

Instructor Guide for Mental Disorders and the Law

By Anne Nichol, Portland Community College

Course Description

This course for community college students was designed to be taught as an online course with no synchronous meetings over a 10 week term (with 11th week for final exam) at Portland Community College.

This course covers mental health and disability issues arising in connection with the criminal justice system, with an emphasis on challenging and preparing system professionals to improve responses to this marginalized and vulnerable population.

The course integrates with the open textbook, [Mental Disorders and the Criminal Justice System](#).

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Respond to those experiencing mental disorders with professionalism and an understanding of mental disorders.
2. Demonstrate an increased awareness of mental disorders that legal system professionals may personally experience.
3. Assess the legal and social forces that contribute to the criminalization of mental disorders in the United States.
4. Evaluate current legal mechanisms and instruments that aim to protect people with mental disorders from harm in the criminal justice system.
5. Recommend legal interventions that improve outcomes for people with mental disorders in the criminal justice system.
6. Develop critical thinking and communication skills necessary to increase transparency in the criminal justice system.

Course Scope and Structure

This course incorporates a variety of instructional materials, including: weekly online-learning activities, including independent assignments and prompts to facilitate written interactive discussions; weekly quizzes and tests; and powerpoint slides that can accompany recorded instructor lectures. Numerous open-source videos and other resources are linked throughout the course to supplement the open text.

Each week of the course follows this structure:

- Overview page providing instructor guidance, an overview narrative of the week's learning, and listing weekly learning outcomes.
- Weekly reading assignment consisting of one chapter of the open textbook per week.

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- Occasional supplemental readings (articles) or videos to augment the content or offer additional perspectives consistent with the DEI focus of the course on disability issues.
- Weekly activity that relates to and expands upon the weekly content. Assignments are independent (or small group) activities, whereas Discussions require a post and responses among peers.
- Weekly assessment (8 chapter quizzes and 2 cumulative tests, at midterm and end of term).
- A final reflection assignment designed to encourage review of the course overall and self-assessment of learning over the term.

Notes to Future Instructors:

This is an ambitious course that covers material from two broad subject areas, psychology and law. As such, the course attempts to provide instruction regarding a group of people who have historically faced mistreatment and neglect. Inevitably, and hopefully, increased concern for and visibility of this group will make some of the ideas shared and language used in the course obsolete as better information is brought forward by people with lived experience. I will eagerly adapt this course as I learn, and I encourage future instructors to do so as well. I am excited for other instructors to use – and improve – these course materials! I invite feedback, conversation, and of course, any questions about these course materials: anne.nichol@pcc.edu.