

Criminal Justice Ethics CRIM 306 Spring 2024

GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION

January 16 – April 30th
Tuesday (with the class on Zoom) 1:30 pm – 2:45 pm

This is a virtual class. We only meet as a group on Tuesdays to discuss the videos and readings, but you should treat this as if there are two classes each week. This means you will need to watch recorded lectures and complete the readings and MindTap exercises *before* attending class. Students must participate weekly and complete assignments by the deadlines listed in the syllabus. You should be prepared to have your camera on. Discussion is the lifeblood of engagement. To foster a seminar-like atmosphere I will call on you to participate. Additionally, class will include activities in which you will need to participate.

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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Office hours: By appointment on Zoom
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Source: Joycelyn M. Pollock: Ethical Dilemmas and Decisions in Criminal Justice, 11th addition

What behaviors should we make criminal and why? What should police do and not do and why? What about defense lawyers, prosecutors, and judges? How should prisons be run? How should corrections officers make decisions about the right thing to do? This course will focus on creating awareness of the ethical issues and dilemmas ever present in the criminal justice system. The course aims to expand your ability to think critically, recognize dangerous situations and thought processes, and respond to them with maximum effectiveness. As a class, we will address some of the broader policy and legal issues confronting the U.S. criminal legal system from an ethics perspective as well as ethical dilemmas faced by individuals working in the criminal legal system.

1. We study ethics because criminal justice is uniquely involved in coercion, which means there are many and varied opportunities to abuse such power.
2. Almost all criminal justice professionals are public servants and, thus, owe special duties to the public they serve.
3. We study ethics to sensitize students to ethical issues and provide tools to help identify and resolve the ethical dilemmas they may face in their professional lives.

The textbook for this course is an applied ethics text, in that we will be concerned with defining behaviors as right and wrong (specifically, those of criminal justice professionals). It also is a professional ethics text because we are concerned primarily with professional ethics in criminal justice.

“Critical thinking skills” has become an overused and abused phrase in education, but the core idea of critical thinking is to be more cognizant of facts as opposed to concepts, assumptions, or biases and to use objective reasoning to reach a decision most effectively or understand a problem. Paul and Elder (2003) explain that all reasoning is based on assumptions, points of view, and data or evidence, but reasoning is shaped by concepts and ideas that affect our interpretations of the data, which then lead us to conclusions that give meaning to the data.

To be a critical thinker, one must ask these types of questions: What information am I using? What information do I need to settle the question? Is there another way to interpret the information? What assumption has led me to my conclusion? Is there another point of view I should consider? What implication or consequence might be the result of this conclusion? Critical thinking is important, especially in how it informs what we *do*. Ethics is not about how we feel or what we think, it's about how we act. We don't really know what our values are until we must choose between them.

REQUIRED VIDEOS AND READINGS

Joycelyn M. Pollock: Ethical Dilemmas and Decisions in Criminal Justice, 11th addition with MindTap. Additional readings and videos will be posted to Blackboard. Check Blackboard at the start of each week.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Attendance and Class Participation (10%, due weekly): We only meet 14 times! Attendance is required for this class. If you miss class, this will reflect on your final grade. **Please be prepared to have your camera on during class, and clear your calendar for class time. Do not schedule appointments or work during class time.** Participation requires that you attend class prepared to engage in an in-class activity and arrive on time. If you are unable to attend a class session, please email me before class. Excuses such as doctor's appointments, trips to see family, or other such reasons do not count as "excused" because they are within your control and thus the absence is likely avoidable. You will earn points each week based on the rubric below. And remember that simply talking is not necessarily participation. If it is clear that you have not read the material you will not receive credit.

2 points	1 point	0 points
<i>Actively participating.</i>	<i>Not exemplary participation.</i>	<i>Not participating.</i>

MindTap Activities (25%, due weekly): To encourage you to keep up with the course materials and come to class prepared to discuss them, you will have several Mindtap activities due at the start of each week.

Case Studies (60%, due Feb. 17th, Feb. 25th, Mar. 17th, Mar. 24th, Apr. 7th, Apr. 14th): You will complete six case studies each worth 10% of your grade. The first set of case studies is related to policing, the second is related to the courts, and the third is related to corrections.

Final Reflection Essay (5% due Apr. 26th): You will write a 2-page reflection essay on how you will resolve ethical dilemmas you may face and the ethical framework(s) that you will most likely rely on to help with making ethical decisions.

Assignment	Points Possible	Grade Breakdown
Attendance	32	10%
MindTap	80	25%
Case Studies	192 (32 each)	60%
Final Reflection Essay	16	5%
Total	320	100%

GRADING SCALE

The course components (attendance/participation; MindTap exercises; case studies; essay) will be weighted as described above to determine your final grade, which will be assigned according to the following scale:

A+ 97-100%		C+ 77-79%	
A 93-96%	<i>outstanding</i>	C 73-76%	<i>average</i>
A- 90-92%		C- 70-72%	
B+ 87-89%		D 60-69%	<i>marginal</i>
B 83-86%	<i>good</i>	F <60%	<i>failing</i>
B- 80-82%			

CLASS AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Contacting Me

The easiest way to contact me is via email. Please feel free to send me an email at any time during the semester if you have any questions, comments, or concerns. Please use your GMU email account and be sure to include your name in all emails and indicate the course number in the subject line so they do not get confused for spam. In addition to general questions, you should always feel free to email me at any time to set up a virtual meeting.

Note: In general, I will respond to emails within 24-48 hours on Monday-Friday. If you email me on a Friday or over the weekend, you may not hear back until Monday. If you have not heard back from me after this period, feel free to send a gentle reminder email. Please do not reach out to me via Blackboard Messenger. All course communications must be through GMU email.

Make-up Policy

If you have a legitimate, excused reason for missing an assignment, please let me know as soon as possible so we can make alternative arrangements. Each of you has a “Life Happens Pass,” which is an automatic 72-hour extension on a (major) assignment once per semester, no questions asked, as long as you inform me in writing before the assignment is due.

Etiquette

We will be discussing many issues in this class that may be controversial and emotional. I encourage students to discuss, disagree, and debate one another. However, rudeness and hostility will not be tolerated. I want you all to be critical of arguments, not the individuals making those arguments. We can and will discuss opposing viewpoints and perspectives respectfully.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

George Mason University’s Honor Code requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Students are expected to abide by the Mason Honor Code, which prohibits lying, cheating, stealing, and plagiarizing (<https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>). Familiarize yourself with this policy and remember your legal fundamentals: Ignorance of the rules is not a valid defense!

Note: Please be sure that the work you submit in this class is your own, and that you provide proper citations when referencing another person’s words or ideas. Instructors are required to report all violations of the Honor Code to the Mason Honor Committee. Violations of the Honor Code may result in a failing grade for the assignment or exam, a failing grade for the course, or any additional penalties determined by the committee, including dismissal from the university. We have multiple writing assignments in this class. Because the act of

composing a response in your own words increases your learning, it is important that you complete the task yourself, rather than rely on an artificial intelligence (AI) tool. Completing these writing assignments yourself will help strengthen your performance in this class on later assignments and activities, as well as help you develop professionally and succeed in your career goals. You should also be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; thus they are not yet prepared to produce text that meets the standards of this course. If you do choose to experiment with AI text generation, you are expected to indicate your usage of it and give credit for text that has been generated by AI. The use of AI-generated text without proper attribution is a violation of academic integrity. **AI statement language from the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning*

Accommodations for Special Needs

If you need academic accommodations, please inform the instructor and contact the Office of Disability Services (703-993-4306; <https://ds.gmu.edu>). All academic accommodations must be made through that office.

Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, and Interpersonal Violence

George Mason University is committed to providing an environment that is free from discrimination, sexual misconduct, and other acts of interpersonal violence to promote community well-being and student success. We encourage students who believe that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted, or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek assistance and support. University Policy 1202: Sexual Harassment and Misconduct speaks to the specifics of Mason's process, the resources, and the options available to students (<https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/sexual-harassment-policy/>).

As a faculty member and designated "Responsible Employee," I am required to report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per university policy. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact the Student Support and Advocacy Center (703-380-1434) or Counseling and Psychological Services (703-993-2380). You may also seek assistance from Mason's Title IX Coordinator (703-993-8730; titleix@gmu.edu).

Counseling and Psychological Services

If you are facing significant life stressors and feeling overwhelmed, there are resources available to help you. These include Counseling and Psychological Services (703) 993-2380, which provides confidential psychological services, including 24/7 crisis intervention. There is also Student Support (703) 993-5376, which helps students negotiate life situations by connecting them with appropriate resources. Student Support also has an online referral system (for non-emergencies only): <https://ssac.gmu.edu/>. The non-emergency number for the GMU police is (703) 993-2810. See <https://ulife.gmu.edu/about-us/offices-of-university-life/> for a full listing of service areas and contact information.

The Writing Center and Mason Library

The Writing Center at Mason (<https://writingcenter.gmu.edu>) is a fantastic and free resource providing information and one-on-one tutoring for all your writing needs. The Writing Center is available throughout your Mason career should you need assistance before submitting any assignments. They can help with any part of the writing process, from planning and organizing your paper to proofreading and revising. Their website also has guides on best practices for reading, note-taking, and citing sources. Mason Library also has excellent tutorials on writing, reading, note-taking, giving presentations, time management, and academic integrity. See <https://library.gmu.edu/tutorials> for a full list.

Purdue OWL

Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) is a great resource for tips on writing and citations. In particular, if you are unsure of how to cite materials in your work, be sure to check their website <https://owl.purdue.edu/>

SCHEDULE

Week	Class Date	Topic	Read/ Watch	Turn In
1	1/16	I can't believe what you say, because I see what you do	Pollack Ch. 1	Mindtap
2	1/23	A man got to have a code	Pollack Ch. 2	Mindtap
3	1/30	Law and justice are not always the same	Pollack Ch. 3	Mindtap
4	2/6	The price one pays for pursuing any profession, or calling, is an intimate knowledge of its ugly side	Pollack Ch. 4	Mindtap
5	2/13	Police role in society	Pollack Ch. 5	Mindtap Case Study 1 due Feb. 18th, Ethical issue: proactive policing
6	2/20	Police discretion and dilemmas	Pollack Ch. 6	Mindtap Case Study 2 due Feb. 25th, Ethical dilemmas: Breonna Taylor
7	2/27	Police: When things go really wrong	Pollack Ch. 7 <i>Watch:</i> I'm in a Police Union That Holds Bad Cops Accountable	Mindtap
8	3/5	Spring Break – No Class		
9	3/12	Law and legal professionals	Pollack Ch. 8	Mindtap Case Study 3 due Mar. 17 th , Ethical issue: cash bail
10	3/19	Legal profession discretion and dilemmas	Pollack Ch. 9	Mindtap Case Study 4 due Mar. 24 th , Ethical dilemma: Alonza Thomas
11	3/26	The Courts: When things go really wrong	Pollack Ch. 10 <i>Watch:</i> Hearne, Texas: Scenes from the Drug War	Mindtap
12	4/2	Punishment and Corrections	Pollack Ch. 11	Mindtap Case Study 5 due Apr. 7 th , Ethical issue: Use of incarceration
13	4/9	Corrections discretion and dilemmas	Pollack Ch. 12	Mindtap Case Study 6, due Apr. 14 th , Ethical dilemma: Annaleen Vissar
14	4/16	Corrections: When things go really wrong	Pollack Ch. 13	Mindtap
15	4/23	So, what did you learn?		Final reflection essay due April 26 th