

**Reentering Communities, Reentering Life:
How do staff and inmates prepare for community reentry?**



GENERAL DESCRIPTION

While community reentry is a “hot” topic in criminal justice research, most current scholarship neglects the important role of local jails within the reentry process. Jail inmates, like their prison inmate counterparts, often face seemingly insurmountable challenges that restrict community reentry and reintegration success. These include inadequate housing, limited education, limited or non-existent work experience, mental and physical health issues, family problems and limited financial and other resources. Where theoretically prisons generally have many years to work with inmates to overcome these problems, most jail inmates are only in custody 12 or fewer months. This, coupled with budget and human resource constraints, leaves jails with limited time and resources to prepare inmates for community reentry and inmates with little time to take advantage of available programming and services. Nonetheless, reentry preparation is a crucial part of improving community safety and slowing the revolving door that leads so many released inmates back to jail/prison within the first three years of their release.

In this Honors course, we will examine how one local jail and its’ management/staff and inmates:

- Perceive their role in the reentry process,
- Prepare for community reentry/reintegration,
- Evaluate and use pre-release programming, and
- Work with community groups to facilitate pre- and post-release reentry preparation and opportunities for success.

The seminar goal is to deepen our understanding of facilitators and constraints for inmates and jail staff working with and/or toward reentry. At the end of the course, we will present our research and results via an executive summary for the jail staff with some suggestions for making improvements to current processes and practices.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Over two semesters, students will work closely with Dr. Danielle S. Rudes on cutting-edge research on prisoner reentry. Working as a team of qualitative researchers students will challenge common assumptions about prisoner reentry by collecting empirical evidence. Students will also have the opportunity to present their research findings to jail managers/staff and scholars.

Specifically, students will:

1. Read and summarize previous research on prisoner reentry;
2. Plan and conduct a research project to understand and examine current jail practices, policies and reentry perspectives using observations of and interviews with correctional staff and managers and inmates, and
3. Analyze original data to present written and oral reports, for dissemination to the participating jail, local Criminology, Law & Society faculty and staff, and possibly at a national research conference.

OTHER INFORMATION

Students must have at least a 3.2 GPA and instructor permission to participate. Students who successfully complete CRIM 491/492 with a GPA of 3.5 or above will receive the honors designation in Criminology, Law & Society when they graduate. Additionally, if a student completes this course, the letters "RS" will appear their academic transcripts indicating they have participated in a Research Scholarship course. This course can apply toward either the electives or the skills category and the Criminology concentration. This seminar will meet on Tuesdays from 1.30-4.10 p.m. at the Fairfax campus, although we will likely substitute some of the class seminars and meetings with fieldwork assignments. General information on the Honors program is available at <http://cls.gmu.edu/undergraduate/honors-research>. If you are interested in registering for this course, please email drudes@gmu.edu.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR



Dr. Danielle S. Rudes is an Assistant Professor in the Criminology, Law & Society Department and Deputy Director of the Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence (ACE!) at George Mason University. Dr. Rudes received her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California, Irvine. Her research focuses on the relationships between social control, organizations and street-level workers. She is particularly interested in the ways decision makers interpret, negotiate and resist organizational change. Using intensive ethnographic observation and interviews, Danielle threads her research around both theoretical and practical considerations using empirical data to inform policy. She teaches courses in organizations, deviance, violence, prisons and social control and prisoner reentry. She received the 2012 Teaching Excellence Award at GMU.