

Gangs: Causes and Consequences

Department of Sociology
University of Colorado Boulder

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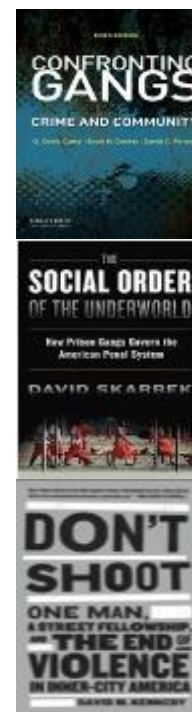
Text

Required:

Curry, G. David, Scott H. Decker, and David C. Pyrooz. 2014. *Confronting gangs: Crime and community* (3rd edition), New York: Oxford University Press.

Skarbek, David. 2014. *The social order of the underworld: How prison gangs govern the American penal system*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kennedy, David M. 2011. *Don't shoot: One man, a street fellowship, and the end of violence in inner-city America*. Bloomsbury.



Course Description and Objectives

This course provides students with a comprehensive introduction to street and prison gangs. The substantive focus of this course is the causes and consequences of, and responses to, gang behaviors and processes. Students will be exposed to a range of issues related to gangs.

By the end of the semester, students will:

- Gain factual knowledge on concepts, trends, and the myths and realities of gangs;
- Learn to apply course material to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions;
- Be able to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view related to the processes and behaviors of gangs, gang members, and communities;
- Recognize the public policy and practical implications surrounding the existence and responses to gangs

Grading

Attendance	.	.	.	.	.	50
Topical summary	.	.	.	.	.	150
Social media	.	.	.	.	.	150
Final essays	.	.	.	.	.	150

Grading scale: (-/+ 0-2/8-9)	A:	100-90%	450 – 500 points
	B:	89-80%	400 – 449
	C:	79-70%	350 – 399
	D:	69-60%	300 – 349
	E:	<60%	< 300

Attendance

Attendance will be taken randomly. You may miss one class period without any penalty; each absence thereafter will correspond with a 2-point reduction in attendance points. Participation will be gauged by student involvement in lecture and classroom discussion. Quizzes may be given as a means to take attendance. Attendance is worth 10% of your final grade.

Topical Summary

Objective: To convey your understanding of the readings—including theory, research, and policy—for each topic covered in the course and to reflect on the significance of these readings.

Details: You are to identify one aspect of the readings that you found interesting on a given topic. This could entail a theoretical perspective (e.g., selection-facilitation-enhancement models), a research fact (e.g., gender and racial/ethnic disparities in gang involvement), or a policy (e.g., civil gang injunctions). You are to elaborate on this aspect of the readings by writing about: Why you found it interesting? Why is it important? How does it mesh with what is known about gangs? How does it change how you think about gangs? How would it change how others think about gangs? It is expected that you use your own words to summarize the subject area, using language drawn verbatim from your books or other sources sparingly and in quotations.

Assignment requirements include:

- A minimum of 1 page of text, but not more than 2 pages of text
- Single-spaced (no additional line or paragraph spacing)
- 1” margins all around
- Times New Roman 12 point font
- No separate title page (include a title on the line above the main text)
- Provide a title at the top of the paper, followed immediately by the main text
- Submit via D2L on the Sunday (11:59pm) after the topic area was concluded in lecture

Topical summaries will be graded as “thumbs down” (=0, incomplete), “thumbs sideways” (=1, marginally complete), and “thumbs up” (=2, fully complete). This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade.

Social Media

Objective: To examine authenticity and performance of gang ties in music videos—namely, rap/hip-hop and punk/metal genres—posted on social media websites. There is considerable speculation that the tentacles of gangs extend to music videos, including their financing, branding, and dissemination, which are supposedly evident in the lyrics and images. It is also believed that these videos are authentic rather than the performative representations of gangs.

Details: You are to (1) identify, (2) transcribe, and (3) code music, and then (4) synthesize the themes found in videos, posted on social media websites (e.g., YouTube) with alleged gang ties for a single, western city in the United States. Additional requirements of this assignment are as follows:

1. *Identifying.*

- Depending on the grade you select for this assignment (see below), you will identify between 5 and 12 music videos posted on YouTube in the last five years.
- You are to focus on videos that have purported gang ties. This will require that you learn about gangs and gang activity in the western city that you are assigned, which can be done via online searching into the gang nations, symbols, signs, geography and territory, violence, rivalries, and criminal justice system responses (e.g., www.streetgangs.com; LexisNexis).
- While it is expected that rap/hip-hop videos will be the dominant genre represented in these videos, you are encouraged to seek out punk/metal videos as well, which may also contain gang-related themes with radical/extremist bent.
- The videos you identify must be “underground”, i.e., the musicians are generally not assigned to a major label, the lyrics are not posted on common lyric websites, and the number of views is less than one million. Also, the videos must not be composed only of still shots (i.e., pictures).

2. *Transcribing.*

- Once you have selected a video, you are then required to transcribe the video, i.e., write down the entirety of the lyrics of the song. The lyrics must be written verbatim, regardless of the content.
- This will take time, usually about 5 minutes of transcribing per one minute of lyrics.

3. *Coding.*

- You will be responsible for documenting the content found in the lyrics and the video of the song.
- In a spreadsheet that will be provided to students, you will document the name of the song, the musician, the year it was posted, the number of views, a URL to the video, and numerous aspects of the lyrics and video that are central to this assignment, including gang- and non-gang-related themes. Examples include: race/ethnicity, substance use, material wealth, weapons, shooting gestures, masculinity, misogyny, gang authenticity and/or performance, active and passive forms of violence and threats, hate speech, fatalism/nihilism, anti-police rhetoric, and pros-social themes. Additional these can be identified by students. How to operationalize these themes will be provided in a handout.
- A spreadsheet will be submitted via D2L for each individual video.

4. *Synthesizing.*

- The last part of this assignment will require you to synthesize what you have observed and documented in the videos that you have identified and transcribed.
- This will be a written assignment, due Week 16 of the semester (more info to follow).
- Readings from the class—both the books assigned, along with the citations found inside of the books—must be included in the paper (>10 citations to journals/books).

The social media assignment has two components where you will be graded. First, you get to choose your grade on this assignment based on the number of videos you identify, transcribe, and code, as follows:

- “A” = 12 videos
- “B” = 10 videos
- “C” = 8 videos
- “D” = 5 videos

Second, your grade will also be determined by how well you synthesize the themes found in the videos. Similar to the topical summary, scores of “thumbs down,” “thumbs sideways,” and “thumbs up” will be used, as follows:

- 12 videos = 135, 143, and 150
- 10 videos = 120, 128, and 133
- 8 videos = 105, 113, and 118
- 5 videos = 90, 98, and 103

You are almost guaranteed to receive the grade that corresponds with the number of videos you have identified, transcribed, and coded; however, exceptions will be made in the case of extremely poor syntheses of the videos. This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade. Parts 1 to 3 (identifying, transcribing, and coding) will be submitted bi-weekly until you reach your desired grade, and due dates are provided in the course schedule below.

* Disclaimer: this assignment, including the videos that will be shown in class, will contain language and images that some, if not all, would consider (1) violent, (2) overtly hostile to individuals in certain racial and ethnic groups, and (3) misogynistic and abusive toward women and LGBTQ groups. Students will be given the option to leave class at the beginning of the video, and return after the video is shown. If you feel as if these words and images would cause discomfort to the point where it would prevent you from completing your assignment, it is advised that you disenroll from this course.

Final Essays

Objective: The final essays will evaluate your knowledge and understanding of the materials covered in the readings, lectures, and classroom discussions, as well as your ability to deeply engage and critically analyze contemporary issues related to gangs.

Details: You will be presented with four questions in which answers have opposing and sometimes clashing views. While there is no right or wrong side of the debate, you must choose one side and develop an argument that supports this view of the issue. You will be graded on the overall body of your responses to the questions, which includes a combination of crafting the argument and the logic employed, the integration of theory and empirical evidence to support your position, and general issues pertaining to writing (e.g., grammar, punctuation, spelling, citations, etc.).

The final essays are a take-home assignment. All materials—notes, books, articles, Google Scholar—is available to you, with two exceptions:

1. The words you submit must be your own and any language or ideas taken from published works must be cited correctly, and
2. You must not work with fellow students enrolled in this class on this assignment.

The questions will be announced one week before the final essays are due. There will be no length minimum or maximum on the final essays. Hard copies of the final exam will be collected on May 11 (and attendance taken). The final essays are worth 30% of your final grade.

Course Schedule

	Topic	Reading	Assn. Due
Week 1: Jan 17, 19	Syllabus and a brief introduction to gangs		
Week 2: Jan 24, Jan 26	1. What's a gang? A gang member? Gang activity?	CDP: 1	TS 1
Week 3: Jan 31, Feb 2	2. Who's in gangs? And why?	CDP: 2	SM 1-2 TS 2
Week 4: Feb 7, 9	3. Where are gangs? And why?	CDP: 2 S: 1-3	TS 3
Week 5: Feb 14, 16	4. How are gangs organized and structured?	CDP: 3 S: 4-6	SM 3-4 TS 4
Week 6: Feb 21, 23	5. How and why do you join, persist, and leave gangs?	CDP: 4	TS 5
Week 7: Feb 28, Mar 2	6. Why is "gang" synonymous with crime and violence?	CDP: 5	SM 5-6 TS 6
Week 8: Mar 7, 9	7. Are gangs American exceptionalism?	CDP: 7	TS 7
Week 9: Mar 14, 16	8. Why aren't there more girls in gangs?	CDP: 6	SM 7-8 TS 8
Week 10: Mar 21, 23	9. Why aren't there more whites and Asians in gangs?	K	TS 9
Week 11: Mar 28, 30	No class: Spring Break		SM 9-10
Week 12: Apr 4, 6	10. Are gangs invading our social institutions?	CDP: 8	TS 10
Week 13: Apr 11, 13	11. Gangs in the system: Cops, courts, corrections	CDP: 9 K	SM 11-12 TS 11
Week 14: Apr 18, 20	12. Gangs in the system: Cops, courts, corrections		TS 12
Week 15: Apr 25, 27	13. What works? Prevention	CDP: 10 K	TS 13
Week 16: May 2, 4	14. What works? Intervention	CDP: 10 S: 7	SM Synth. TS 14
Week 17: May 11	Final exam: 1:30 to 4:00pm		Essays

CDP: Curry, Decker, and Pyrooz—Confronting gangs

S: Skarbek—Social order of the underworld

K: Kennedy—Don't shoot

SM: Social media video submission

SM Synth=Social media video synthesis

TS: Topical summary

*This syllabus and corresponding class schedule are subject to change

Contact

Email is the best option. For general questions, especially related to D2L and absences, please email Kendra.Clark@colorado.edu. Please cc David.Pyrooz@colorado.edu on all emails. The subject line should include the course name (SOCY 4004 – Gangs). Emails that lack a greeting, main text, and sign off may not be acknowledged. Emails that contain questions that could be answered by reading the syllabus will be responded to with “Please consult the syllabus.”

Discrimination

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU-Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. CU-Boulder will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. For purposes of this CU-Boulder policy, "Protected Classes" refers to race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSC) at 303-492-5550. Information about the OIEC, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be found at the [OIEC website](#). The [full policy on discrimination and harassment](#) contains additional information.

Late Policy

Arrive prior to 3:30pm. Late arrivals may be considered absent for that class period.

Classroom Code of Conduct

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, disability, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the [policies on classroom behavior](#) and [the student code](#).

Electronic Device Policy

Non-disruptive occasional use of cell phones is permitted. Device sound alerts must be turned off during class. Tablets and laptops may be used strictly for class purposes at your my discretion. All interpersonal communication is prohibited. Audio and video recordings are not permitted. Any deviation from the aforementioned policy must be discussed with the me beforehand.

Academic Integrity Policy and Student Honor Code

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to [the academic integrity policy](#) of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Additional information regarding the [Honor Code policy can be found online](#) and at the [Honor Code Office](#).

Services for Students with Disabilities

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to your professor a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (for exam accommodations provide your letter at least one week prior to the exam) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or by e-mail at dsinfo@colorado.edu. If you have a temporary medical

condition or injury, see [Temporary Injuries guidelines](#) under the Quick Links at the [Disability Services website](#) and discuss your needs with your professor.

Writing Center

If you need help with writing, visit the CU-Boulder Writing Center. Writing tutors will work with you one-on-one at any stage of the writing process (brainstorming, generating a draft, organizing a draft, or revising a draft) for any written assignment. Consult their website for resources <http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter.html>

Religious Accommodations

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. See [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

Withdrawals

Students wishing to withdraw are cautioned to follow formal procedures outlined by the University <http://www.colorado.edu/registrar/registration-grades/adddrop-courses>