

Criminal Justice: An Overview of the System

Module 3: Criminal Law

3.1: Sources of the Criminal Law

Administrative Law: The body of law that regulates the activities and procedures of government agencies.

Case Law: The law as established in previous court decisions; A synonym for legal precedent.

Commentaries on the Laws of England: A treatise on the common law of England by Sir William Blackstone that heavily influenced the law of the early United States.

Common Law: The legal system that originated in England and is now in use in the United States, which relies on the articulation of legal principles in a historical succession of judicial decisions.

Criminal Law: The body of law that defines crimes and the punishments that go with them.

Cybercrime: Crimes conducted over the internet or other computer network.

Damages: Money that a defendant pays a plaintiff in a civil case if the plaintiff has won.

Embezzlement: Theft of an employer's property by an employee.

Felony: A serious crime, usually punishable by at least one year in prison.

Hate Crime: A crime motivated by racial or other prejudice; often violent.

Misdemeanor: An offense punishable by one year of imprisonment (usually in a county jail) or less.

Ordinary Crime: Crimes that are highly visible to the public; also called street crime.

Organized Crime: A group having some manner of a formalized structure and whose primary objective is to obtain money through illegal activities.

Phishing: Obtaining financial or other sensitive information from online account holders by posing as a legitimate business or organization.

Precedent: A court decision in an earlier case with facts and legal issues similar to a dispute currently before a court.

Procedural Criminal Law: The body of law that controls how the various agents and elements of the criminal justice system treat people.

Reporter: A series of books containing the written judicial opinions of a particular court.

Sir William Blackstone: An English legal scholar who wrote the Commentaries on the Laws of England, a set of law books that had a major influence of the development of the criminal law in the United States.

Stare Decisis: Legal Latin for "to stand by things decided;" the doctrine that rules of law established in past court cases should be followed in present ones.

Street Crime: A broad term describing crimes that take place in public places.

Substantive Criminal Law: The part of the criminal law that specifies prohibited acts and the punishments associated with those acts.

Tort: A civil, not criminal, wrong.

Visible Crime: Another name for street crime; offenses committed in public places.