University of Cincinnati students enrolled in Intro to Criminal Justice are exposed to a variety of out-of-class learning experiences: From visiting jails, listening to guest speakers, to doing a ride along with a police officer.

Robin Engel, professor at the school of criminal justice, has been teaching this course at UC for five years. This course is different from most intro level courses and it all starts with the lecture. Every class the students come in and they start the class off by talking about what is in the news. Engel likes the students to think about current issues in crime and media and then engage in thoughtful discussions.

During the semester 4 to 8 guest are brought in by Engel to help the students understand what this field of work is like from all sides. Guest can include professionals in the field of criminal justice such as U.S. Attorneys, police officers, victims of crimes and even convicted murders who have served their time.

“I want the students to be able to question the information they are provided and understand that the way we handle crimes and the way we write about them are different than it is actually delivered,” Engel said. “The only way to understand those differences is to experience it from both sides.”

Aside from the lectures and assignments students are required to take initiative outside the classroom. Students are required to do one out-of-class activity and then write a paper about their experience explaining that they saw, what was interesting to them, etc.

“We need to better merge research and practice and this is the best way to do it,” Engel said. “These students are going to become the ambassadors for building that bridge. They are the future of our field.”

Students get to choose from a wide variety of options. They can visit the Homeland security office, Cincinnati Police Academy Training Facility, Hamilton County jail, a rehab facility or even do a ride along with a Cincinnati Police officer. “Students are able to see what their work may look like,” Engel said. Josh Nelson, Junior, decided to do a police ride along in district 1 of Cincinnati. District 1, under the command of Capt. Michael John, is responsible for patrolling and policing five neighborhoods: Mt. Adams, Over-the-Rhine, Pendleton, Queensgate and the West End.

“The officer I rode with was an open book and was very interesting”, said Nelson. “I really liked being in the patrol car and riding around the district because I was not familiar with the area at all.”

Nelson participated in his ride along in February, so it was cold out. He said it cut back on some of the crime that may have been going on.

“It was cold! My officer told me, the cold weather made the drug dealers deal from inside and the action on the streets go down.”

This class is giving students real life knowledge about their field. They are going out and seeing what it is like to be an attorney, working in a jail or in Nelson’s case a police officer.

“My favorite part of the class was the fact that we were given the opportunity to go on the outside class activity. That class was an intro course and had a very broad range of topics discussed within it but I feel
like that class taught me a lot about the criminal justice system and some of the history behind it. I really enjoyed my experience.”