

Working With Youth Gangs

The School of Social Work

The University of Texas at Austin

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Course Overview

Gangs are social groupings that have norms that violate the laws and social norms of the larger society. Gangs range in characteristics from youth associations that will appear among grade school youngsters and neighborhood young adolescents to more tightly organized street gangs to security threat groups in prisons to social enterprises that may last for several generations. In some cultures gang-like entities serve as rites of passage to adulthood. Among the Plains Indians, for example, raiding parties of young men would prey on neighboring tribes, Mexican and Anglo settlements and much of the raiding was to demonstrate strength, bravery and cunning. Cultures of antiquity such as the Greek and the Roman used youth gangs as preparation for entering into warrior societies as did the Normans of Scandinavia. Late in the 19th Century, popular writing depicted gangs in cities like New York and London preying on unwary citizens. Much of Charles Dickens' writings concerned young gangs in London. Both Japan and China are noted for gang structures such as Tongs of China and the Yakuza of Japan that last for generations. Males have been far more visible as gang members in the past but there is an increase in female members of gangs but exclusively female gangs are rare. No culture is without some example of gang activity.

Gang activity or visibility varies over the years. Substantial gang activity occurred after the Civil War, during the Great Depression, in the early 60's and the late 80's. Visibility has increased in the last 5 years in most of the United States and Mexico is beset with powerful and violent gangs in recent years.

This course will approach gangs from the perspective of social groups and view gang activity from that orientation. It will include material on how to identify and work with gangs as well as reasons for gang membership. Four major types of gangs will receive

attention. Social groups as they appear in middle, high schools and colleges will be one type. A second type is street gangs that are the most familiar for many people and receive frequent media attention. A third type will be adult criminal gangs such as motorcycle gangs, prison gangs (security threat groups) or gangs engaged in large scale rackets such as the distribution and sale of drugs, prostitution and protection. A fourth will be international gangs such as those of Salvadorian refugees, Mexican drug cartels, and terrorist entities.

Course Objectives

1. Examine the relative incidence and history of gangs among youth and young adults
2. Examine the structure of youth gangs as social groups and extend those concepts to formal and informal adult organizations
3. Examine the relations between adolescent self-development, the role of peer groups and the influence of peer culture
4. Understand approaches being used by police, prosecutors, community groups and the schools to prevent the development of gangs
5. Overview conceptual material and direct contact with community programs to work with gangs and gang prevention
6. Review current research and policy issues in dealing with gang activity in Austin
7. Examine the role of youth in gang membership and terrorism

Course Texts

Shelden, Randall G., Tracy, Sharon K., and Brown, William B. (2009) *Youth Gangs in American Society*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.

Required readings will be posted at the class web site.

Additional readings as assigned. Assigned use of the Internet is a class requirement.

Student Responsibilities

1. This is an upper division class and mature work is expected. Some material is confidential and students will be expected to maintain any restricted information to themselves. Attend class regularly. Attendance will be taken and counts toward final grade. Each missed day will deduct 2% from the final grade. Late and leaving early count as a miss.
2. During class time, no cell phones, pagers or iPod devices or reading material other than text and notes. If you text in class, you will be asked to drop the class.
3. Hats and caps off during class.
4. No food or drink during class.
5. Check class Blackboard site weekly at <http://courses.utexas.edu>
6. Come prepared to class to participate. Instructor will ask questions about material including Blackboard postings and you will want to be prepared.
7. Dress appropriately. We will have guest speakers that you may see in other settings and that watch what we do and who we are at the University closely.

Basis for Grades and Dates of Exams and Papers

Participation	25%	Daily Attendance, Preparation, and Participation in class and at the web site
Weekly Class Exams	35%	Scantron Scored
Class Final	40%	Friday, July 8, 2011 (if enrolled for graduate credit, paper will account for 20% and exam for 20%).

Class Participation

This class will consist of lectures, presentations from area leaders, and class exercises. Class attendance and participation is required.

The instructor will moderate a discussion group for the class and members are to participate in this Web-based group. You will be expected to post an item or reply on the DISCUSSION AREA each week. Friday will be the day that the week's discussion is due for completion. If you do not have home or work access to the web, many University facilities including at the School of Social Work are available.

This section pertains only to those enrolled for graduate credit.

Paper Topics for Persons Enrolled for Graduate Credit

You Must Propose a Topic to the Professor by Thursday, June 9

History of an Austin Gang

Aspects of College Life That Reflect Gang Characteristics

Gang Issues in Austin Neighborhoods

Middle Class Gangs

Gangs in Texas Prisons

Gangs and the Drug Trade in Texas

Gangs in Professional Sports

Gangs in Colleges

Girls and Gangs

Why Adolescents Become Involved in Gangs

Existing Successful Programs To Prevent Gang Involvement

Community Safety Programs

Terrorists and Gangs

Gangs and the Mexican Border

Immigration, Marginalization and Gangs

The Paper

Required Format

1. Introduction: Why I have chosen this topic and my personal experience with gang phenomena (group membership, norms of the group, roles in the group, status hierarchy in the group)
2. Characteristics: of the Gang or Problem

3. Theories: What theories explain the situation?
4. Solutions: What might be done?

Your paper should be typed and approximately fifteen pages, double spaced, exclusive of the bibliography. Use 1-inch margins on the four sides and Times Roman 12 point or a near facsimile. Total number of words will be between 2,500 and 3,000 exclusive of bibliography. This means that each citation will require a two to three sentence summary of the citation. Such page limitations mean that you will need to use an economy of style in your writing and keep closely focused to the problem you have chosen. Make appropriate reference to theories but direct your narrative efforts to the Problem and how you have chosen to analyze it and develop a response. This is a style that does not use footnotes and simply enters the name of the author/s and the copyright date in the text. Full citations are at the end of the paper. Prepare your paper on a computer word processor and include an electronic version for submission. Use the American Psychological Association for paper style. For explanations of this style see <http://www.utexas.edu/ssw/apss/forms/resources/apa.html>

References may include interviews and html sites on the World Wide Web. The paper is due at the end of the class period (Monday, July 5, 2011) and must be submitted as hard copy and electronic. Please keep a copy of your paper, as papers will not be returned.

Website

Uses University's Blackboard application. Instructor moderates website and it is restricted.

Class Schedule

Month	Day	Date	Topic	Readings
June	Thurs	2	Introduction to course, overview of text: Youth Gangs in American Society	Handouts
	Mon	6	The Criminal Justice System In America And Its Response To Gangs	Shelden, et al: Chapter 1,
	Tues	7	Gang Properties And Characteristics: Who Belongs To Gangs, What Function Do They Serve For Individuals, How Are They Alike And Different From Other Youth Associations	Shelden, et al: Chapter 2
	Wed	8	History Of Youth Gangs	Shelden, et al: Chapter 3
	Thurs	9	Gang Cultures And Criminal Activities Exam 1	Shelden, et al: Chapter 4
	Mon	13	Girls and Gangs	Shelden, et al: Chapter 5
	Tues	14	Why There are Gangs: Ties Between The Neighborhood, Larger Gang Entities	Shelden, et al: Chapter 6
	Wed	15	Issues Such As The Drug Trade, Protection, And	Shelden, et al:

		Prison Gangs In Austin:	Chapter Review of Gang Properties and Theories
	Thurs	16 Austin Gangs Continued Exam 2	All lectures and Chapters 1-6
	Mon	20 Gangs In Context: Inequality In American Society	
	Tues	21 Community Response Gang Interventions Gang Threat From A Police Perspective	Shelden: Chapter 7
	Wed	22 Current Approaches At Community Control	Shelden: Chapter 8
	Thurs	23 Legal Intervention Strategies. Exam 3	Shelden: Chapter 9
	Mon	27 County and School Response	Website
	Tues	28 Gangs In The Adult Prison System Racial And Ethnicity Issues In Gangs	Guest Speaker
	Wed	29 APD Police Response	Guest Speaker
July	Mon	4 Holiday—No Class	
	Tues	5 Terrorism And Gangs Paper Due for Graduate Enrollment	Shelden: Chapter 10
	Wed	6 Gangs in Professions and College Life	
	Thurs	7 Review	
	Fri	8 Last Day Of Class and Final Exam	