



Western
UNIVERSITY · CANADA

The University of Western University

SOCIOLOGY 3423G- 001
Rethinking Punishment

Winter 2026

Instructor: Dr. Ballucci, Assistant Professor

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Course Description

This course critically examines punishment as a social, political, and legal practice that extends well beyond prisons and criminal sentencing. Rather than treating punishment as a discrete response to crime, the course explores how punishment operates through **surveillance, discipline, welfare systems, treatment regimes, and governance**, often under the language of care, protection, or rehabilitation.

Students will engage with classical theories of punishment, socio-legal and criminological scholarship, and contemporary case studies to interrogate who is punished, how punishment is justified, and what alternatives might look like. One section of the course draws on **Prosecuting Poverty, Criminalizing Care** to examine how criminal law increasingly functions as a substitute for social policy.

This course examines punishment as a social, political, and legal practice that extends far beyond prisons and criminal sentencing. Rather than focusing only on formal penal institutions, the course explores how punishment operates through **surveillance, risk management, care, welfare, treatment, and governance**—often targeting marginalized populations under the language of help, protection, or rehabilitation. Students will engage with classical theories of punishment, critical criminology, socio-legal scholarship, and contemporary case studies.

Prerequisites: Sociology 2266A/B, and registration in third year or above in a Department of Sociology module or fourth year in any module.

Unless you have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The 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.

Anti-requisite(s): Sociology 4409F/G, Sociology 4486G taught in 2010.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Explain major classical and contemporary theories of punishment
2. Identify punitive practices beyond formal criminal justice institutions
3. Analyze how punishment intersects with race, gender, class, and governance
4. Critically assess reformist, therapeutic, and abolitionist approaches
5. Apply socio-legal frameworks to contemporary policies and institutions

Course Material

All readings will be made available to students on Brightspace as a PDF link in the syllabus or via email.

Communication

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL Brightspace site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/d2l/login>) regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

How to Contact Me:

I can be contacted via email at dballucc@uwo.ca. Only emails that use proper etiquette will be answered. For example, a salutation is required. “Hello Professor Ballucci, or Dr. Ballucci” is acceptable. “Hey”, “Miss”, or the absence of a salutation is insufficient. Also, no texting terminology is acceptable. Lastly, provide me with your name, the course and the section (if applicable) you are emailing about.

Also, please do not email me questions about course content or procedures. I will take time in every class to answer these types of questions. There are, however, two main exceptions to this policy:

1. You are experiencing a personal emergency that I need to know about before the next class.
2. You want to make an appointment to see me.

I will try to respond to these emails within 24 hours on weekdays, but I answer emails infrequently on the weekends.

Method of Evaluation

1. Film Analysis February 12 - 20%
2. Punishments on Trials Labs -25%
3. Mid- Term Exam, March 5 - 25%
4. Final Exam TBA -30%

Detailed Descriptions:

1. Film Analysis 20%

This class uses a documentary film to examine punishment as a lived and institutional experience. Through guided viewing and discussion, students analyze how punishment operates beyond formal sentencing through time, waiting, family separation, surveillance, and everyday compliance. The film analysis reinforces key course concepts—such as governance, discipline, risk, and inequality—and complements insights emerging from the Punishment on Trial Labs by making forms of punishment visible that are often obscured in legal and policy discussions.

Following the in-class analysis, students will complete a **group-based written response** (approximately **1,500 words, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font**) that applies course concepts to the film. One submission per group is required. The assignment must be **submitted electronically via OWL** by the posted deadline.

2. Punishment on Trial Labs (25%)

The **Punishment on Trial Labs** are a series of structured, in-class group activities that examine punishment as a social, legal, and political practice. Across the term, the class will complete several labs, each focused on a different punishment practice (e.g., bail, parole, fines, risk-based supervision). In each lab, students work in stable groups to analyze a **shared newspaper article or court decision**, which is treated as *data* rather than something to summarize. The goal is to examine how punishment is justified, framed, and experienced, drawing on course concepts and theories. Each lab takes place during approximately **1.5 hours of class time** and will be held on the following dates: **[Lab dates are in the course schedule]**.

Each student will **present only once during the term**, as part of a designated presenting group, but all students are expected to attend and engage in every lab. When not presenting, students participate through discussion, critical listening, and a short individual written synthesis submitted at the end of class. Learning in these labs is **collective and cumulative**: different groups surface different dimensions of punishment, and students are expected to engage with all presentations, not only their own. The **final exam will draw directly on both the assigned texts and the arguments developed during in-class labs**, and students who do not attend or engage with lab discussions will be at a significant disadvantage. Full details, including responsibilities and grading criteria, are provided in **Appendix A**.

2. Midterm Exam (25%): March 5, 2026 (you will have 3 hours)

The midterm exam will be administered in class and will assess all the course material covered up to the exam date. **All materials used in the course are examinable**, including lectures, assigned readings, films, class discussions, in-class activities, and any guest lectures. The exam may include multiple-choice, true/false, matching of key concepts, fill-in-the-blank, and short-answer questions. Students are responsible for all material presented and discussed in class up to the midterm date.

Students with an approved absence from an in-class test or exam must write a makeup exam. The course professor or teaching assistant(s) may not be available to answer questions during the makeup exam. Students should be aware that the make-up test will not necessarily be in the same format, duration, or cover the same material as the original test.

2. Final Exam: Final Exam (30%): TBA

The final exam will be scheduled during the formal examination period. **The exam is not cumulative** and will assess only the course material covered **after the midterm**. All material presented, discussed, or assigned following the midterm—including lectures, readings, films, class discussions, in-class activities, and any guest lectures—is examinable.

The exam may include multiple-choice, true/false, matching of key concepts, fill-in-the-blank, and short-answer questions. Students are advised **not to make travel commitments** during the examination period. Students are expected to write their examinations honestly and in accordance with Western University's academic integrity policies. Students who do not write the final exam will fail the course; only students with appropriate documentation will be permitted to write a make-up exam.

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. No electronic devices will be allowed during tests and examinations.

Bonus Grades: Occasionally, I may provide opportunities for bonus marks. I may offer these on days with low attendance, either at the start or end of each class.

General Grading Inquiries

Questions regarding grades on any course assessment must be directed first to the Teaching Assistant, with Professor Ballucci copied on the email. Students are encouraged to take time to review their graded work, feedback, and the assignment instructions carefully, and to wait at least 24 hours before contacting instructional staff to allow for reflection and review. Requests for grade review must be submitted within 14 days of the grade being released and must be supported by a clear and specific rationale, referencing the assignment instructions, learning objectives, or grading criteria. Requests based solely on disagreement with the grade, effort invested, or general dissatisfaction (e.g., *"I thought I did better"* or *"I would like a higher grade"*) do **not** constitute valid grounds for review. Comparisons to other students' grades are also inappropriate, as grading reflects the quality and content of individual submissions and may differ for legitimate academic reasons. Please note that grading is a qualitative and evaluative process, and a re-evaluation may result in a grade that increases, decreases, or remains unchanged. All communication with instructional staff must be respectful, professional, and mindful of their time; failure to adhere to these expectations may result in the request not being considered.

Missed/Late Assignments:

Late and missed in-class assignments will not be accepted without extenuating circumstances. In-class assignments are due at the end of each class unless Dr. Ballucci says otherwise. For the film assignment, a 5% deduction will be applied for each day the assignment is late.

Student Absences:

If you are unable to meet a course requirement due to illness or other serious circumstances, please follow the procedures below.

University policy on academic considerations are described [here](#). This policy requires that all requests for academic considerations must be accompanied by a self-attestation. Further information about academic considerations, and information about submitting this self-attestation with your academic consideration request may be found [here](#). Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline.”

Students must familiarize themselves with the [Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#). Students missing course work for medical, compassionate or extenuating circumstances can request academic consideration by completing a request at the central academic consideration portal. Students are permitted one academic consideration request per course per term without supporting documentation. Note that supporting documentation is **always** required for academic consideration requests for examinations scheduled by the office of the registrar (e.g. December and April exams) and for practical laboratory and performance tests typically schedule during the last week of the term. Students should also note that the instructor may designate one assessment per course per term that requires supporting documentation. This designated assessment is described elsewhere in this document. Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor of this course, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of

Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline. Supporting documentation for academic considerations for absences due to illness should use the [Student Medical Certificate](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation by a health care practitioner.

Students with an approved absence from an in-class test or exam will be required to write a makeup exam. Course professor or teaching assistant(s) may not be available to respond to questions during the makeup exam. Students should be aware that the make-up test will not necessarily be in the same format, be of the same duration, or cover the same material as the original test.

Artificial Intelligence:

All assignments must be completed independently, without the aid of artificial intelligence (AI), unless otherwise stated by Dr. Ballucci.

Academic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for 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 (<https://www.turnitin.com/>).

Students are expected to retain all research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, your instructor may ask you to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against you.

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.

Copyright: Students may not record or distribute any class activity, including conversations during office hours, without written permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use.

Absence from Course Commitments: Students must familiarize themselves with the [Policy on Academic Consideration](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf) – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs
https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Students missing course work for medical, compassionate or extenuating circumstances can request academic consideration by completing a request using the Student Absence Portal (SAP) https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/index.html. Students are permitted one academic consideration request per course per term without supporting documentation. Note that supporting documentation is *always* required for academic consideration requests for examinations scheduled by the office of the registrar (e.g. December and April exams) and for practical laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled during the last week of the term. Students should also note that the instructor may designate one assessment per course per term that requires supporting documentation. This designated assessment is described in the course outline. Supporting documentation for academic considerations for absences due to illness must include the completed Western Student Medical Certificate (SMC) <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf> or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation by a health care practitioner. Students must request academic consideration as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

Once the request and supporting documentation have been received and reviewed, appropriate academic consideration, if granted, shall be determined by the instructor in consultation with the academic advisor, in a manner consistent with the course outline. Students with an approved absence from an in-class test or exam will be required to write a makeup exam, unless otherwise specified in the course outline. The course instructor or teaching assistant(s) may not be available to respond to questions during the makeup test/exam. Students should be aware that the make-up test/exam will not necessarily be in the same format, be of the same duration, or cover the same material as the original test/exam.

Note: missed work can *only* be excused through one of the mechanisms above. Being asked not to attend an in-person course requirement due to potential COVID-19 symptoms is **not** sufficient on its own. Students should check the Western website to see what directives for Covid are to be followed. Western has been and will continue to follow directives established by the Middlesex-London Health Unit. That directive will state whether students should or should not come to campus/class and any other requirements (e.g., masks are mandatory). Please check on your own and do not email the instructor, the Department Undergraduate Advisor/Coordinator or the Faculty Academic Counselling Office.

Students who fail to write a make-up test or special examination will receive a grade of zero on that assessment. No other make-up opportunities will be provided unless further academic consideration is granted by the student's Home Faculty Academic Counselling office.

Religious Accommodation: Students should review the policy for Accommodation for Religious Holidays https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf. Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but not later than two weeks prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Contingency plan for an in-person class pivoting to 100% online learning: In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence or University approved emergency during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, affected course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL Brightspace for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will **not** change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Code of Student Conduct: It is the responsibility of every student to read the Code and familiarize him or herself with its contents. The Code is available at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/code_of_conduct.pdf. Sanctions for non-compliance range from a warning or reprimand to expulsion from the University.

Student Responsibility: Students in a degree program must select courses in accordance with the published requirements. Students are responsible for ensuring that their selection of courses is appropriate and accurately recorded, that all course prerequisites have been successfully completed, and

that they are aware of any antirequisite course(s) they may have taken. Students must familiarize themselves with the Student Responsibility for Course Selection policy

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/general/academic_counselling.pdf and the Registration and Progression policy
https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/registration_progression.pdf. Students are responsible for the successful completion of the Graduation Requirements for their degree program
https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/graduation.pdf.

Support Services:

Office of the Registrar Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

[Faculty Academic Advising](#) - Please visit your Home Faculty Academic advising webpage for information regarding adding/dropping courses, important dates, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters
https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html.

[USC services](#) offers information about student the health/dental plan, Bus Pass, food support services, Peer support Centre etc <http://westernusc.ca/services/> .

[Mental health](#) – Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

[Health & Wellness Services](#) – Registered part-time and full-time students can book a physical health appointment at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/shs/index.html>. Additional on-campus services are also available <https://www.uwo.ca/health/shs/services/index.html>.

[Accessible Education](#) provides supports and services to students with disabilities at Western, in all programs and faculties. Students with disabilities or accessibility challenges should work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing.

[Gender-Based and Sexual Violence](#) – Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and 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 experience GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: http://uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

[Western Libraries](#) – Visit the many library locations on campus. Western Libraries provide access to material in physical and digital formats <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/catalogue/index.html>. Research support is available <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/research/index.html>.

[Writing support](#) – Online writing resources, writing support and writing modules are available <https://writing.uwo.ca/undergrads/>

Bookstore: Search for Textbook availability and cost <https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search>