

CJ 1330

PLA Content Guide

Foundations of Criminal Law

- Purpose and functions of criminal law in society
- Differences between criminal law and civil law
- Sources of criminal law: common law, statutes, constitutional law
- Classification of crimes: felonies, misdemeanors, and infractions
- Theories of punishment: deterrence, rehabilitation, retribution, incapacitation

Constitutional Limits on Criminal Law

- Due process and equal protection clauses
- The principle of legality (“no crime without law”)
- Protections under the Bill of Rights (especially 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th, and 14th Amendments)

Elements of a Crime

- Actus Reus
- Mens Rea
- Causation
- Strict liability offenses

Types of Crimes

- Crimes against the person
- Crimes against property
- Crimes against public order and morality

Inchoate and Related Crimes

- Attempt, solicitation, and conspiracy
- Accomplice liability and aiding and abetting

Defenses in Criminal Law

- Justification defenses: self-defense, defense of others, necessity, duress
- Excuse defenses: insanity, mistake, entrapment
- Competency and criminal responsibility

Criminal Court System and Participants

- Roles and motivations of key actors:
- Adversarial system basics
- Ethical duties of attorneys and judges

The Criminal Process

- Steps from arrest to appeal
- Burdens of proof and evidentiary standards
- Jury selection and jury behavior
- Plea bargaining and its role in case resolution
- Sentencing goals and types (incarceration, probation, restitution, fines)
- Victims' rights and restorative justice