

Mapping the Criminal Legal System: A Day-One Activity for an Undergraduate Psych-Law Course

I was thrilled to receive the 2022 AP-LS Teaching and Mentoring award from the Teaching, Training, and Careers Committee. I mark this award as one of my most meaningful accomplishments. Big thank you's to Drs. Cindy Najdowski and Christopher Kelly for nominating me. I know that I would not be where I am today without the benefit of exemplary, caring mentors and key teachers. It is my most sincere hope that I pay forward the mentoring I received to my students and junior colleagues.

I describe here an activity developed for the first or second day of an undergraduate psych-law course. It is an initial activity to use before readings have been assigned. I have used it at least half a dozen times and have found it to be an engaging activity for the students. The primary purpose is to introduce the substance and types of research conducted by psycho-legal scholars, and how and where such research fits into the criminal legal system.

The basic activity is to Map the Criminal Legal System, which involves two main parts. Part one is the creation of the map itself, and part two is the overlay of psych-law research onto the mapped-out continuum.

Part One:

Mapping the Criminal Legal System

First, explain the basic concept of the activity to the class. Specifically, that student groups should create a map of the criminal legal system. They should begin in the community, laying out all possible events that may occur to an individual as they make their way through the system; as well as all possible actors involved; all possible outcomes.

Emphasize to students that they should be as detailed as possible--to think about very specific events and not just major ones; no event/role/outcome is too small. Most students think about the experiences of a person arrested for a crime, but the map can also include the experiences of victims, witnesses, courtroom actors, prison officials, etc. For example, community occurrences could include the crime itself, the victim's routine activity, the perpetrator planning the crime, etc. Stating examples such as these are helpful to jump start students' thinking and to further clarify the activity.

Second, explain that students should create this map using whatever they know (or think they know) about the criminal legal system, which could come from personal experience, watching Law and Order, other courses, etc. I teach in a criminology, law and society (CLS) department, so most of the students in this course are CLS majors, and often include students who double major in psychology. I also teach this course as a 400-level course, so most students are juniors and seniors who have taken several courses relevant to the criminal legal system previously. But this exercise can be done with freshman as well.

Third, break the students into groups. Multiple group activities throughout the semester is beneficial for developing a sense of classroom community or culture, and this initial activity can be an opportunity to create semi-permanent groups within the class culture. Borrowing loosely from aspects of Team-Based Learning (<https://learntbl.ca/team/>), my focus has been to pose questions to form diverse groups. Questions to the students may include: 1) Have you ever worked in a criminal legal setting before?



Dr. Allison Redlich

TTC Award Recipient

The Teaching Tips Column welcomes the contribution of Dr. Allison Redlich as guest columnist, and one of the AP-LS 2022 Teaching and Mentoring award winners. Dr. Redlich, a University Professor in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University, has over 21 years of teaching and mentoring experience with undergraduate and graduate students and is in a unique position for teaching and mentoring within a multi-disciplinary environment – psychology and law and criminology and criminal justice. In describing “A Day-One Activity for an Undergraduate Psych-Law Course”, Dr. Redlich takes us through an initial lesson on introducing the field of psychology and law with the aim of engaging student interest in the justice system and the role that scholars play within it. Thank you, Dr. Redlich, for taking the time to share this teaching tip with our community.

Kim McClure, Ph.D., Past-Chair
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2) Were you born and raised in the state where the college/university you're attending is? 3) Are you a department major (e.g., in Criminal Law and Society, Psychology, etc.)? About four to six students in each group is ideal but this depends on the size of your class.

Fourth, students work on their maps in these structured groups. It is often helpful, as the instructor, to walk around visiting the groups, which helps to ensure that all students are participating. Instructor observation also helps to ensure that you are available to answer any questions students may have.

Fifth, have the first group that finishes draw their map (e.g., on the whiteboard) where the rest of the groups can see it. As groups continue to finish, new events/roles/outcomes can be added to the first group's map. Use different color markers to distinguish between group maps. Depending on the number of groups and the time available, instructors can facilitate discussion by completing the map by having groups identify what may be missing after all groups are represented. There is often overlap between the groups on major events such as jury trials, sentencing, and prison. There is also a great deal of unique input from the groups.

Part Two: Overlaying Psychology and Law Research onto the Map

The second part is to overlay recent psychology and law research onto the criminal legal system map. Recent volumes of *Law and Human Behavior and Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* can facilitate this process. Instructors can bring actual, physical copies of journals to class, print out recent Tables of Content, or by having students explore journals' websites. Online may be the best option as it can help familiarize students with scholarly publications, introduce them to professional writing, and allow for the instructor and students to view the abstract and access the article if more information is needed.

Depending on time constraints, have students from each group read aloud one or two titles and then have the class try and determine where it fits on the map. For example, a recent LHB title is, "The detrimental effect of alcohol intoxication on facets of Miranda comprehension" (Mindthoff et al., 2022). Typically, students will name administration of Miranda warnings as an event, and thus it is easy to place this research there. But if Miranda was not mentioned, this serves as an opportunity to educate students about an aspect of the criminal legal system they did not think about, but that psychology and law scholars consider.

Another example involves research that might address multiple aspects of the map, "Breaking rules for moral reasons: Development and validation of the prosocial and antisocial rule-breaking (PARB) scale" (Hennigan & Cohn, 2022). This research could be placed in multiple places on a map such as in the community before arrest, and in jail/prison. Thus, serving another pedagogical purpose, the instructor can make the point that research can have implications for many different places on a map. This example and others allow for deeper instruction about the variety and type of scholarly content and the multiple applications research professionals may have across the criminal justice system as reflected on the students' map. That is, scholars in Psychology and Law create and validate measures, conduct experiments, surveys, interviews, analyze administrative datasets, etc. This activity also facilitates discussion on how sub-fields within psychological disciplines (e.g., cognitive, social, developmental) play a role in the criminal legal system. In short, there are many teachable moments to be had from this activity.

Mapping the Criminal Legal system is a dynamic process in the classroom that can be varied and tailored to meet different instructors' goals and learning objectives. It fosters basic knowledge about aspects of the legal system, but also enhances and expands discussion for student understanding of science as the evidence-basis for evidence-based practices. Things to consider when implementing this activity include the number of students and how much time is available. This activity fits well within a single class duration of 1hr and 15 minutes with typically 35-50 students. It could also be modified and distributed across 2 class sessions with a duration of 50 minutes. Day 1 might involve developing the map in groups and having students find scholarly sources to bring into the next class period to further develop the connection between the map and the Psychology and Law scholarship. Though I have not attempted an online version, I believe adjustments could be made easily enough to accommodate this activity for an asynchronous, online class.

This activity often works best in conjunction with a lecture introducing the field of psychology and law. Part of the lecture is to review the contrasts between psychology (e.g., probabilistic, theoretical) and the law (e.g., case-specific, reactive) and the 'roots' of our field (see Brigham, 1999). Early roots include the development of the M'Naghten insanity case, Guy Whipple's papers on memory and witness testimony, whereas later roots include the development of AP-LS, scientific review papers on eyewitness identifications (Wells et al., 1998, 2020) and police interrogations (Kassin et al., 2010), and the Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychology (APA, 2013). In discussing these classic and contemporary events, the course discussion leads back to the map, further demonstrating the impact of the field on the criminal legal system. It also emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to addressing current and future challenges at the interface of Psychology and Law.

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