

**Administration of Justice**  
**2005-2006 Honors Seminar Description**  
**Public Opinion on Crime and Terrorism: Perceptions and Policy Preferences**

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Public opinion, or at least the perception of “the public will,” plays an important role in developing policy responses to the problems of crime and terrorism. The 2005-2006 Honors Seminar will explore public opinion toward crime and terrorism in the United States. Emphasis will be given to public perceptions of law enforcement and the criminal justice system, and public preferences for crime and security policy. Students in the honors seminar will design, conduct, and analyze a public opinion survey on these topics.

It is likely that the events of September 11, 2001 influenced Americans’ views about fighting crime and terrorism, yet we know very little about public opinion toward policies and practices launched as part of the “war on terror.” For example:

- To what extent are Americans willing to trade individual civil liberties for better protection against possible terrorist attacks? Are people willing to let the government review their library records? Or conduct background checks of airline passengers from particular racial/ethnic backgrounds?
- How does the public perceive the agencies and law enforcement personnel in charge of counter-terrorism? Does the public trust them? Does the public believe they are doing a good job?
- How do people’s experiences with the criminal justice system affect their willingness to help the government fight crime and terrorism?

To address these and other questions, students in this class will:

- ✓ Explore the academic literature on public perceptions of the criminal justice system and policy preferences for fighting crime and terrorism
- ✓ Locate and analyze public opinion polls and other survey data on attitudes toward the justice system and crime/security policy
- ✓ Examine current crime and terrorism-related policies
- ✓ Develop and execute a research study to collect and analyze original data on this topic

A seminar format will be used for most of the fall semester to examine the literature on public opinion toward crime, terrorism and their related policies. The spring semester will be dedicated to developing and executing a group research project. The goal of this project is to make an original contribution to the literature by expanding our understanding of public opinion on crime and security policy. As part of the research project, students may conduct in-depth interviews, analyze public opinion data, and will design and conduct a survey of the GMU student body. Much of the research will involve working collaboratively in small teams.

Students accepted into the honors seminar will help shape the direction of the course, and should expect to be actively involved in the learning process and all stages of the research. Students will be encouraged to present their work to interested policymakers or at a research conference, and to publish their findings. As a result of their participation in this class, students will gain valuable skills applicable to a wide-range of careers in the criminal justice field.

Students who successfully complete ADJ 491/492 with a grade point average of 3.5 or above will receive the honors designation in Administration of Justice when they graduate. The 2005-2006 Honors Seminar will be directed by Professor Devon Johnson. Professor Johnson has conducted research on public responses to crime, with an emphasis on understanding racial differences in views of the justice system and the link between public opinion, politics and crime policy. The seminar will meet Thursdays from 1:30-4:10pm on the Prince William Campus. Enrollment is controlled.

VISIT THE ADJ WEBSITE FOR APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS  
<http://www.gmu.edu/depts/pia/adj/honors/index.shtml>