



Online Courses for High School Students

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Careers in Criminal Justice 1A: Introduction

Most of us have watched a sensationalized crime show at one time or another, but do we really know how things work behind those dreaded prison bars? Do we really understand all the many factors in our justice proceedings? The criminal justice system is a very complex field that requires many seriously dedicated people who are willing to pursue equal justice for all. The Careers in Criminal Justice course illuminates what those different career choices are and how the juvenile justice system, the correctional system, and the trial process all work together to maintain social order. Find out more about what really happens when the television show ends and reality begins.

Prerequisite: None

Course Length: One Semester

Required Text: There are no required textbook for this course.

Materials List: There are no required materials for this course.

Course Outline

Unit 1: Overview of Criminal Justice

Most people know that when the United States we declared its independence from Britain in 1776, it became a nation of our own. Few people, however, realize that with this newfound freedoms came the burden of responsibility. No longer subject to the laws of the monarchy, early Americans had to come up with a new system of justice—one that would keep its citizens safe from harm. Thus, the criminal justice system in the United States was born. Over the years, the American criminal justice system has undergone many changes, and it continues to adapt to new challenges and societal demands. In this unit, we will explore the history and purpose of the criminal justice system as well as its many different parts.

Unit 2: US Laws: Freedom versus Responsibility

At the very core of the criminal justice system is the law. In the last unit, we referred to the chaos that would ensue if there were no laws that citizens were expected to abide by. Laws create social order that (ideally) reflect social values. When offenders break the law, they must be punished. In this unit, we will examine the different types of laws that exist and how they work together to protect communities and ensure that justice is served.

Unit 3: Inside a Criminal Trial

You may already know that the United States government consists of three branches: the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch. Each of these three arms of the government plays a very distinctive and important role. In this unit, we will look closely at the judicial system and how it works.

Unit 4: The Juvenile Justice System

Did you know that kids as young as seven used to be sentenced and imprisoned right alongside adults? While some young offenders are still tried in adult courts today, most young people who run into trouble with the law are dealt with by the juvenile justice system. There are several key differences between the juvenile justice system and the criminal justice system, but it wasn't always this way. In this unit, we'll discuss those differences and look at how judges and courts have shaped today's juvenile justice system as we know it. We'll also examine some of the current trends in the juvenile justice system and discuss their potential to rehabilitate young offenders.

Unit 5: Jails, Prisons, and Community Corrections

Americans are fascinated with criminal activity and the legal process. Turn on the television at any given moment, and you're bound to find at least one "true crime" mystery or courtroom drama. As a result of this widespread publicity, most Americans have a basic understanding of criminal investigations and prosecutions. The same cannot be said, however, for the correctional system. Do you know what happens to a convicted criminal after he or she is handcuffed and escorted out of the courtroom? Not many people are aware of the reality of prison life. In this unit, we'll explore the types of correctional facilities employed by the United States' criminal justice system, including the programs and procedures that seek to punish and rehabilitate prisoners. You'll have the opportunity to evaluate the philosophy behind such practices and decide for yourself which facilities and strategies are effective and which do more harm than good.

Unit 6: Careers in Criminal Justice

Have you found the topics in this course interesting? Perhaps even fascinating? If so, then you may want to consider a career in criminal justice. The nature of such careers varies widely, so if the idea of arresting criminals doesn't appeal to you, rest assured that there are many other job opportunities in the field to consider. In this unit, we'll explore the vast and exciting field of criminal justice. Who knows? You may just discover your future career!

Unit 7: Evaluating Justice Ethics

As you learned in previous units, the criminal justice system is set up to protect the innocent and to punish those who break the law. In order to achieve both of these goals, legislators, law enforcement officers, and judges must exercise power over the people. As you may know, power is something that must be used very carefully. When power is abused or misused, it can corrupt the system and promote injustices—the very opposite of what the criminal justice system is intended to do. Even though professionals in the field of criminal justice take oaths and undergo extensive training in order to prevent the misuse of excessive power, many critics of the system believe that unethical practices and procedures are still rampant. In this unit, we will explore the issue of ethics in the criminal justice system, and you'll have the opportunity to make up your own mind about what's fair and what's not fair when it comes to enforcing laws and punishing criminals.

Unit 8: People Skills in Criminal Justice

Not everyone can perform the job of a law enforcement officer or a corrections officer. These careers and comparable careers in the criminal justice system require a unique skill set, including specialized interpersonal and personal skills. Because the men and women in law enforcement interact with the public on a daily basis in an attempt to protect the safety of individuals, apprehend criminals, and/or investigate crimes, a high level of social intelligence and the ability to communicate effectively with others is key. In fact, in the high-risk field of law enforcement, it could literally make the difference between life and death. Other careers in the criminal justice field also require personal and interpersonal skills. On any given day, an attorney, for example, must communicate effectively with his or her client, persuade him or her to take the best course of action, and negotiate with other lawyers to settle the case. The good news is that even if you have decided that a career in criminal justice is not for you, you still stand to benefit from the information provided in this unit. After all, employability skills are requirements for anyone who wants to be successful in finding and keeping a job of any kind!

Unit 9: Communication in Criminal Justice

Nearly all career fields have their own languages so to speak, and the field of criminal justice is no exception. Although good verbal and nonverbal communication skills can be helpful in almost any line of work, there are specific communication skills necessary for success in criminal justice. In this unit, we'll look at the types of specialized terminology and communication equipment you'll need to work in various fields of criminal justice.

Unit 10: Finding Employment in Criminal Justice

There are many job opportunities available in the criminal justice system for those who are interested in the field and willing to do what is required to earn the necessary qualifications. In this unit, we'll discuss the steps one needs to take in order to locate and evaluate job opportunities in this competitive job arena. As you complete the readings and activities for this unit, it may be helpful to keep your own individual career choice(s) in mind, even if they are outside the field of criminal justice.