., if any experiential learning activities will replace seat time)

n/a

Is there anything else the reviewing parties should know about this new course proposal that hasn't been addressed?

Again, I'm submitting this one day late and hoping it can be fast-tracked for review and approval, so these DIS sections can be taught in Spring 2026. There is an urgent need for more DIS sections and I can teach 2 sections of this class in the spring without minimizing the number of other gen eds my department will offer.

Sample Syllabus

- [Fink-DIS-Crime-Punishment-syllabus.docx](#)