OER Textbook Review

For each category, assign 1-5 stars (with 5 being best) and provide written details. There’s also space at the end for general comments. Please fill out electronically, then print the final product and have it signed by your department chair. You can either drop the printed and signed copy off to me in the library or send it through the inter-campus mail.

Comprehensiveness =  2.5 Stars
The text covers all areas and ideas of the subject appropriately and provides an effective index and/or glossary.

The text is fairly comprehensive, but in a very general way - covering the consensus and conflict views of law, the crime control and due process perspectives, and the three major components of the criminal justice system (law enforcement, courts, and corrections). Like most textbooks, it also includes chapters on theories of crime and juvenile delinquency. While there is a glossary, the text lacks an index which makes it difficult to find various topics and court cases. Strangely, while the text relies heavily on explaining various court cases, it misses some very important ones. For example, when discussing overcrowding, there is no mention of Brown v. Plata (2011). While the recent case of Timbs v. Indiana (2019) - applying 8th amendment prohibitions to asset forfeiture - is included, there is no mention of more relevant topics such as the exclusionary rule. The good-faith exception (U.S. v. Leon), for example, is not included. Furthermore, I cannot understand how a text - even an introductory text - can discuss capital punishment without discussing its moratorium, Furman v. Georgia (1972), Gregg v. Georgia (1976), and the Baldus (1990) study. Given this, it is likely that the text also neglects other key topics and cases. The text also neglects the history of various topics. There is little discussion on the history of law enforcement in the United States and what is presented lacks any critical analysis. For example, Walker (1980) and others discuss the creation of slave patrols and the use of law enforcement to enforce white supremacy throughout the Jim Crow south. The text briefly discusses stop-and-frisk but portrays it in a largely positive light.

Content Accuracy =  3.5  Stars
Content is accurate, error-free, and unbiased.

From what I can tell, the text is generally accurate and error-free. However, the authors neglect to include relevant information. Whether that is a result of bias or space constraints, I am not sure. However, the exclusion of this information (e.g critical history of policing, relevant court cases, discussion of the exclusionary rule) is a critical shortcoming of the text.
Relevance/Longevity = 4 Stars
Content is up-to-date, but not in a way that will quickly make the text obsolete within a short period of time. The text is written and/or arranged in such a way that necessary updates will be relatively easy and straightforward to implement.

The book is organized in such a way that it would be easy to update. However, the book needs to include more core content. While the text already cites cases from 2019, it neglects important historical content and past court cases.

Clarity = 5 Stars
The text is written in lucid, accessible prose, and provides adequate context for any jargon/technical terminology used.

The book is written in an accessible manner and all terms are clearly explained. I believe students in an introductory course would be able to understand all of the material.

Consistency = 5 Stars
The text is internally consistent in terms of terminology and framework.

Terminology is consistent and the various frameworks/perspectives are consistently presented.

Modularity = 4 Stars
The text is easily and readily divisible into smaller reading sections that can be assigned at different points within the course (i.e., enormous blocks of text without subheadings should be avoided). The text should not be overly self-referential, and should be easily reorganized and realigned with various subunits of a course without presenting much disruption to the reader.

The text is divisible into smaller parts that could be easily assigned to students. However, I would argue that the readings are too small. The discussion of capital punishment is less than one page. The discussion of various constitutional protections is also very short. In order to use this text, supplementary readings would have to be used for various topics. While this isn’t necessarily a problem, I would prefer that an introductory text adequately cover key topics.

Organization/Structure/Flow = 4.5 Stars
The topics in the text are presented in a logical, clear fashion.

Topics are presented in a clear and logical fashion. However, the fact that some topics are discussed so briefly makes the flow feel choppy in places.
Interface = 4.5 Stars
The text is free of significant interface issues, including navigation problems, distortion of images/charts, and any other display features that may distract or confuse the reader.

There were no interface issue and the images were clear. The spacing was strange in some spaces (e.g. not beginning at the top of the page and extra spacing in several places.

Grammatical Errors = 5 Stars
The text contains no grammatical errors.

I did not notice any grammatical errors, although I am not a fan of the first-person style of writing in a textbook.

Cultural Relevance = 2 Stars
The text is not culturally insensitive or offensive in any way. It should make use of examples that are inclusive of a variety of races, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

The text may not be offensive, but it is not inclusive. It treats race/ethnicity as a binary - black/white. For example, “Latino” and “Asian” are included twice in the entire text and “Native American” is included only once. There is no mention of Black Lives Matter. There is significant room for improvement here.

General Comments

Overall, the book provides a basic introduction to the criminal justice system. However, it lacks depth. In order to use this book, you would have to add a significant amount of supplementary material. For an introductory level course, I would prefer that most of the information needed for the course was provided in the textbook. Additionally, I did not like how the text neglected the racialized history of law enforcement in the United States or how it neglected key court cases related to various constitutional protections.

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I have read the above review and shared it with the department.

____________________________________  __________________________
Department Chair  Date

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Reviewer  Date