

CRJS 491-003

Social Action and Justice

Fall 2026

Instructor: Sarah Jane Brubaker, PhD

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Office Hours: Tuesday 12-1:30 in person; Wednesday 11-12 via zoom

<https://vcu.zoom.us/my/sarahjanebrubaker>

Class Location: Hibbs 0431

Class Meeting Times: Tuesdays 2-3:15 in person; Thursdays asynchronous

GTAs: Emily Cramer; Aniya Carter

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University Policies

See the following link for University Statements for Course Syllabi (this information is also at the end of the syllabus): <http://go.vcu.edu/syllabus>

Course Description

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Hybrid (in-person and asynchronous)

This service-learning course provides an opportunity for students to work directly with a community organization that interfaces with the juvenile and/or adult criminal justice systems at the local level. Students will choose from a variety of direct and indirect activities and course products and will spend 20 hours throughout the semester working with the community partner, in addition to completing course assignments. Assignments will include group work, assigned reflective journals, group presentations, and a final portfolio to allow students to synthesize their learning.

VCU Statement of Service-Learning. Service-learning at Virginia Commonwealth University is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets community-identified needs. Service activities may be direct (e.g., mentoring youth, volunteering with patients, working in community gardens) or indirect (e.g., creating research reports, designing online or print materials); may be individual or group-based; may occur either on- or off-campus; may be scheduled at varying times of the week/day; may be focused in different parts of the city; and may involve a variety of community organizations. Individual service-learning classes do not offer all of these options. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the service activity roles and options that are

available in this class and, in consultation with their instructor, to select the ones that best suit their needs and interests. Students in all VCU service-learning classes participate in reflection activities that are designed to increase students' understanding and application of course content and to enhance their sense of civic responsibility.

Social Action. This semester, we are combining service-learning with social action, which occurs when everyday people band together to develop their power in order to change policy, and it has been a part of the American experiment in democracy throughout our history. This is a course that explores our power and democracy, both of which are central to the Social Sciences. More specifically, this course examines the topics of issue development, change theory, building power, group dynamics, strategy and tactics, and campaign planning and implementation.

What is unique about this course is that students do social action rather than just learn about it. In a traditional course, students read about theories of social change, analyze social problems, read about campaigns, develop an abstract understanding of concepts, all with the professor being the “sage on the stage”. In the experiential social action model, students read about theories of social change and apply it to real world campaigns, as well as define a social problem and develop concrete, quantifiable solutions (i.e., demands). In this experiential social action model, students choose and lead campaigns and are transformed through a direct experience of democracy, all with the professor being a “guide on the side” where they are de-centered and co-creators of knowledge.

A key part of the social action model is that students have the opportunity to enact a policy (i.e., a rule, regulation, norm, or practice of an institution) on campus or in the community, with the students choosing and developing the campaigns on their own rather than assigned by the instructor.

Another key feature of the social action model is the topic and flow of the course. The motto of this model is “On Your Mark, Go, Get Set.” In order to launch the campaigns by mid-semester, students go through the issue development process (identifying demands and targets) in the opening days of the class. By choosing the campaigns by the 4th or 5th class, students have enough time to learn about all of the necessary aspects of social change, and then to launch a campaign by the ninth week, and still have almost half a semester to do several actions.

*Students' time devoted to social action campaigns focused on the juvenile legal system can be considered indirect service learning hours, but I hope that all students will contribute at least 5 service hours specifically to the organization.

Student Learning Outcomes – B.S. in Criminal Justice

Upon completing this program, students will know and know how to do the following:

1. Students will be able to identify and understand the structure and job functions within police organizations, models of policing, constitutional rights associated with policing, police corruption and ethics, procedural justice and its impacts on police legitimacy, and use of force. Students will develop the ability to apply these principles to actual cases and solve problems.
2. Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the types and sources of law, jurisdiction, structure and functions of state and federal courts, the impact of discretion, the dynamics of courthouse justice, the role of courtroom workgroup dynamics, and steps in criminal cases, including sentencing issues and post-conviction relief. Students will develop the ability to apply knowledge to actual cases and solve problems.
3. Students will develop knowledge of the history and philosophies of punishment and the influence of the Enlightenment period on the development of the Positivist School, and identify the structure of jails and prisons, including the role of correctional officers and management, community corrections programs, probation and parole, preventive detention and bail systems, and basic inmates' rights. Students will develop the ability to apply these principles to actual cases and solve problems.

*This course focuses primarily on SLO #3, helping students learn about the history of the juvenile legal system in the US and in Virginia and its evolution over time based on changing philosophies of punishment.

Student Learning Outcomes - Social Action

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

1. conduct issue development
2. build power
3. implement various strategies and tactics
4. conduct research (historical analysis, power map, target analysis)
5. work with the media
6. perform campaign implementation and evaluation plans

Required Course Materials

Books:

Myers-Lipton, Scott. 2023. *CHANGE! A Student Guide to Social Action*, Second Edition

Assigned Articles:

Cleary, H., & Bull, R. (2021). Contextual factors predict self-reported confession decision-making: A field study of suspects' actual police interrogation experiences. *Law and Human Behavior*, 45(4), 310.

Donnelly, Ellen A. "Do disproportionate minority contact (DMC) mandate reforms change decision-making? Decomposing disparities in the juvenile justice system." *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 17, no. 3 (2019): 288-308.

Morgan, H. (2021). Restorative justice and the school-to-prison pipeline: A review of existing literature. *Education Sciences*, 11(4), 159.

Reports:

The Sentencing Project. 2026. Restorative Justice Diversion. A Meaningful Way to Provide Meaningful Accountability.

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2026/03/Restorative-Justice-Diversion-A-Better-Way-to-Provide-Meaningful-Accountability-for-Youth.pdf?emci=d3f56eff-7d28-f111-9a48-000d3a14b640&emdi=c9d7d53c-1e29-f111-9a48-000d3a14b640&ceid=14243225>

Assignments and Grading Policy

Reflective journals 5x10 = 50 points

Portfolios 8x20 = 160

Final presentation = 75 points

Log = 75 points

Total = 360 points

Based on a 10-point scale, final grades will be calculated as follows:

A=324 and above

B=288-323

C=252-287

D=216-251

F=215 and below

Course Meeting Schedule

We will meet ***in person every Tuesday from 2-3:15*** and Thursdays will be for group work, meetings with the instructor and/or community partner, service learning tasks, or independent work.

Attendance at in-person sessions is required. Each student is allowed 1 absence. Additional absences will each result in a 5-point deduction from the final grade.

Course Schedule (The instructor reserves the right to make changes or adjustments to the syllabus.)

Black font = readings on Canvas or websites

Purple font = readings from *CHANGE! A Student Guide to Social Action*
Portfolio assignments are in the *CHANGE!* book

<u>Week</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Subject Topic</u>	<u>Social Action Content</u>	<u>Readings to Complete before Tuesday</u>	<u>Assignments Due by Sunday at midnight</u>
1	8/18-8/20	Introduction to the course		Review Syllabus and Canvas site	
2	8/25-8/27	Meeting with RISE for Youth	<i>Social Action: Issue development</i>	Review RFY website https://www.riseforyouth.org/ and bring questions for the RFY reps <i>Introduction (XI-XVII) & Ch. 1 (p. 1-6)</i>	Journal 1
3	9/1-9/3	History of the Juvenile Legal System in the US and VA	<i>Social Action: Issue development</i>	Review Powerpoint JLARC Report <i>Ch. 1 (p. 7-18)</i>	<i>Portfolio 1</i>
4	9/8-9/10	ACEs and Trauma	<i>Social Action: Setting the tone</i>	<u>Trauma-informed juvenile justice systems: A systematic review of definitions and core components - PMC</u> <i>Ch. 2 (p. 20-25)</i>	Journal 2 <i>Portfolio 2</i>
5	9/15-9/17	Race in the JL System	<i>Social Action: Change Theory</i>	Donnelly (2018) <i>Ch. 3 (p. 28-40)</i>	Log 1 <i>Portfolio 3</i>
6	9/22-9/24	Gender in the JL System	<i>Social Action: Building Power</i>	Baidawi et al. (2023) <i>Ch. 4 (p. 43-50)</i>	Journal 3

7	9/29-10/1	School to Prison Pipeline	<i>Social Action:</i> Building Power	School-to-Prison Pipeline American Civil Liberties Union Morgan (2021) Ch. 4 (p. 51-58)	Portfolio 4
8	10/6-10/8	Adolescent Development, Interrogation, and False Confessions	<i>Social Action:</i> Research	Cleary, H., Guarnera, L. A., Aaron, J., & Crane, M. (2021). Ch. 5 (p. 60-71)	Portfolio 5
9	10/13-10/15	Juvenile Corrections		Youth Justice by the Numbers	Journal 4 Log 2
10	10/20-10/22	Restorative Justice	<i>Social Action:</i> Group dynamics	RJ and Diversion Ch. 6 (p. 72-79)	Portfolio 6
11	10/27-10/29		<i>Social Action:</i> Strategy and Tactics	Ch. 7 (p. 81-88)	
12	11/3-11/5		<i>Social Action:</i> Strategy and Tactic	Ch. 7 (p. 89-97)	Portfolio 7
13	11/10-11/12		<i>Social Action:</i> Campaign Kickoff	Ch. 8 (p. 99-106)	
14	11/17-11/19		<i>Social Action:</i> Campaign Kickoff	Ch. 8 (p. 107-112)	Portfolio 8
15	11/24-11/26	Fall Break	No Class		
16	12/1-12/3	Present Final Portfolios 12/1			
17	12/8-12/10	Exam Week	Campaign Evaluation	Ch. 10 (p. 122-124)	Portfolio Binder Journal 5 Log 3

Instructions for Assignments:

Reflective journals

Five times through the course, students will respond to specific prompts about the assigned materials as well as assigned activities and share their learning experiences. Journal entries will be graded on writing, responses to questions, and depth of analysis and reflection.

Portfolio, log, and presentation

Students will develop a portfolio of their work throughout the course related to issue development, history of the issue, strategies, group work, and messaging. Individual portfolio assignments are in the CHANGE! textbook.

Students will log the time they devote to the community partner to ensure they meet the **20-hour requirement** using forms provided by the instructor.

Students will present their work to the class at the end of the semester.

These assignments will be graded for thoroughness/comprehensiveness, critical thinking and analysis, depth of knowledge gained, integration of course materials, teamwork, and oral and written communication.

Class Discussion Community Agreements (courtesy of Black Women's Blueprint, <http://www.blackwomensblueprint.org/>):

- one mic
- stories stay, lessons go
- take space, make space
- be mindful of language
- challenge assumptions
- be present and engaged
- ask questions
- respect identities and pronouns
- lean into discomfort

Additional Recommended/Optional Readings:

Abrams, L. S. (2013). Juvenile justice at a crossroads: Science, evidence, and twenty-first century reform. *Social Service Review*, 87(4), 725-752.

Andersen, Tia Stevens. "Race, ethnicity, and structural variations in youth risk of arrest:

Evidence from a national longitudinal sample." *Criminal justice and behavior* 42, no. 9 (2015): 900-916.

Baglivio, Michael T., Kevin T. Wolff, Nathan Epps, and Randy Nelson. "Predicting adverse childhood experiences: The importance of neighborhood context in youth trauma among delinquent youth." *Crime & Delinquency* 63, no. 2 (2017): 166-188.

Belenko, S., Dennis, M., Hiller, M., Mackin, J., Cain, C., Weiland, D., ... & Kagan, R. (2022). The Impact of Juvenile Drug Treatment Courts on Substance Use, Mental Health, and Recidivism: Results from a Multisite Experimental Evaluation: BELENKO et al. *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*, 49(4), 436-455.

Benier, Kathryn, and Suzanna Fay-Ramirez. "Ethnicity, Immigration, and the Experience of Incarceration." *The Handbook of Race, Ethnicity, Crime, and Justice* (2018): 371.

Bishop, Donna M., Michael Leiber, and Joseph Johnson. "Contexts of decision making in the juvenile justice system: An organizational approach to understanding minority overrepresentation." *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 8, no. 3 (2010): 213-233.

Brubaker, S. J., & Cleary, H. M. (2023). Connection and caring through a therapeutic juvenile corrections model: Staff and youth resident perceptions of structural and interpersonal dimensions. *International journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology*, 67(4), 373-397.

Carr, N. T., Hudson, K., Hanks, R. S., & Hunt, A. N. (2008). Gender effects along the juvenile justice system: Evidence of a gendered organization. *Feminist Criminology*, 3(1), 25-43.

Cavanagh, C., Paruk, J., & Grisso, T. (2022). The developmental reform in juvenile justice: Its progress and vulnerability. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 28(2), 151.

Cleary, H., Guarnera, L. A., Aaron, J., & Crane, M. (2021). How trauma may magnify risk of involuntary and false confessions among adolescents. *Wrongful Conv. L. Rev.*, 2, 173.

Dembo, R. (2022). Introduction to Special Section on Public Health in Juvenile Justice: R. Dembo. *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*, 49(4), 420-421.

Dierkhising, Carly B., Andrea Lane, and Misaki N. Natsuaki. "Victims behind bars: A preliminary study of abuse during juvenile incarceration and post-release social and emotional functioning." *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 20, no. 2 (2014): 181.

Dietsche, L. A. (2020). Poetic justice: Juvenile justice alternatives and the road to a poetic criminology.

Elliott, D. S., Buckley, P. R., Gottfredson, D. C., Hawkins, J. D., & Tolan, P. H. (2020). Evidence-based juvenile justice programs and practices: A critical review. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 19(4), 1305-1328.

Goodkind, S. (2005). Gender-specific services in the juvenile justice system: A critical examination. *Affilia*, 20(1), 52-70.

Hemez, P., Brent, J. J., & Mowen, T. J. (2020). Exploring the school-to-prison pipeline: How school suspensions influence incarceration during young adulthood. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 18(3), 235-255.

Holsinger, K., & Hodge, J. P. (2016). The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender girls in juvenile justice systems. *Feminist Criminology*, 11(1), 23-47.

Kimbrell, C. S., Wilson, D. B., & Olaghere, A. (2023). Restorative justice programs and practices in juvenile justice: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis for effectiveness. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 22(1), 161-195.

Lawson, C. L., & Katz, J. (2004). Restorative justice: An alternative approach to juvenile crime. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 33(2), 175-188.

Lowery, Patrick G., and John D. Burrow. "Concentrated disadvantage, racial disparities, and juvenile institutionalization within the context of attribution theory." *Criminal Justice Studies* 32, no. 4 (2019): 330-355.

Myers, D. M., & Farrell, A. F. (2008). Reclaiming lost opportunities: Applying public health models in juvenile justice. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30(10), 1159-1177.

Paik, Leslie. "Good parents, bad parents: Rethinking family involvement in juvenile justice." *Theoretical Criminology* 21, no. 3 (2017): 307-323.

Additional/Optional Reports:

Mendel, Richard. March 20, 2024. Protect and Redirect: America's Growing Movement to Divert Youth Out of the Justice System. The Sentencing Project.
<https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/protect-and-redirect-americas-growing-movement-to-divert-youth-out-of-the-justice-system/>

Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice. 2024. Data Resource Guide.
https://www.djj.virginia.gov/documents/about-djj/drg/FY2024_DRG.pdf

Rovner, Joshua. May 27, 2026. Youth Courts vs. Adult Courts: Why the Juvenile Justice System Works Better. The Sentencing Project.

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/policy-brief/youth-courts-vs-adult-courts-why-the-juvenile-justice-system-works-better/>

Other recommended resources (websites and videos):

• <u>Learning Policy Institute school discipline report</u>
• <u>Child Trauma</u>
• <u>Trauma-informed JJ</u>
• <u>Transforming Juvenile Probation</u>
• <u>Juvenile Law Center on Youth Justice</u>
• <u>Voices for Virginia's Children website</u>
• <u>Bryan Stevenson TED Talk</u>
• <u>ACLU Toolkits</u>
<u>National Collaborative for Transformative Youth Policy</u>