Chapter Exercises for **Chapter 12: Criminal Justice**

1. Visit a court proceeding. What are the characteristics (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, age) of people being prosecuted in comparison with those of court officials? Is the culture of the courtroom control and punishment oriented? Are people simply being processed, or is there an effort to understand their background and rationales? How do the attorneys differ in how they show respect in the courtroom?

2. Consider joining a volunteer group that visits prisoners. After your visit, describe how it feels to be in a prison and behind bars. What are topics of interest among prisoners? Do prisoners accept responsibility for their actions? Do they receive help during incarceration and articulate any sense of being able to move forward in their lives?

3. Investigate the duties and procedures of your university’s student disciplinary board. Does it seem that student criminal activity is viewed differently than criminal behavior in the general population? If so, how? If you know someone involved in the student disciplinary board, ask that person about her or his perceptions of the system. You might also consider becoming a member of the disciplinary board.

4. Some community leadership academies offer “ride alongs” with police officers. People can accompany on-duty police offers in their patrol cars. Sign up to participate and then report on what you observed. How would you characterize the authority and discretion afforded police officers in the community?

5. Ask a criminal defense attorney about her or his practice and the types of criminals served. How does the attorney view helping professionals, particularly social workers? Would the attorney recommend law school as an option for social workers—if so, what kind of law?

6. Have you ever been charged with or convicted of a crime? Would your criminal record

pose a problem for your entry into a professional field such as social work? Depending

on the charge(s), many state social work boards provide applicants with the chance to

describe and explain the circumstances surrounding a crime and what the applicant has

done since the criminal behavior. If you are interested in social work as a major and

have a criminal record, examine your state’s licensure board website and the content

relating to criminal records and licensure. You might also want to discuss the

ramifications of any criminal past with one of your social work professors, who could

share or point you toward relevant information for your state.