

## CRIM 491/492 Honors Seminar 2015-2016:

# Emerging Police Technologies, Surveillance, and the Public

Professor Linda Merola



### Course Overview

Law enforcement agencies increasingly rely upon technologies with surveillance capabilities for crime prevention and investigation. Examples include the installation of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in public spaces, body-worn or dashboard cameras, automatic license plate recognition systems, facial recognition systems, StingRay mobile phone trackers, and even unmanned aerial vehicles (or drones). While some of these technologies (such as CCTV systems) have been in use for years, others are recent innovations. However, in all cases, the capabilities and data storage capacities of these types of systems continue to increase, while costs continue to decrease. As a consequence, a range of surveillance technologies are now or will soon be used by many law enforcement agencies.

In a time of limited agency budgets, it is not surprising that the promise of these technologies – that of more efficient and effective policing at decreased costs – would be attractive. However, these technologies also raise concerns because they greatly increase law enforcement's access to ready, detailed information about ordinary citizens' activities. As a result, the technologies prompt questions about privacy, about increases in the generalized surveillance capabilities of police, and also about the potential for harms resulting from data hacking or misuse. To date, however, relatively little empirical research has examined the use of these technologies by police.

### Course Activities

Students in the 2015-2016 Criminology, Law and Society Honors Seminar will conduct original research investigating the ways in which emerging surveillance technologies are deployed by law enforcement. To do so, they will design and administer a survey of police agencies in the United States. Prior to designing the survey, students will study the capabilities of these technologies and also the existing scholarly research on the topic. Additionally, students will learn how to construct and administer a survey, as well as how to analyze the data collected. During the course, students will work collaboratively in small teams, which is excellent preparation for a professional career in law or criminal justice. At the conclusion of the course, students will present their work to the Criminology, Law and Society faculty and to the College

of Humanities and Social Sciences. Students will also be encouraged to present their work to criminal justice professionals and researchers and to publish their findings.

### **Course Enrollment**

Students must have at least a 3.5 GPA and instructor permission to participate. Students who successfully complete CRIM 491/492 with a GPA of 3.5 or above (for these two courses) will receive the honors designation in Criminology, Law & Society when they graduate. Additionally, the letters “RS” will appear on their academic transcripts indicating they have participated in a Research and Scholarship Intensive course. These courses can apply toward either the electives category or the skills category (for students with a catalog year prior to 2013-14) and the criminal justice concentration. This seminar will meet on Tuesdays from 1:30 to 4:10 at the Fairfax campus. 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 Professor Merola at [lmerola@gmu.edu](mailto:lmerola@gmu.edu).

### **About the Instructor**



Dr. Linda Merola is an Associate Professor of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University and a Senior Fellow in the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at GMU. She received her Ph.D. in government from Georgetown University, where she was awarded the Harold N. Glassman Award for Excellence in Research, given to the most accomplished dissertation across the social science disciplines each year. Professor Merola also holds a J.D. from the George Washington University Law School, where she served on *The George Washington Law Review* and was admitted to the Virginia State Bar Association upon graduation. Professor Merola's academic interests relate to civil liberties and terrorism, with particular emphasis on public and expert opinion about these topics. Recently, she has published articles concerning the coverage of terrorism and civil liberties in the media, and she is currently working on research related to airport security and passenger screening. She has also published research related to the use of license plate recognition technology by law enforcement, including its impacts on privacy and police legitimacy. Professor Merola has received advanced training in research methodology, statistics and survey/experimental methods through the National Science Foundation and Duke University, as well as at the University of Michigan as a recipient of the ICPSR's Miller Scholarship.