

Security at U.S. Airports and Connecting Metro/Subway Lines

An Honors Class Partnership with the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority Police (MWAA) and the Washington Metro Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Police

CLS Honors Seminar (CRIM 491/492) Fall-Spring 2024-2025

Although slow-going, Washington DC area Metro ridership has begun to pick up pace after a significant decline that began during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, new stations have been added that link the metro to Dulles International Airport and even more locales in the region. At the same time, metro riders and others living and working near metro stations have expressed concerns about safety and crime at stations and on subway trains. In a recent report on five-year crime trends in the DC metro system, the Metro Transit Police reported that the volume of serious “Part I” crimes is 36% higher than in 2019, before the pandemic.

In response to increasing crime, fear of crime, and newly added stations that link the region’s airports, the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority Police (MWAA) and the Washington Metro Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Police Department have embarked on a collaboration to improve the safety and security of metro stations connecting the Capitol region’s airports as part of a broader collaborative program between WMATA and police agencies around the region. The two police departments hope to improve their crime prevention efforts in stations and lines where they share customers. The MWAA has asked the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP) in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University to assess and evaluate these collaborative efforts to better understand and respond to public safety challenges in the metro system linking the airports to the region. CLS’s honors students will be a part of this one-of-a-kind research opportunity.

Course Goals, Activities, and Expectations

Over this two-semester course (6 total credit hours), students will have the opportunity, under the guidance of Professor Cynthia Lum and other faculty at the CEBCP, to partner with the MWAA and WMATA to study, analyze, and evaluate crime and policing efforts in and around metros that serve Dulles International (IAD) and Reagan National (DCA) Airports. The course will begin with students familiarizing themselves with the evidence related to crime prevention and policing in subways and airports, and more generally, the evidence base on proactive, effective, and legitimate crime prevention measures that police agencies can deploy. Students will then directly learn from the MWAA and WMATA police officials about the security challenges they face in subways and at airports, the nature of their collaboration, and their goals in partnering to improve public safety at these transportation hubs.

With this knowledge base, students will then engage collaboratively in a major research project to assess and analyze the impacts of police deployment operations at metro stations under the guidance of some of the top policing scholars in the U.S. They will also work on their own individualized projects related to security and safety at airports and public transportation systems. All of these efforts will include systematic observations, data collection and analysis, interviews, surveys, and crime analysis.

As this project involves action research and fieldwork, students should expect to sometimes travel to Dulles Airport and connecting metro stations to learn, observe, and collect data. All fieldwork will be structured, supervised, flexibly scheduled, and carried out safely and with others. By the end of this project, students should expect to sharpen their action research skills, publish articles as named authors, present to researchers and practitioners, and network with industry leaders.

Course Enrollment

The CLS Honors Program is open to Criminology, Law and Society majors with excellent academic records and an interest in applying research and science to crime problems facing communities and criminal justice agencies. The class will appeal to students who are interested in crime prevention, policing, and evidence-based crime policy, or who are considering pursuing graduate education in criminal justice. To enroll, students should have a 3.4 overall GPA and have earned a B+ or better in CRIM 315 (Research Methods and Analysis in Criminology). Students must commit to the two-term course for six credits. Students who complete CRIM 491 and 492 with a GPA of 3.5 or above will receive the honors designation in Criminology, Law and Society when they graduate, and the letters “RS” will appear on their academic transcripts indicating they have participated in a Research and Scholarship Intensive course. The six credits from these two courses can be applied toward the CRIM electives section of the major and can count toward the criminal justice concentration.

About the Instructor

Dr. Cynthia Lum is Distinguished University Professor in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society and Director of George Mason University’s Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy. She is a leading authority on evidence-based policing, an approach that advocates that research, evaluation, and scientific processes should have “a seat at the table” in law enforcement policymaking and practice. Prof. Lum has studied and written extensively about patrol operations and police crime prevention activities, police technology, investigations and detective work, and evidence-based crime policy. Additionally, she has developed numerous tools and strategies to translate and institutionalize research into everyday law enforcement operations. Professor Lum is an elected Fellow of the American Society of Criminology (ASC) and an appointed member of the Committee on Law and Justice (CLAJ) for the National Academies of Sciences (NAS). She is a Board Trustee of the Council on Criminal Justice and a Board Director for the National Police Foundation. She is the recipient of the 2017 inaugural Mason Presidential Medal for Excellence in Social Impact and the 2020 Virginia State Council for Higher Education Outstanding Faculty Award. Professor Lum is a former Baltimore City police officer and detective.

Please feel free to contact Professor Lum (clum@gmu.edu) with any questions you might have about the course.