Question #2: Identify and explain the three components of the Criminal Justice System.

When criminal offenders are identified, they will be brought into the criminal justice system so the government may seek justice. The criminal justice system is comprised of three major components: law enforcement, courts, and corrections. (Schmalleger, 2011, p. 3)

The first component is law enforcement. After a crime occurs and the police are notified, some of their primary goals are to identify the suspect, collect evidence, and document their investigation. When the investigation is complete, and there is probable cause, a suspect will be arrested. In the United States, law enforcement made an estimated 10,797,088 arrests in 2015. (Uniform Crime Reports, 2016) This does not mean there were 10,797,088 people arrested that year, as some people were arrested more than one time within that year.

The second component is the courts. After the offender is arrested, the police report is taken to a prosecutor, usually by a detective. The prosecutor will read the police report and determine if the documented facts violate a law. If the elements of a crime are satisfied, the prosecutor will file a complaint (in some jurisdictions it is an information) with the court alleging criminal conduct. Legal researcher John Smith found (as cited in Schmalleger, p. 341) that if the defendant is in custody, procedural rules dictate that he or she must be offered the opportunity to an initial in-court appearance before a magistrate without unnecessary delay. The suspect will be arraigned and face a criminal trial. If the suspect is found guilty of the crime, either by pleading guilty or being found guilty by a jury or judge’s verdict, then the suspect will be sentenced.

If a defendant is sentenced to prison, jail, or probation the third component of corrections is triggered. Most people convicted of serious crimes will be sent to prison. Typically, a prison is where the convict will be sent if sentenced to more than one year of incarceration. If sentenced to less than a year, the inmate will likely be incarcerated in a local county jail.

Each of the three components of the criminal justice system will overlap. A police officer may investigate a crime and arrest a suspect, but participation does not stop there. The officer will have to go to court to testify and possibly be called to testify many years later at a prison parole hearing. Although some may argue that one component is more important than another, they are all very necessary.
References:
