HONORS 353
Effective Responses to Crime:
Policies and Strategies

Fall, 2018

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

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Office Hours: By appointment
Course Description and Goals

While the crime rate in the U.S. today is far lower than 20 years ago – and closer to rates in the 1960s – the nation continues to face a host of public safety challenges: In many cities (as well as suburban and rural areas) gang crime, drug trafficking and gun violence persist, and the country faces a continuing opioid epidemic, as well as the challenge of mass shootings in schools and other settings. There is also broad concern about high rates of incarceration and how fairly the criminal justice system treats racial and ethnic minorities, as incidents in Ferguson, Mo. in 2014 and many other jurisdictions have highlighted. At the same time, the use of rapidly developing technology for public safety – like body worn cameras and facial-recognition technology – raises a multitude of questions relating to privacy and civil liberties. Looking back, in the 1960s, a Commission appointed by President Johnson issued a landmark report that comprehensively examined all facets of the criminal justice system and set out a blueprint for reform. No single government document on crime since then has been so influential.

In this seminar, students act as members of a Crime Commission to examine key criminal justice problems in the U.S. and explore what solutions are – or could be – adopted to address them effectively. Through seven subject area Task Forces, students will examine issues on policing, corrections and prisoner reentry, technology and criminal justice, juvenile justice, gun violence, drugs, and the court system. Each Task Force will look at current practice in their subject area, assess problems, research what science tells us about effective approaches, and consider potential solutions. 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 undertaken in the field. Based on this work, each Task Force will put together a set of 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. Students have flexibility to address any criminal justice issue within the broad topic area encompassed by their Task Force.

The semester’s work will culminate with several products: In the final sessions of the class, the Task Forces will discuss and debate their recommendations with the full “commission,” and then present their final proposals to a Washington policymaker who will visit the class to hear their proposals and give them feedback. 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 and how public policy is made and how it can be changed, and analyzing the wisdom of policy options, weighing the evidence in support of arguments for change;
- 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 leading 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.” I appreciate 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 6, 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 seven Task Forces (on Policing, Corrections/Prisoner Reentry, Technology & Criminal Justice, Juvenile Justice, Drugs, the Court System, or Gun Violence, each consisting of 3 or 4 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 (including an overview of current practice, problems, and the state of research on the subject), frame key issues and policy challenges related to this subject and come up with, and “brainstorm,” questions that can be presented to the witness who will be appearing before the class. **Two requirements for this class:** Involve the class in an exercise of some kind involving your topic, and describe the witness who will be appearing at the next class to talk about your issue.

   b. Providing a one-page status report on Task Force planning. This is due on Thursday, September 20 and should summarize the Task Force members’ initial thinking and planning for your assigned class, the reading to assign your classmates, and research plans. No format for the report is specified.

   c. 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.**

   d. 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 Task Force members are prepared to ask, with every Task Force member participating in the questioning. (The guest will speak for roughly 30 minutes and your Task Force will be asking questions through the remainder of the class – except for the last 5 to 8 minutes when we will turn to other members of the class for their questions.)

   e. 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.

   f. Educating yourselves by reading pertinent background research, including relevant chapters which the professor will share with each Task Force from James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia, eds. (2011). *Crime and Public Policy* and other relevant material. **NOTE:** These will be made available once the Task Forces have been appointed. It will then be your responsibility to read them as part of your background research.

3. One short paper (500 words) describing your research paper topic, how you plan to approach it, and your research plan is **due September 11** and a **progress report** on your
individual research paper (350 words) is due November 6. For the latter you will use a progress report form provided on Blackboard.

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, let me know by email in advance. Unexcused absences will impact your 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/](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/)

**Course Evaluation/Grading:**

30% - Final research paper (1500 to 2000 words). Criteria for grading: (1) Your analysis of the issue and discussion of existing research; (2) thoroughness of your research and how you document it; (3) whether you cited at least 4 academic sources; (4) your specific evidence-based recommendations on how the issue can be addressed; (5) organization of the paper and polish of your writing (i.e., minimum of no typos, grammatical errors).

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. I’m also always available to sit down and talk with you during office hours or after class to give you feedback about how you are doing.

**Grading scale:**

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Exam Policy:

There is no exam in this course.

Required Reading:

Students will be reading all/parts of two books, as well as material provided by the professor, posted on Blackboard, or for which Web links are provided in this syllabus. The books are:

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

- Strunk, Jr., William and E.B. White. (2000). *The Elements of Style, 4th Edition*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. This is a classic guide to good writing. (You will read the entire compact book.) 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 [https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/](https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/)

Enrollment:

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in the class. Last day to add classes - Tues., Sept. 4; last day to drop is Fri., Sept. 28. 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. 28  
**Introduction and Overview**  
Purposes and goals of the course  
The state of criminal justice in the United States today

Assignment for this class:  
“Stadiums See Drones as Major League Threat”

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/nationalinclude;/stadium-and-team-owners-see-drones-as-major-league-threat/2018/05/10/83e0b954-50ad-11e8-84a0-458a1aa9ac0a_story.html?utm_term=.c0cc308ef25c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/nationalinclude;/stadium-and-team-owners-see-drones-as-major-league-threat/2018/05/10/83e0b954-50ad-11e8-84a0-458a1aa9ac0a_story.html?utm_term=.c0cc308ef25c)

Thurs., Aug. 30  
**Setting the Stage: Why Crime is (again) a Hot Topic**  
A focus on police-community relations post-Ferguson  
Sentencing/incarceration reform: Bipartisan interest in the states vs. the 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”

“Two years after Castile’s death, programs aim to transform relations between police, residents”


Attorney General Sessions’ speech to National Sheriffs Association


Tues., Sept. 4  
**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
Thurs., Sept. 6  A Primer on the Criminal Justice System
The basics: How the criminal justice system works.
Assignments: Chap. 2 from Ismaili, *US Criminal Justice Policy*; “Out on the Beat: Policing with a Smile”

Tues., Sept. 11  Current Criminal Justice “Big Issues”
Assignment:  (a) Chap. 6 from Ismaili, *US Criminal Justice Policy*; (b) Two-page paper (500-word): Describe the topic you have chosen for your research paper; how you will approach/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. 13  Current Criminal Justice “Big Issues” (cont.)
Assignment: Chap. 3 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. 18  Individual Meetings with Students; Task Force Planning
Professor will meet individually with students on research topics. During class, Task Forces will meet to plan your class sessions, your reading assignment for the class, and your status report to the professor due on September 20.

Assignment: Strunk & White: All Chapters

Thurs., Sept. 20  GMU's Library: Resources it offers for your research projects
Guest speaker: Janna Mattson, Instructional and Social Sciences Librarian, GMU

Note: Bring your laptop today for in-class exercises.

Assignment: A one-page status report from each Task Force on how your planning is proceeding. (No format specified.)
Tues., Sept. 25  **Task Force on Gun Violence presentation**
Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”

**Assignment:** To be made by student Task Force.

Thurs., Sept. 27  **Gun Violence witness appears**
Josh Horwitz, Executive Director
Coalition to Stop Gun Violence

Tues., Oct. 2  **Task Force on the Court System presentation**
Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”

**Assignment:** To be made by student Task Force.

Thurs., Oct. 4  **Witness on the Court System appears**
Cynthia Roseberry, former Executive Director, Federal Defenders of the Middle District of Georgia; former Director, Clemency Project 2014; currently Vice President of Institutional Advancement, Wilberforce University, Ohio

Tues., Oct. 9  **No class (due to Columbus Holiday – Mon. classes meet this Tues.)**

Thurs., Oct. 11  **Task Force on Drugs presentation**
Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”

**Assignment:** To be made by student Task Force.

Tues., Oct. 16  **Witness on Drugs appears**
Alan I. Leshner, Chief Executive Officer Emeritus, American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)
Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), 1994-2001

Thurs., Oct. 18  **No class.** Professor has professional meeting commitment.
(Task Forces are encouraged to use this occasion to meet!)

Tues., Oct. 23  **Task Force on Corrections and Prisoner Reentry presentation**
Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues
they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”

**Assignment:** To be made by student Task Force.

**Thurs., Oct. 25**  
**Task Force on Juvenile Justice presentation**  
Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”

**Assignment:** To be made by student Task Force.

4:30 p.m. – You are strongly encouraged to attend a special lecture by Pulitzer Prize winning writer James Forman, Jr., who authored the book *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*. Mr. Forman is a Yale law professor and former DC public defender. This will be held in the Mix. Questions addressed in the book/talk are on point with those we are delving into in this class.

**Tues., Oct. 30**  
**Witness on Corrections and Prisoner Reentry appears**  
Stefan LoBuglio, Former Director of Corrections & Reentry, Council of State Governments Justice Center; Principal Consultant, LoBuglio Justice Solutions

**Thurs., Nov. 1**  
**Witness on Juvenile Justice appears**  
Tim Curry, Director of Training and Technical Assistance National Juvenile Defender Center

**Tues., Nov. 6**  
**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 *submitted in hard copy on the form*.)

**Thurs., Nov. 8**  
**Task Force on Technology & Criminal Justice presentation**  
Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”

**Assignment:** To be made by student Task Force.
**Tues., Nov. 13**  
**Witness on Technology & Criminal Justice appears**  
James H. Burch, II, Vice-President, Strategic Initiatives, Police Foundation  
Former Assistant Director, ATF, U.S. Department of Justice

**Thurs., Nov. 15**  
**No class.** Professor attending American Society of Criminology meeting in Atlanta.

**Tues., Nov. 20**  
**Task Force on Policing presentation**  
Students on this Task Force will lay out and frame issues they will be exploring with the witness at the “Commission hearing.”

**Assignment:** To be made by student Task Force.

**Thurs., Nov. 22**  
**Thanksgiving**

**Tues., Nov. 27**  
**Witness on Policing appears**  
Hassan Aden, Former Chief of Police, Greenville, NC  
Senior Advisor on Policing, Vera Institute of Justice

**Thurs., Nov. 29**  
**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. 4**  
**Special Guest:** Mary Lou Leary, former Deputy Director  
White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP);  
Former Acting Assistant Attorney General, US Department of Justice

Presentations of the Commission’s final proposals by the Task Forces; feedback from visiting policymaker

**Thurs., Dec. 6**  
**Moving into the World: Four Guideposts to Effectiveness**

**Assignment:** Your research papers are due