The National Research Council’s Panel on High Risk Youth estimates that one in four adolescents are now at risk of failing to achieve productive adult lives. Not surprisingly, the numbers in the juvenile justice system have exploded as other segments in society, including the church, have failed to respond to these growing numbers of troubled youth. While traditionally a neglected population, this has also become a very fruitful venue of ministry for the local church – the Samaria – of Jesus’ call in Acts 1:8.

There are a myriad of complex internal and external risk factors that contribute toward delinquency in children. Focused attention will be given to understanding the impact of dysfunctional family systems, over-stressed communities, learning and mental health issues, racial tension and disproportional minority confinement, gangs, criminal thinking patterns, and various types of addiction and substance abuse issues. Attention will be given to healthy adolescent development and the impact of both internal and external risk factors upon natural human development.

This course surveys the social systems that impact troubled teens from a “systems thinking” perspective. The aim is to make clear the functioning and dysfunctioning of family, community, educational, law enforcement, criminal justice, and other social service systems.

Course Objectives

As a result of this course students will…

1. Understand the causes of at-risk and delinquent behavior, including the environmental factors leading to anti-social behavior.

2. Understand the most prevalent learning issues, developmental disabilities, and mental health issues displayed by troubled youth and how to effectively contextualize the Gospel through appropriate teaching and engagement strategies.

3. Become familiar with criminal thinking patterns and how to interrupt them.
4. Understand anti-social characteristics and how to engage with those who display them.

5. Become familiar with the Code of the Streets and how it impacts juvenile offenders.

6. Understand systems thinking, be able to articulate the functions of social systems, and to positively engage in them.

7. Understand the way God’s Law and the principles of Christ apply to our secular world and its systems.

8. Understand the interrelatedness of social systems and their function and dysfunction.

9. Become equipped to develop holistic ministry and recognize how piecemeal people-helping and piecemeal social reforms can do more harm than good.

**Course Format and Structure**

This six-week course with a 5-day intensive examines the many internal and external factors that impact high-risk youth. Participants will examine them from the perspective of youth who live in these various components. Teaching methods will include lecture, interactive classroom discussions, video presentations, interviews with those who have experienced the various risk factors, guest presenters, small group and individual projects, reading & reflective assignments, and journaling.

**Assignments**

There will be pre-intensive assignments and post-intensive assignments for students to complete as well as short assignments to be completed during the residency course. Four book reviews will be required on reading texts. There will be one final exam on the final day of the residency period. Students will also be graded on class attendance and participation. Specific pre- and post-intensive written assignment include:

**Pre-Intensive Assignments:**

1. Interview a youth (or young adult) who is locked up, or has been locked up, to find out some of his life story, what contributed to him his or her ending up where they are, and what he or she feels is needed for others to avoid going that way. Write 3-5 pages detailing as many contributing factors as you can.
2. Read the two required reading articles which are posted electronically and write 1-2 pages on each, connecting the material in the article specifically to your own work with at risk youth. Discuss how you will apply the learning you derived from the book to your own individual ministry context.

Post-Intensive Assignments:

1. Pick one of the mental health issue categories below that is common to high risk youth in your area and write a 8-10 page research paper on it. Detail pertinent research and data known, different types of clinical diagnoses, contributing factors, how it presents itself, frequency among juvenile offenders, effective intervention strategies, and implications for your ministry context. Below are categories to choose from:

   1. *Focal disorders* – ADD, ADHD, etc.
   2. *Attachment disorders* – Oppositional Defiance Disorder, Reactive Attachment Disorder, etc.
   3. *Anxiety disorders* - General Anxiety Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, etc.
   4. *Mood disorders* – Depression, Bi-polar disorder, etc.
   5. *Traumatic injuries* – Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, crack babies, lead poisoning, environment of poverty, etc.

2. Research three promising and successful interventions for drug and alcohol treatment. Write 6-8 pages, including an interview with a person who has been clean for a long period, chronicling contributing factors to his or her success.

3. Write 2-4 pages examining the racial composition of the youth you serve in comparison to the racial composition staff and volunteers in your ministry. What are the challenges of diversity and the implications of racial composition in ministry effectiveness? What are next steps you can take to become more sensitive to, and reflective of the youth you are serving?

4. Write 3-5 pages developing an integrative Biblical and theological framework for understanding mental health, addiction and other contributing factors to delinquency, and a Biblical response for addressing it.

5. Complete the three book reviews on the required reading. Write 3-5 pages on each book, connecting the material in the book specifically to your own work with at risk youth. Discuss how you will integrate and apply the learning you derived from the book to your own individual ministry context.

Grading:
Pre- and post-intensive assignments will make up 40% of grade; book reports 30%; 5-day intensive assignments and participation 20%; Final exam 10%.

**Reading Requirements**

**Required texts:**


**Required Articles:**


**Additional suggested reading:**


Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community*, The


Samuel Yochelson and Stanton Samenow, The Criminal Personality Vol 1: A profile for
Class Schedule

1. Understanding the World of Juvenile Offenders

Knowing where at-risk youth come from is key to effectively ministering to them. This session will deal with the at-risk youth’s world and how that world shapes a young person’s view of society, the future, the church, government, the law and God.

2. Understanding the Core of Delinquent Behavior

This session will examine the factors that contribute to a youth being “at risk” as well as intervention strategies for the different types of at risk teens. Criminal thinking patterns, anti-social personality traits, and issues of abuse and neglect will be examined.

3. Learning and Mental Health Issues and At-Risk Youth

This session will examine stage-theories of development for adolescents. Developmental delays and disabilities common among at-risk youth and their effects on a young person’s learning style will be detailed. Working with at-risk youth can also be extremely frustrating when mental health issues cloud kid’s perceptions and interrupt their ability to relate. Particular attention will be given to the issues surrounding mental health and how it affects ministry to at-risk youth.

4. Criminal Thinking and “Street Folk”

Students will become familiar with the stages of Criminal Thinking from Samenow and Yochelson’s work\(^1\), as well as Elijah Anderson’s distinction


1. Building himself up by putting down others.
2. Telling others what the criminal thinks they want to hear
3. Feeding the examiner what the criminal thinks he ought to know
4. Lying
between “Decent and “Street Folk” and how to intervene in these destructive thinking patterns most effectively.

5. Cross-cultural Issues

High-risk youth come from a variety of cultural backgrounds that impact how they learn and process life, as well as their ability to connect with and trust others. This session will focus on how we can be more sensitive to others’ cultural backgrounds, as well as understand how our own background influences us.

6. Addiction

Students will gain an overview of the various types of addictions displayed by youth as well as several successful models of intervention.

Further Bibliography by Systems that Impact Juvenile Offenders

Family


5. Vagueness
6. Attempting to confuse
7. Minimization
8. Diversion
9. Assent
10. Silence
11. Selective attention and perception
12. Total inattention
13. Tardiness and missing appointments
14. Misunderstanding
15. Generalizing a point to absurdity
16. Deliberate postponement
17. Claiming that he has changed enough to leave the program
18. Attacking
Education


Social Welfare Systems


**Foster Care**


**Criminal Justice**

