

HONORS 353
Effective Responses to Crime:
Policies and Strategies

Fall, 2017

Tuesdays and Thursdays: 1:30 - 2:45 p.m.
Thompson 1017

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Course Description and Goals

While the crime rate in the U.S. today is more than 50% lower than 20 years ago – and far closer to rates in the 1960s – the nation continues to face public safety challenges: In some cities (as well as suburban and rural areas) gang crime, drug trafficking and gun violence continue to persist, and preliminary FBI data for the first half of 2016 show violent crime rising in many cities around the country. At the same time, there is broad concern about high rates of incarceration and how fairly the criminal justice system responds to racial and ethnic minorities, as incidents over the past two years in Ferguson, Mo. and numerous other jurisdictions have highlighted. Tragic shootings this last year in Baton Rouge, St. Paul and Dallas underscore the difficult challenges that continue to face our country. Looking back, in the 1960s, a Presidential Commission appointed by Lyndon B. Johnson issued a landmark report that comprehensively examined all facets of the criminal justice system and set out a blueprint for reform. No single document in criminal justice since then has been so influential.

In this seminar, students act as members of a Criminal Justice Commission to examine key aspects of the crime problem in the U.S. and explore what solutions are – or could be – used to address them effectively. Through six subject area Task Forces, students will examine issues on policing, corrections and prisoner reentry, juvenile justice, gun violence, drugs, and the court system, looking in each area at major problems, current practice, research, and innovations. Each Task Force will assess the issues in their subject area, consider potential solutions, and draft recommendations to address the problems confronted. As a key part of this process, students will hold “hearings” at which they will have the opportunity to question “expert witnesses” (guest speakers who are frontline criminal justice practitioners) and explore evidence-based approaches that are being, or could be, undertaken. Based on this work, each Task Force will develop a set of proposed action recommendations.

In addition, each student will also prepare an individual policy-oriented paper over the course of the semester in the subject area of his/her Task Force (i.e., police, drugs, etc.). Students will have flexibility to address any criminal justice issue within that general subject area.

The semester’s work will culminate with several products: In the final sessions of the class, the Task Forces will discuss their recommendations with the full “commission,” prompting debate on those proposals. At the last class, all students will turn in their individual papers.

This course can help students in:

- understanding how the criminal justice system works, how public policy is made and how it can be changed, and the importance of mustering evidence in support of arguments for change in current approaches;

- undertaking policy-oriented research and writing, and analyzing and synthesizing data and information; and
- developing skills in interacting with public officials and practitioners and in making public presentations.

Class Sessions

Student participation is a key feature of this course. For that reason, students are expected to attend every class and regularly engage in discussion about the reading and the material presented in class. *Attendance and active class participation will thus constitute 20% of your final grade.*

We will host a number of outstanding criminal justice practitioners and policymakers as “witnesses” at our hearings. Task Force members will be expected to engage with the guests by coming to class with prepared questions.

In September, I will hold individual sessions with you about the research paper topic you have selected and the approach you plan to take in pursuing it. We will also devote one class in October to progress reports from each of you on your individual research papers.

Electronic Devices:

No computers are allowed in class except by special permission. Please take notes with pen and paper. I also regard the classroom as a “no texting zone.” Thank you for your cooperation.

Course Requirements:

1. Each student will prepare over the course of the semester a **1500 to 2000 word policy-oriented research paper** on a criminal justice issue within the general subject area of your Task Force. These are due on December 7, the last day of class. You must cite at least four (4) academic sources, provide a thoughtful analysis of the problem, and discuss existing evidence and research on potential solutions. Your own evidence-based recommendations on how to constructively address the issue should be set out.
2. **Each student will serve on one of six Task Forces (on Policing, Corrections/Prisoner Reentry, Juvenile Justice, Drugs, the Court System, or Gun Violence) that will be set up, each consisting of 4 or 5 students.** Each Task Force will be responsible for:
 - a. **Planning and holding one class devoted to their topic.** At this class, Task Force members will lead class discussion on the issue, provide research and background about the topic, frame key issues and policy challenges related to this subject area

and come up with, and “brainstorm,” questions that can be presented to the witness who will be appearing before the class.

- b. Assigning reading to the full class at least one week ahead of the session.** The reading can be anything from a peer-reviewed journal article or relevant government reports to items from the current press or news media (including YouTube videos, as long as the entire assignment is not videos). *The assignment should NOT be a chapter or material from a class textbook.*
- c. Handling questioning of the guest speaker “witness” when he/she appears before the “commission” to speak.** This will involve organizing a list of at least 10 to 12 questions that the Task Force members are prepared to ask, with every Task Force member participating in the questioning. (The guest will speak for roughly half the class period and your Task Force will be asking questions through the second half.)
- d. After the witness appears, developing evidence-based recommendations** (i.e., backed by research or solid field experience) to address existing crime and criminal justice problems.
- e. Educating themselves by reading the pertinent chapter/s in the Wilson/Petersilia volume – i.e.:**
 - i. Policing Task Force – Chapter 20
 - ii. Corrections/Prisoner Reentry Task Force – Chapters 17 and 18
 - iii. Gun Violence Task Force – Chapter 10
 - iv. Juvenile Justice Task Force – Chapter 4
 - v. Drugs Task Force – Chapter 13
 - vi. Courts Task Force – Chapters 15 and 16

- 3. One short paper** (500 words) describing your research paper topic, how you plan to approach it, and your research plan is due September 12 and **a progress report** on your research paper (350 words) is due October 19.
- 4. Active participation** in class, as noted above, is a key expectation. Students should plan to complete the entire reading assignment before class. There are several ways you will be held accountable for the reading, including exercises that require you to apply the lessons of the reading in class and small group discussions – and in exchanges with guest speakers.
- 5. Regular attendance in this class is expected.** If you will be missing class, I ask that you let me know by email in advance. Unexcused absences will affect your final grade.
- 6. Good writing skills** are essential in this class. If you need to improve your writing, I encourage you strongly to seek help from the Writing Center early in the semester. Poor writing, grammar and punctuation will affect your grade. <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>

Course Evaluation/Grading:

- 30% - Final research paper (1500 to 2000 words). The criteria on which you will be graded are: (1) Your analysis of the issue and discussion of existing research; (2) the thoroughness of *your* research and how you document it; (3) whether you have cited at least 4 academic sources; (4) *your* specific recommendations on how the issue can be best addressed; (5) the organization of the paper and quality/polish of your writing (i.e., at a minimum, no typos, grammatical errors, problems with sentence structure, etc.).
- 35% - Task Force work (Your active participation in the TF work, including the TF's class session, the questioning of the TF witness, and development of TF recommendations.)
(Note: I give feedback through the Blackboard Grade Center about your Task Force work – 5 points for very good; 4 for good; 3 for satisfactory; 0-2 for poor/inadequate.)
- 20% - Active participation in class discussions, including engagement with guest speakers; as well as regular attendance in class
- 15% - Short paper/progress report

Students will receive a Midterm grade based on (a) class participation and attendance; (b) the short topic paper; and (c) Task Force work to date.

Grading scale:

94-100%	A	77-79%	C+
90-93%	A-	74-76%	C
87-89%	B+	70-73%	C-
84-86%	B	60-69%	D
80-83%	B-	Below 60	F

Exam Policy:

There is no exam in this course.

Required Reading:

Students will be reading all or parts of three books, as well as other material that will be posted on Blackboard or for which Web links are provided in this syllabus. The required books:

- Ismaili, Karim, ed. (2017). *U.S. Criminal Justice Policy*. Bridgewater, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning, LLC. We will be reading selected chapters from this volume and discussing them in class.

- Wilson, James Q., Joan Petersilia, eds. (2011). *Crime and Public Policy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc. All students should read Ch. 1 and 21. Note: *Once you have your Task Force assignment, you will also be reading the relevant chapter/s in this volume. (See discussion in the syllabus under "Course Requirements.")*
- Strunk, Jr., William and E.B. White. (2000). *The Elements of Style, 4th Edition*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. This is a compact guide to good writing. Written communication skills are a key ingredient in your success professionally -- and in this class.

Students with Disabilities:

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodation, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Academic Integrity:

GMU has an Honor Code that requires all students to pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal or lie in matters related to academic work. All work submitted to fulfill course requirements is to be solely your product. You may not rely on projects, papers, or any other written work previously prepared by another student, and no paper or work of any type submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of another course may be used a second time to satisfy a requirement. No assistance is to be obtained from commercial organizations which sell or lease research help or written papers. Footnotes and attribution are required. All violations will be reported to the Honor Committee. For more information see

<http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/>

Enrollment:

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in the class. Last day to add classes - Tues., Sept. 5; last day to drop is Fri., Sept. 29. After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing requires the approval of the Dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.

Communications:

You should activate your Mason email account and check it regularly for information, including messages about this class. Email is the best way to reach me; I check it many times a day.

Class Schedule:

Tues., Aug. 29

Introduction and Overview

Purposes and goals of the course

The state of criminal justice in the United States today

Assignment for this class:

Wilson & Petersilia: Chapters 1, 21.

Thurs., Aug. 31

Setting the Stage: Why Crime is (again) a Hot Topic

A focus on police-community relations post-Ferguson ('14)

Sentencing/incarceration reform: Bipartisan interest in the states vs. a new tone in Washington

Assignments for this class:

Chap. 7 from Ismaili, *US Criminal Justice Policy*

“After Dallas Ambush, We Must Explore Why Police Use Force”

<https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2017/06/29/move-forward-dallas-ambush-must-explore-police-use-force>

“Out on the Beat: Policing with a Smile”

<https://thecrimereport.org/2017/06/29/out-on-the-beat-policing-with-a-smile/>

Attorney General Sessions’ speech at National Summit on Crime

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-jeff-sessions-delivers-remarks-opening-national-summit-crime-reduction>

Tues., Sept. 5

Crime Commissions: Looking back and looking forward

The President Johnson Crime Commission (1960s)

The proposed National Criminal Justice Commission (2017)

Your research papers

Assignments for this class:

Chap. 1 from Ismaili, *US Criminal Justice Policy*

Read Pres. Johnson Message to Congress (3/9/66) at

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27478>

and 2017 bill to create a National Criminal Justice Commission -

<https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/s573/BILLS-115s573is.pdf>

Thurs., Sept. 7

The View from Capitol Hill

Guest speaker:

Former United States Senator Jim Webb (D-VA)

Chief sponsor of legislation to create a National Crime Commission

Assignment: Chap. 2 from Ismaili, *US Criminal Justice Policy*

Tues., Sept. 12

A Primer on the Criminal Justice System

The basics: How the criminal justice system works.

Assignment: Two-page paper due (500-word): Describe the topic you have chosen for your research paper; how you plan to approach and develop it; and the resources you will draw on (your research plan). (*Although this is a short paper, pay close attention to your writing and proofreading.*)

Thurs., Sept. 14

Current Criminal Justice “Big Issues”

Assignment: Chap. 6 from Ismaili, *US Criminal Justice Policy*

(Note: A portion of this class will be devoted to starting meetings with individual students about your research topics.)

Tues., Sept. 19

Individual Meetings with Students; Task Force Planning

Professor will meet individually with students on research topics. Task Forces will meet to plan presentations/class sessions.

Assignment: Strunk & White: All Chapters

Thurs., Sept. 21

GMU's Library: What resources it can offer for your research projects

Guest speaker: Janna Mattson, MLS Social Sciences Liaison Librarian, Mercer Library, Prince William Campus, GMU

Note: This class will be held at the Johnson Center in Room JCL228. This is on the 2nd floor of the JC Library.

Please bring your laptop with you to class.

Tues., Sept. 26

Current Criminal Justice “Big Issues” (cont.)

Task Force Planning Meetings – Continue planning sessions

Professor will meet with each Task Force.

Assignments: (1) Chap. 3 from Ismaili, *US Criminal Justice Policy*; and (2) Be prepared to discuss with the Professor concrete points in your Task Force’s “plan of action” – e.g., ideas for your class presentation, your assignment for the class, etc.

Thurs., Sept. 28

The Role of Innovation in Criminal Justice

Guest speaker: James H. Burch, II

Vice-President, Strategic Initiatives, Police Foundation

Former Assistant Director, ATF, U.S. Department of Justice

Assignments:

“Police Leadership Challenges in a Changing World”

<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/content/download/67521/1242894/version/1/file/PoliceChallengesChangingWorld-07-12.pdf>

“Outside the Academy: Learning Community Policing Through Community Engagement” – *Posted on Blackboard*

Tues., Oct. 3

Task Force on Juvenile Justice presentation

Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues – and practice questions – that they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”

Assignment: To be made by student Task Force.

Thurs., Oct. 5

Juvenile Justice witness appears

Tim Curry, Director of Training and Technical Assistance

National Juvenile Defender Center

Tues., Oct. 10

No class (due to Columbus Holiday – Mon. classes meet this Tues.)

Thurs., Oct. 12

Task Force on Policing presentation

Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues – and practice questions – that they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”

Assignment: To be made by student Task Force.

Tues., Oct. 17

Policing Witness appears

Hassan Aden, Former Chief of Police, Greenville, NC

Senior Advisor on Policing, Vera Institute of Justice

Thurs., Oct. 19

Progress Reports on Individual Research Papers

Students provide oral and written reports in class on status of research for your individual papers

Assignment: Progress Report due. (Use report form provided by

Professor – *find it on Blackboard*. Answer each of the questions thoughtfully and completely. The report should be *typed and submitted in hard copy*.)

Tues., Oct. 24

Task Force on the Court System presentation

Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues – and practice questions – that they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”

Assignment: To be made by student Task Force.

Thurs., Oct. 26

No class. Professor has professional meeting commitment. (Task Forces are encouraged to use this occasion to meet!)

Tues., Oct. 31

Witness on the Court System appears

Cynthia Roseberry, Executive Director, Council for Court Excellence
Former Director, Clemency Project 2014

Thurs., Nov. 2

Task Force on Gun Violence presentation

Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues – and practice questions – that they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”

Assignment: To be made by student Task Force.

Tues., Nov. 7

Witness on Gun Violence appears

Josh Horwitz, Executive Director
Coalition to Stop Gun Violence

Thurs., Nov. 9

Task Force on Drugs presentation

Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues – and practice questions – that they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”

Assignment: To be made by student Task Force.

Tues., Nov. 14

Witness on Drugs appears

Mary Lou Leary, former Deputy Director of State & Local Affairs
White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP)

- Thurs., Nov. 16** **No class.** Professor attending American Society of Criminology meeting in Philadelphia.
- Tues., Nov. 21** **Task Force on Corrections and Prisoner Reentry presentation**
Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues – and practice questions – that they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”
- Assignment: To be made by student Task Force.
- Thurs., Nov. 23** **Thanksgiving**
- Tues., Nov. 28** **Witness on Corrections/Prisoner Reentry appears**
Amy Solomon, Vice President of Criminal Justice Policy, Arnold Foundation; former Chair of Federal Interagency Reentry Working Group
- Thurs., Nov. 30** **Task Force deliberations on final recommendations**
Students work in Task Force groups
 Resolve questions, hammer out proposals
 Finalize lists of recommendations
Review and discussion of final proposals by the class
Planning for presentation of final recommendations
- Tues., Dec. 5** **Guest Speaker: James M. Cole, Former U.S. Deputy Attorney General**
Presentations of the Commission’s final proposals by the Task Forces to former Deputy Attorney General of the United States
- Thurs., Dec. 7** **Moving into the World: Four Guideposts to Effectiveness**
- Assignment: Your research papers are due.