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ECONOMICS OF CRIME AND JUSTICE
Spring 2024 Syllabus

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Class Location: Center for Law and Justice, Room 574
Class Time: Thursday, 10:00 am to 12:40 pm
Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is devoted to the economic analysis of criminal behavior and criminal justice policy. Economic analysis has three important facets. First, it posits a model of individual behavior as being rooted in “rational choice” and thus sensitive to the potential (perceived) consequences of law violation, in terms of both its rewards and costs. The economic model is not a literal model of cognition—it is prescriptive (“how *should* decision-makers act if they are utility maximizing?”) rather than descriptive (“how *do* decision-makers actually behave in real life?”). But even if it is descriptively inaccurate (and it is), its focus on incentive structures is still extraordinarily useful in the realm of both criminological theory and criminal justice policy.

Second, economic analysis is fundamentally concerned with markets, which encourages thinking about crime holistically and through the lens of a system with interdependent parts. While the market analogy should not be pushed too far—for example, we should avoid conceptualizing predatory crime as an exchange of goods between willing participants—one can imagine the volume of crime as determined by mutual interactions among criminal offenders (*producers*), crime victims (*consumers*), and criminal justice officials (*regulators*), among other market participants. Thinking about a “market for crime” acknowledges the reality of feedback loops, since not only does crime depend on actions taken by the parties in this system, but those actions are themselves dependent on crime. Market thinking also sensitizes one to the fact that well-intentioned policies can have unintended or even perverse consequences, to the extent they modify the incentive structure of market participants in unexpected ways.

Third, economic analysis is unapologetically policy oriented and approaches discussions of crime prevention with questions like, “will it work?,” “what will it cost?,” and “is it worth paying?” As such, it makes one attentive to crime prevention as a tradeoff between the benefits and costs of different courses of action (or inaction) in the policy realm, and in both the short run and the long run. It also encourages one to consider the ways that policies having nothing to do with crime and justice (e.g., social safety net, educational policy, minimum wages) might have positive spillover effects on crime, which should be included in the benefit column of any legitimate benefit/cost analysis. Good policy analysis requires an ability to evaluate claims, to judge the quality of evidence for and against them, to carefully articulate the benefits and costs, and to see beyond the more immediate (stated) policy objective.

Course Objectives

- Familiarity with key economic concepts that are relevant for criminal behavior and criminal justice policy.
- Comprehension of, and active engagement with, evaluations of crime control policies.
- Judgment concerning the quality of evidence for and against specific claims related to crime control policy.
- Evaluation of the potential costs and benefits of crime control policy, especially policy not explicitly designed with crime in mind.

Course Prerequisites

Basic knowledge of the criminal justice system and criminological theories is assumed but will not be required. Statistics and research methods are also not required, but given that the course will be policy focused, it will be helpful if students have some basic comfort with the material covered in those courses.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required Articles (Perusall)

Articles to be discussed each week will be posted at the beginning of the semester on Perusall (<https://perusall.com>), which is a collaborative annotation program for course reading material. Perusall is a tool to help students become active rather than passive learners, and is designed to transform reading from a solitary experience into a collective one. Students engage with course readings (and with each other) by commenting, requesting clarification of difficult-to-understand concepts, posting responses to classmates' questions, "upvoting" insightful comments, linking outside material with the reading content (e.g., relevant books or journal articles, newsworthy events), etc. Because annotations are anonymous (to other students, but not to the instructor), students can ask questions or make comments about the material without feeling self-conscious.

As soon as possible at the start of the semester, students are expected to create a Perusall user account and enter course code APEL-RADQJ to register for this particular course. They are then encouraged to familiarize themselves with the program by annotating the course syllabus with at least one question or comment.

COURSE GRADING

Course grading will be based on the following criteria, described in more detail below:

In-class discussion	15%
Perusall markup	30%
Podcast presentation	20%
<u>Term Paper</u>	<u>35%</u>
	100%

The grading scale that will be used for the final semester grades is as follows:

A	89.50% to 100%
B+	84.50% to 89.49%

B	79.50% to 84.49%
C+	74.50% to 79.49%
C	69.50% to 74.49%
D	59.50% to 69.49%
F	Below 59.50%

In-Class Discussion (15%)

This course is a seminar, thus attendance is required. Because the course meets only once per week, it is imperative that students be present and ready to participate in discussion about the prevailing topic. During in-class discussion, students should anticipate being called on by the instructor to contribute. Those who are unprepared will lose up to 1-percentage point of their discussion grade for the day.

One absence during the semester will be allowed with no penalty (nor will an excuse be required by the instructor), after which 2.5 percentage points will be deducted for each unexcused absence. Late arrivals will also not be tolerated, so students should be thoughtful about planning their commutes to be on campus in a timely fashion. Students who arrive late to class will forfeit 0.5-percentage point of their discussion grade for each occasion.

Perusall Markup (30%)

For a typical weekly assignment, students will read and annotate three journal articles posted on Perusall, each of which is about 20-30 pages in length. Perusall grades are based on “quality scoring,” which is an assessment of the student’s level of engagement with the reading material. The quality scoring for the annotations is as follows:

- Full credit = High-quality engagement with the readings.
- 2/3 credit = Medium-quality engagement with the readings.
- 1/3 credit = Low-quality engagement with the readings.
- No credit = Did not do the assigned readings.

Perusall grades are assigned on a 0-10 scale, and average the quality scores of the student’s five best annotations—this means students should aim to contribute more than five annotations, since they stand to boost their quality score. An example of how annotations are scored is available here: <https://perusall.com/downloads/scoring-examples.pdf>. Although quality scoring is performed by an algorithm, the instructor may override the assigned grades and students may appeal their scores to the instructor. For additional information, see the tip sheet written by Dr. Sara Wakefield at the end of this syllabus.

Some important benefits of Perusall annotations is (1) they ensure students come to each class prepared for discussion having read the material for that day, (2) they aid comprehension since some class time can be spent on aspects of the readings that were confusing, (3) they help students become better and more engaged readers of academic research over time, and (4) they give students who might be naturally quiet in a classroom setting the opportunity to show what they know. Note that Perusall annotations are due every Thursday by 10:00 am. Annotations after that time will not be allowed.

Podcast Presentation (20%)

Beginning in the middle of the semester, each student will give a presentation summarizing the contents of a crime policy podcast. The instructor recommends Probable Causation podcasts hosted by Dr. Jennifer Doleac, which are discussions with economists about crime and justice policy. The episodes of the podcast are accessible here: <https://www.probablecausation.com>. They are also available through most podcast apps. With the instructor's permission, students may choose a different podcast than Probable Causation.

Students will be expected to give a Powerpoint (or other medium) presentation of roughly 15 minutes in length, on the topic of their chosen podcast. During this presentation, they should characterize the subject of the podcast, describe the relevant economic or criminological theory, outline the empirical challenges faced by researchers, summarize the state of the literature as they understand it, and provide a roadmap to guide future research and policy efforts. The objective is to provide a summary that is sufficiently detailed so as to facilitate class discussion, where the student is the subject matter expert.

In preparation for their podcast presentation, students are strongly encouraged to read some of the accompanying articles for their topic that are listed on the podcast webpage. Students who are assigned a podcast presentation will not be required to submit Perusall annotations during the week of their presentation.

Term Paper (35%)

The course will culminate in a term paper on a policy-related topic of the student's choosing. Students have maximum discretion to develop their own topic, but should discuss their ideas ahead of time with the instructor. Some possible ideas for the term paper include the following:

- *Review the evidence base for a specific crime policy.* This would entail conducting a review of existing research on the crime policy in question (or a social policy with potential crime reduction benefits), judging the quality of the evidence for the policy, weighing the fiscal and social benefits of the policy against its costs, and recommending either that the policy be adopted, curtailed, or eliminated, or that more research be conducted (being specific about what kind of research would strengthen the evidence base). Students who wish to do so may expand on their podcast presentation by providing a paper-length treatment of their chosen topic.
- *Perform an evaluation of a specific crime policy.* Quantitatively advanced students are permitted to empirically evaluate an intervention related to crime or the working of the criminal justice system. A correlational study will not suffice (e.g., regression analysis with mere statistical controls), and instead, the study must employ a natural experiment or some other quasi-experimental design to render causal statements about the policy minimally credible.
- *Devise a multi-pronged solution to a specific crime problem.* This would entail choosing a specific crime or social problem, justifying the choice based on the costs to society, and reviewing existing research capable of informing a proposal to reduce the incidence or severity of the crime.
- *Remediate racial disparity in criminal justice.* This would involve reviewing evidence for racially disparate treatment at some stage of the criminal justice system (e.g., police officers, prosecutors, judges, or parole officials), discussing possible reasons for the disparity, and drafting a proposal that seeks to redress those underlying reasons.

Students are expected to produce original work, to use direct quotations from published work sparingly, and to appropriately cite the work of others. Other details about the term paper (e.g., its length) will be left intentionally vague, so students have maximum discretion in identifying their topic of study. Students are urged to start thinking early in the semester about potential term paper topics. Done strategically, the term paper can serve as the start of an empirical paper, dissertation prospectus, or other work. Students are welcome (and are in fact encouraged) to use it as an opportunity to consult with their faculty advisor or mentor, and to make progress on ideas which could eventually lead to a publishable manuscript.

COURSE POLICIES

Class Announcements

As needed, e-mail will be utilized to post course announcements (e.g., class cancellation due to inclement weather) as well as to occasionally provide links to items that are relevant for the topics covered in this course (e.g., newspaper articles, journal articles).

Classroom Climate

Disruptive behavior in the classroom cheats other students of the opportunity to learn. Examples include arriving late to class, leaving and re-entering the classroom during the seminar, talking excessively, using cell phones, eating, reading outside material, and persisting in speaking without being recognized. The instructor reserves the right to ask disruptive students to leave the classroom.

Academic Integrity

The instructor will uphold Rutgers University policies concerning ethical behavior and academic integrity, and students are expected to familiarize themselves with these policies. The relevant principles, policies, and disciplinary procedures can be accessed from the university's website at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>.

ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT STATEMENT

Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students and the University as a whole. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

For Individuals Experiencing Disability: The Office of Disability Services (ODS) works with students with medical, physical, and/or mental conditions who encounter disabling barriers in order to determine reasonable and appropriate accommodations for access. Students who have completed the process with ODS and have approved accommodations are provided a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) specific to each course. To initiate accommodations for their course students must both provide the LOA to and have a conversation with the course instructor about the accommodations. This should occur as early in the semester as possible. More information can be found at the RU-N ODS website (ods.newark.rutgers.edu). Contact ODS at (973) 353-5375 or via email at ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals Who Are Pregnant: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy. Students may contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance at (973) 353-1906 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Short-Term Absence Verification: The Office of the Dean of Students can provide assistance for absences related to religious observance, emergency or unavoidable conflict (illness, personal or family emergency, etc.). Students should refer to University Policy 10.2.7 for information about expectations and responsibilities. The Office of the Dean of Students can be contacted by calling (973) 353-5063 or emailing deanofstudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals with Temporary Conditions/Injuries: The Office of the Dean of Students can assist students who are experiencing a temporary condition or injury (broken or sprained limbs, concussions, or recovery from surgery). Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury should submit a request using the following link: <https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu>.

For Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance can assist students who are experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking. Students can report an incident to the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance by calling (973) 353-1906 or emailing TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. Incidents may also be reported by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm. For more information, students should refer to the University's Title IX Policy and Grievance Procedures located at <https://uec.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/60-1-33-current-1.pdf>.

For Support Related to Interpersonal Violence: The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance (VPVA) can provide any student with confidential support. The office does not have a reporting obligation to Title IX. Students can contact the office by calling (973) 353-1918 or emailing run.vpva@rutgers.edu. There is also a confidential text-based helpline available to students; students can text (973) 339-0734 for support. Students do not need to be a victim/survivor of violence; any student can receive services, information and support.

For Crisis and Concerns: The Campus Awareness Response and Education (CARE) Team works with students in crisis to develop a plan of support plan and address personal situations that might impact their academic performance. Connect with the CARE Team by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNCARE or emailing careteam@rutgers.edu.

For Stress, Worry, or Concerns about Well-Being: The Counseling Center has confidential therapists available to support students. Students should reach out to the Counseling Center to schedule an appointment: counseling@newark.rutgers.edu or (973) 353-5805.

Additional support is available to any RU-N student through Uwill services:

- Umatch: Teletherapy with flexible scheduling, starting with a free account.
- Uhelp: Crisis support at 833-646-1526 (available 24/7/365).
- Urise: Wellness-based video collection with a free account.

Access Uwill@RUN at <https://my.rutgers.edu> using your netid. Services are confidential and free.

For emergencies, call 911 or contact Rutgers University Police Department (RUPD) by calling (973) 353-5111.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The schedule below is subject to change depending on time demands and adverse weather. All readings are posted as PDFs on Perusall, and are expected to be annotated by 10:00 am on the day of the class they will be discussed. They should be read in the order listed (chronologically).

The articles are carefully curated to facilitate discussion of a wide range of policy issues related to crime and criminal justice. They have been chosen because they embody the scholarly consensus, are relevant to ongoing and unresolved debates, or challenge preconceived notions. They have all been published as peer-review journal articles. Some will be technical in character, but all are selected for their engagement with questions of a causal nature.

Class Date	Topic	Readings
Thursday, January 18	Economic approach	. <i>Becker (1968)</i> : "Crime and punishment: An economic approach." . <i>Posner (1975)</i> : "The economic approach to law."
Justice Policies		
Thursday, January 25	Police deployment	. <i>Klick and Tabarrok (2005)</i> : "Using terror alert levels to estimate the effect of police on crime." . <i>Owens (2017)</i> : "Testing the school-to-prison pipeline." . <i>Blattman, Green, Ortega, and Tobón (2021)</i> : "Place-based interventions at scale: The direct and spillover effects of policing and city services on crime."
Thursday, February 1	Police discretion	. <i>Grogger and Ridgeway (2006)</i> : "Testing for racial profiling in traffic stops behind a veil of darkness." . <i>Gelman, Fagan, and Kiss (2007)</i> : "An analysis of the New York City police department's 'stop-and-frisk' policy in the context of claims of racial bias." . <i>Voigt, Camp, Prabhakaran, Hamilton, Hetey, Griffiths, Jurgens, Jurafsky, and Eberhardt (2017)</i> : "Racial disparities in police language" (including supplementary information).
Thursday, February 8	Pretrial decision making	. <i>Heaton, Mayson, and Stevenson (2017)</i> : "The downstream consequences of misdemeanor pretrial detention." . <i>Arnold, Dobbie, and Yang (2018)</i> : "Racial bias in bail decisions." . <i>Agan, Doleac, and Stevenson (2023)</i> : "Misdemeanor prosecution."
Thursday, February 15	Trial and sentencing	. <i>Anwar, Bayer, and Hjalmarsson (2012)</i> : "The impact of jury race in criminal trials." . <i>Rehavi and Starr (2014)</i> : "Racial disparity in federal criminal sentences."

		. <i>Cohen and Yang (2019)</i> : “Judicial politics and sentencing decisions.”
Thursday, February 22	Prisons	. <i>Donohue and Siegelman (1998)</i> : “Allocating resources among prisons and social programs in the battle against crime.” . <i>Johnson and Raphael (2012)</i> : “How much crime reduction does the marginal prisoner buy?” . <i>Buonanno and Raphael (2013)</i> : “Incarceration and incapacitation: Evidence from the 2006 Italian collective pardon.”
Thursday, February 29	Mandatory penalties	. <i>Kessler and Levitt (1999)</i> : “Using sentence enhancements to distinguish between deterrence and incapacitation.” . <i>Webster, Doob, and Zimring (2006)</i> : “Proposition 8 and crime rates in California: The case of the disappearing deterrent” (including introduction and commentary).
Thursday, March 7	Collateral damage	. <i>Uggen and Manza (2002)</i> : “Democratic contraction? Political consequences of felon disenfranchisement in the United States.” . <i>Johnson and Raphael (2009)</i> : “The effects of male incarceration dynamics on acquired immune deficiency syndrome infection rates among African American women and men.” . <i>Wildeman and Andersen (2017)</i> : “Paternal incarceration and children’s risk of being charged by early adulthood: Evidence from a Danish policy shock.”
Thursday, March 14	NO CLASS	SPRING RECESS
Thursday, March 21	Decarceration	. <i>Drago, Galbiati, and Vertova (2009)</i> : “The deterrent effects of prison: Evidence from a natural experiment.” . <i>Andersen (2015)</i> : “Serving time or serving the community? Exploiting a policy reform to assess the causal effects of community service on income, social benefit dependency and recidivism.” . <i>Lofstrom and Raphael (2016)</i> : “Incarceration and crime: Evidence from California’s public safety realignment.”

Social Policies

Thursday, March 28	Neighborhood conditions	. <i>Jacob, Kapustin, and Ludwig (2015)</i> : “The impact of housing assistance on child outcomes: Evidence from a randomized housing lottery.” . <i>Sharkey, Torratts-Espinosa, and Takyar (2017)</i> : “Community and the crime decline: The causal effect of local nonprofits on violent crime.” . <i>Sampson and Winter (2018)</i> : “Poisoned development: Assessing childhood lead exposure as a cause of crime in a birth cohort followed through adolescence.”
Thursday, April 4	Private precaution	. <i>Cook and MacDonald (2011)</i> : “Public safety through private action: An economic assessment of BIDS.”

		<p>. <i>Cheng and Hoekstra (2013)</i>: “Does strengthening self-defense law deter crime or escalate violence? Evidence from expansions to castle doctrine.”</p> <p>. <i>McMillen, Sarmiento-Barbieri, and Singh (2019)</i>: “Do more eyes on the street reduce crime? Evidence from Chicago’s Safe Passage program.”</p>
Thursday, April 11	Opportunity reduction	<p>. <i>Wright, Tekin, Topalli, McClellan, Dickinson, and Rosenfeld (2017)</i>: “Less cash, less crime: Evidence from the electronic benefit transfer program.”</p> <p>. <i>Branas, South, Kondo, Hohl, Bourgois, Wiebe, and MacDonald (2018)</i>: “Citywide cluster randomized trial to restore blighted vacant land and its effects on violence, crime, and fear” (including supplementary information).</p> <p>. <i>Chalfin, Hansen, Lerner, and Parker (2022)</i>: “Reducing crime through environmental design: Evidence from a randomized experiment of street lighting in New York City.”</p>
Thursday, Apr. 18	Criminal records	<p>. <i>Pager, Bonikowski, and Western (2009)</i>: “Discrimination in a low-wage market: A field experiment.”</p> <p>. <i>Siwach (2017)</i>: “Criminal background checks and recidivism: Bounding the causal impact.”</p> <p>. <i>Agan and Starr (2018)</i>: “Ban the box, criminal records, and racial discrimination: A field experiment.”</p>
Thursday, April 25	Reentry supports	<p>. <i>Blattman and Annan (2015)</i>: “Can employment reduce lawlessness and rebellion? A field experiment with high-risk men in a fragile state.”</p> <p>. <i>Yang (2017)</i>: “Does public assistance reduce recidivism?” (including supplementary information).</p> <p>. <i>Agan and Makowsky (2023)</i>: “The minimum wage, EITC, and criminal recidivism.”</p>
Thursday, May 2	NO CLASS	TERM PAPER DUE

Understanding Perusall: Tips, Tricks, and Resources

by Dr. Sara Wakefield

(used with permission)

General Information

- Perusall uses an algorithm to evaluate annotations, comments, and responses to peers in terms of quality and engagement. We spot check them for every student throughout the course (and we can see your grades while we are commenting within the platform to modify them as needed).
- People have a tendency to dislike algorithms (for good reason) but there are also good reasons to dislike a small number of (imperfect) human beings evaluating you. The idea with Perusall is that all of you have an algorithm PLUS two human beings evaluating you. I've been using Perusall for several years now and have yet to find a case where the TA and I disagree with the algorithm (but we spot check it just in case).
- If you are interested in learning more about how the platform algorithm works, check this out: <https://perusall.com/downloads/scoring-details.pdf>
- **You should not worry about getting a perfect 10 score on every assignment**, you are aiming for something in the 8-10 range. It is relatively difficult to get a perfect score every time but perfection is not required in order to do well on this.
- Comments/replies are evaluated on a 0-3 scale and you receive additional credit for things like reading time, comments that are spread throughout the text, and engaging with your peers. All of these components are factored in to produce an overall score between 0 and 10 points per assignment.
- Remember that the purpose of Perusall is to give us a forum for discussion and asking questions. Don't get too stuck on the grades unless you're consistently struggling with it (reach out to the instructor if you are consistently scoring a 5 or below). The point is for us to connect with and help one another.
- Some students prefer to "get in early" on an assignment and comment first while others prefer to wait a bit and spend more time responding to comments from peers or the instructor. It doesn't matter what kind of student you are and you can do well following either strategy or a mix of both. Assignments are released at the same time every week so plan your Perusall time according to your preference.
- Perusall offers me a chance to answer questions outside of class as well as have a sense of what is interesting or confusing to you. If you have a question, feel free to @ the instructor in Perusall (either within the text as a highlighted comment or in the general discussion section). I will receive a notification and respond as soon as I am able.
- Perusall offers a variety of settings to increase accessibility. Links are provided [here](#) and please speak to the instructor as soon as possible if you have additional needs.

- Your Perusall comments/annotations/questions MUST BE YOUR OWN REFLECTIONS. If you find a useful outside source, include the link in your comment and refer the rest of the class to it. If you use an outside source to produce an annotation, you must include a link and cite it. Perusall annotations are also covered by the course student conduct policy.
- Finally, while you should aim to write clearly using full sentences in your annotations, you are not being graded on your ability to use big words and jargon. A simply put annotation that is insightful will often be graded more highly than a confusing one using big words and jargon.

Tips for Improving Your Engagement Score:

The first Perusall assignment in Module 1 is **for practice**. It will not count towards your final grade and I leave the grading “open” so that you can watch your score change as you annotate (I will not do this on future assignments).

If you’re looking to improve your engagement score following the first practice round, try the following:

- Do more than the minimum number of annotations (the required number will depend on the length of the reading but is always listed in the assignment description) and remember that doing the minimum is not the same as A+ work (this is why a C stands for average but is still passing). You must do the minimum to receive a score but only doing the minimum is unlikely to achieve a high score.
- Perusall will grade your “best” annotations to come up with your summary score so if you are looking to improve, more high-quality questions, responses, and comments will help. If the assignment requires 7 annotations and you complete only 7, Perusall will grade those 7. If you do 15 annotations, however, Perusall will use your highest scoring 7 annotations among all 15 when calculating your grade.
- Comments, questions, and responses are treated the same in Perusall. The main purpose of Perusall is to generate discussion and to allow students to teach one another so replies are great! A reply or response should include analysis, however, just like a first comment. For example, a reply that says “that’s a great point” is kind but not necessarily analytical engagement. If you turn that reply into “That’s a great point and it makes me think of (another example),” you’ve demonstrated engagement (and kindness!). You’ll also receive a higher score for the second version of a comment.
- Say WHY you are highlighting something. A comment that highlights an important definition is fine (“important!”) – but a comment that also offers examples of that concept or asks questions about it is better (“this definition is important because it tells us how to evaluate a survey study”).
- Simply saying *something* the required number of times will not yield a high score unless what you say demonstrates engagement with the material. Think of your comments as responding to the text, rather than simply marking up important points (though you can do a bit of that too for your own note-taking, Perusall also has a notes section that does not count towards your grade but allows you to complete notes for yourself).
- Try responding to peer or instructor questions.

- Comment throughout the article. Comments that are clustered on the first page will score lower than comments that are spread throughout the document (and as an FYI, Perusall can tell whether or not you read the whole thing).
- Check your Perusall grades in the Perusall gradebook. If you click on your score, you'll see how you were graded in detail (number of comments, average quality score, and additional information).
- Play around with the first Perusall assignment. The gradebook for the first practice assignment (and only this assignment) is open so you can check your score as you comment to learn how it works.