**CRIM 595: Learning from Errors in the Justice System**

Instructor: Dr. Robert J. Norris Fall 2019

Email: rnorris4@gmu.edu Wed,7:20-10:00 pm

Office: Enterprise Hall 321\* Peterson Hall 1109

Office Hours: By appointment\*

Our criminal legal system is a complex apparatus that sometimes produces undesirable outcomes. This class explores ways to think about and evaluate these errors. We will discuss a variety of outcomes, including police-involved shootings and wrongful convictions. In addition to discussing the common public reactions and discourse surrounding these events, we will examine some of the many psychological, organizational, and social underpinnings of such outcomes. Students will engage in meaningful discussion about the sources and meanings of these errors, and the ways in which our system might be improved to prevent their occurrence in the future.

You are expected to keep up with the assigned readings and to come to class prepared every day. By staying enrolled in this course, you are agreeing to the terms set forth in this syllabus.

**Required Materials**

There is no required text for this course. All readings and materials will be posted on Blackboard and/or shared in class.

**Grading Scale**

A 93-100

A- 90-92

B+ 87-89

B 83-86

B- 80-82

C 70-79

F 69 and below

**Grade Breakdown**

Participation 20%

Film Review/Analysis 30%

Final Report and Presentation 50%

**Grade Requirements**

**Participation (20%)**:

You are expected to come to class each week having read the assigned materials and prepared to participate in class discussion. This class is premised on people coming together to discuss challenging situations from a variety of perspectives and attempt to draw some conclusions and policy prescriptions based on that discussion. Thus, your participation is essential. This is a seminar, not a lecture-based class, so your active participation is required.

**Film Review/Analysis (30%):**

During the first half of the semester, you will complete a brief paper that reviews and analyzes an erroneous outcome that was depicted in a film. A list of options and more details will be provided in class.

**Final Report and Presentation (50%)**:

Students will work in small groups throughout the semester to prepare a report and presentation as their major project. More details will be provided in class.

In short, the project will involve choosing an error in the justice system (options will be provided) and conducting a modified version of a “Sentinel Event Review” of the incident. You will have to collect information about the event including its antecedents, the event itself, and the aftermath. You will then examine the leading individual, structural, and systemic causes of the error and conduct research on those issues. Finally, you will use this research to develop policy reforms that may help prevent such errors from occurring in the future. During the final weeks of the semester, each group will present their event review to the class. This will involve giving an overview of the event, your research findings, and your policy prescriptions, as well as engaging the class with discussion questions and/or other activities.

You will complete pieces of the project throughout the semester, so that you can receive feedback and make improvements before submitting the final product at the end. Each group will be assigned one of the Ph.D. students to serve as a point-person. They will be there to help you bounce around ideas, organize the workload, and provide feedback as you work through the various elements of the project.

**Class Policies**

**Contacting Me**: The easiest way to get in touch with 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. Your emails should be written in a professional manner. I will not respond to any emails that do not follow these guidelines.

**Make-up** **Policy**: Unless you have a legitimate, excused reason for missing an assignment or exam, make-up opportunities will not be given.

**Extra** **Credit**: I generally do not give extra credit. You will have plenty of opportunities to be successful in this class, and I will do anything I can to help you do so. Furthermore, unless an error was made in grading your exam or assignment, it is inappropriate to ask me to increase your grade, and I will not do so.

**In-Class Discussion:** We will be discussing many issues in this class, some of which are 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.

**Laptop/Tablet Policy**: If you wish to use a laptop or tablet in class, you should only use it to take notes or look at class materials. Any indication that you are using your computer for anything other than class will result in my requiring you to put it away. If it continues to be a distraction, you may be asked to leave and forfeit your participation credit for that day.

**Cell Phone Policy**: Please put your phones on silent and do not have them out during class. If I see or hear your cell phone once, you will be asked to put it away. If I see or hear it again, you will be asked to leave and you will forfeit your participation credit for the day. If you are expecting an important notice or if an emergency crops up, quietly step outside of the classroom and handle it.

**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*: All graded work for this class (including homework assignments and exams) must be completed ***independently*** (do ***not*** work with or compare answers with anyone else). **The use of another student’s clicker during class is also prohibited.** 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.

**Students with Disabilities**: 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.

**Class Schedule**

Notes:

* Readings should be completed prior to that day’s class meeting
* “*Textbook*” denotes Lab et al., *Criminal Justice: The Essentials* (5th ed.)
* Class schedule is subject to change. I will notify you of any changes in class and/or via Blackboard

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| **Week** | **Class Dates** | **Topic(s)** | **Class Readings**  | **Assignment Due** |
| 1 | Aug. 28 | * Introductions and class overview
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| 2 | Sep. 4 | * The “conventional” reactions to errors
* Overview of NIJ’s Sentinel Events Initiative
 | * Doyle, “NIJ’s Sentinel Events Initiative”
* Doyle, “Learning about Learning from Errors”

Additional Reading: * Doyle, “Learning from Errors”
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| 3 | Sep. 11 | * Approaches to the analysis of errors
 | * Dekker et al., “The complexity of failure”
* Doyle, “A safety model perspective”

Additional Reading:* Quattrone Center, “Report of the Philadelphia Event Review Team”
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| 4 | Sep. 18 | **No Class Meeting – Online Assignment Due** |
| 5 | Sep. 25 | * Cursory application of ideas
 | * Sherman, “Reducing Fatal Police Shootings as System Crashes”
* Thacher, “The Learning Model of Use of Force Reviews”

Additional Reading: * TBA
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| 6 | Oct. 2 | * Group workshop week
 | * Case-specific readings on your own\*
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| 7 | Oct. 9 | * Individual biases in decision-making
 | * TBA
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| 8 | Oct. 16 | * Behavioral ethics and organizational decision-making
 | * Bazerman & Gino, “Behavioral Ethics”
* TBA
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| 9 | Oct. 23 | * TBA\*
* The nature of the jobs
 | * TBA
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| 10 | Oct. 30 | * TBA\*
* Critical perspectives and the lessons of history
 | * TBA
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| 11 | Nov. 6 | * TBA\*
* Consequences of errors
 | * TBA
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| 12 | Nov. 13 | * Group workshop week – MS only
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| 13 | Nov. 20 | * Group presentations
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| 14 | Nov. 27 | **No Class** |
| 15 | Dec. 4 | * Group presentations
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