With record numbers of Americans being prosecuted and incarcerated, and increasing calls for major criminal justice reform from policymakers, scholars, journalists, and the public, well-trained criminal justice professionals are in high demand and can have a transformative impact on law and public policy.

The delicate balance between victims’ rights, public safety, the rights of the accused and incarcerated, as well as humanitarian, fiscal, and practical concerns, have given rise to intense debate on numerous policy issues, including mandatory minimum sentences and mass incarceration; stop-and-frisk policies, use of force, and other policing practices; forensics, eyewitness identification, interrogations, and confessions; discovery, plea bargaining, indigent defense, sentencing disparities, bail reform, and wrongful convictions.

Students seeking to pursue criminal justice careers – prosecutorial, defense, or judicial – will be held to the highest standards. The Criminal Law Program will equip its students not only to reach, but to exceed, those expectations.

The Criminal Law emphasis at the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law at Arizona State University is led by some of the most distinguished criminal law scholars in the nation, all of whom are dedicated to preparing students to promote and pursue criminal justice. Students gain a deep understanding of the criminal justice system through both foundational and specialized classes. Participation in clinics and externship opportunities allows students to put into action the knowledge they gain in the classroom.

By taking advantage of the many criminal law–related opportunities offered, graduates will be prepared to advance the ideals of criminal justice as either prosecutors or defense attorneys. The Criminal Law Program goes beyond the courtroom as well, preparing students for a range of careers in federal and state government.

Degrees Offered

Juris Doctor (JD): Students may choose from a variety of courses that look at the criminal justice system at both the state and federal level, as well as from the prosecutorial and defense perspectives. In addition to classroom learning, students are encouraged to pursue hands-on experiential opportunities through the many available externships and clinics.

Master of Laws (LLM): An LLM in Criminal Law can enhance your understanding of how the justice system operates, criminal liability, and the fundamental laws that hold true to the integrity of a just and fair society. The study of criminal law equips students to understand the myriad of agencies charged with enforcing various laws, the rights of suspected or convicted people, societal goals that may be achieved via the punishments meted out to offenders, and how laws differ from state to state and country to country.

Master of Legal Studies (MLS): In this one-year, 30-credit program, students pursuing careers that intersect with the criminal justice system – police and corrections officers, for example, or government investigators – may tailor their course selection to reflect their area of interest. The MLS is offered both on-ground and online.

Faculty Expertise

Students interested in Criminal Law at ASU Law will be taught by an impressive mix of renowned and respected professors and experienced practitioners from around the community, including:

• Erik Luna, Amelia D. Lewis Professor of Constitutional & Criminal Law, worked as a prosecutor and has conducted research and served as a visiting professor on criminal law-related subjects in Europe, New Zealand, and Cuba. He is also spearheading a grant-funded national criminal justice reform project.

• Michael Saks, Regents’ Professor of Law and Psychology, is a leading international authority on the use (and abuse) of scientific methods and evidence in the criminal justice system. He has published more than 200 articles and books and is widely cited in the national media.
Sample course offerings
- Arizona Criminal Law
- Cross-Border Investigations & Prosecutions
- Victims in Criminal Procedure

Clinics
- Prosecution Clinic: Students are involved in all stages of both misdemeanor and felony prosecutions with the Maricopa County and city courts. Every student will have the opportunity to participate in at least one jury trial during the semester.
- Public Defender Clinic: Students are supervised by experienced public defenders from the Maricopa County Superior and Justice Courts in the representation of indigent defendants for charges including drug possession, DUI, and aggravated assault.
- Post-Conviction Clinic: Funded by a grant from the National Institute of Justice, this clinic evaluates and pursues wrongful conviction claims in which DNA testing may provide grounds for exoneration.

Externships
- Federal Public Defender’s Office
- Salt River Pima – Maricopa Indian Community, Office of the Prosecutor
- Office of the Legal Defender, Major Felony and Death Penalty
- United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Criminal Division

Students interested in Criminal Law have the benefit of structuring their own curriculum and tailoring their course and hands-on experiential learning to reflect their individual perspective and career path. ASU Law is centrally located on ASU’s Downtown Phoenix campus in the Beus Center for Law and Society. Students have ample opportunities to train with judges and practitioners involved in the criminal justice system through clinics, externships, and courtroom observation.

Career Opportunities
ASU Law is uniquely situated in downtown Phoenix, where major city, county, state, and federal jurisdictions intersect. This offers not only an abundance of internship, externship, and clerkship opportunities, but a wealth of professional opportunities in the field of criminal justice:

Prosecution
- Prosecutor’s offices in city, county, federal, and tribal jurisdictions.

Defense
- Public defender’s offices representing the indigent in city, county, federal, and tribal jurisdictions.
- Private practices specializing in criminal defense.

Judicial
- Judges, commissioners, and justices of the peace in various jurisdictions.

Law enforcement
- Federal, state, county and city police jobs; agencies such as Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), Border Patrol/Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS), U.S. Secret Service, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
- Policy