

CRIMINOLOGY 517

RESEARCH PRACTICUM IN JUSTICE POLICY & PRACTICE

SPRING, 2020

THURSDAYS: 4:30-7:10 p.m.

Thompson 1017

Professor Laurie O. Robinson
Clarence J. Robinson Professor of Criminology, Law and Society
George Mason University

Office: 207A East Building

Phone: (703) 993-2162

Email: lrobin17@gmu.edu

Office Hours:

Thursdays 3:15 to 4:15 p.m.
Or by appointment

Course Description and Goals:

This research practicum is the capstone course for students pursuing the Criminology Department's Master of Science in Criminal Justice and MA concentration in Policy and Practice. In the course, students will work with a justice organization (a government agency or a non-profit) to plan, initiate and undertake a research project, focusing on a problem or issue relevant and useful to that organization. This work will culminate in students preparing a policy-oriented report (a "white paper") as well as a PowerPoint summarizing findings and recommendations for presentation at the final class.

Students will also hear from – and interact with – leading policymakers and practitioners in the criminal justice field and have an opportunity to discuss with them current and future challenges in the field as well as career opportunities. Students will prepare a short paper synthesizing insights and information gained from our speakers.

This course can help students to

- improve their ability to engage effectively and professionally with a "client" justice organization;
- undertake policy-oriented research, synthesize various forms of information to make an effective case (i.e., recommendations) to a policy audience based on their analysis and research findings; and
- build practical skills in how most effectively to present findings and recommendations to policy and practitioner leaders.

Class Sessions:

A key aspect of the course will focus on developing your relationship with your "client" organization. Students will work with their agency or organization on defining the issue to be addressed, refining the research question, and agreeing on how data will be collected.

Class sessions early in the semester will provide assistance to students on research methods which can be used as they approach their topics. Expert guest lecturers -- other CLS faculty -- will address how to handle qualitative interviews and observational research. Students will learn, as well, about resources available through the GMU library. We will also talk about data analysis and organization of the report, as well as about effective writing for policy audiences. As the semester progresses, I will be holding individual sessions with you regarding progress on your research and -- later -- on the status of your written drafts.

You will regularly present brief reports on the status of your research and your writing. Guest speakers will join us for several classes devoted to discussing criminal justice system innovations and challenges, as well as career opportunities.

At the final class, you will make PowerPoint presentations of your findings and recommendations to a former high level government official. This will be modeled on what might take place before a top level criminal justice policy leader.

Electronic Devices:

Because of the nature of the research work, you may bring laptops to class. But I expect you not to use electronic devices for non-course purposes during class – and to put away cell phones and not to text during the class period.

Course Requirements:

The central focus of the class is your research project and the 20 to 25-page white paper (minimum 5000 word) that will result from it. This is due at the last class. (See factors below under “Course Grading” as to how your paper will be evaluated.) Students will also present a (maximum) 5-minute PowerPoint presentation at the final class summarizing findings and recommendations from their project.

Students will also prepare – and then present in class on April 9 – a 500 to 750-word paper synthesizing insights and information gained from attending either the MS Speaker Series or guest speakers in our class. *You should draw on what you learned from at least two speakers*, and, referring to specific illustrations from the speakers’ talks, explore one of the following options:

(1) Consider what you learned about the challenges of translating research into policy and practice and discuss *specific examples* cited by the speakers and how these challenges were mitigated or overcome;

(2) Describe two or three of the most valuable insights you learned about how leaders deal effectively with problems in running a criminal justice organization. In your analysis, cite concrete examples discussed by the speakers.

(3) Discuss major opportunities for criminal justice reform and how these might be addressed, citing specific approaches advanced by the speakers.

In addition, there are short reports assigned during the semester for you to provide updates on the status of your research.

Finally – as to course expectations – I expect students to attend every class. In addition to important information I'll share in class – and the courtesy we need to extend to guest speakers – you will be expected to give regular updates on your project. ***If you anticipate missing class, please contact me in advance to let me know you will not be present. A portion of your grade will be based on active class participation.***

Course Evaluation/Grading

- 50% White paper (20 to 25 pages – Minimum 5000 words)
(You will be evaluated on a number of factors, including your one-page executive summary; the clarity of your research question; your literature review; how you handle the research and how that is documented in a methodology section; how you synthesize information and set out your findings; how you build the case for specific policy recommendations, using evidence to back up specific proposals; and the quality and polish of your writing. Timely submission is also key.)
- 15% Paper on speakers and your presentation of the paper in class.
- 10% Class reports and other assignments
- 15% Attendance and active class participation (including engagement with guest speakers)
- 10% PowerPoint presentation in final class

There is no extra credit given in CRIM 517.

Grading scale:

94-100%	A	77-79%	C+
90-93%	A-	74-76%	C
87-89%	B+	70-73%	C-
84-86%	B	60-69%	D
80-83%	B-	Below 60	F

Exam Policy:

There is no exam in this course.

Required Reading:

There are several reading assignments listed for individual classes in the schedule of classes below. In addition, there are two books required for this course:

- Strunk, Jr., William and E.B. White. (2000). *The Elements of Style, 4th Edition*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. This is a compact guide to good writing. Strong writing skills are important for your career – and for the white paper in this course.
- Patton, Michael Quinn. (1987). *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications. This book can be a valuable asset – providing practical guidance for you. Read, in particular, its chapters on fieldwork and observation and depth interviewing, as well as the chapter on analyzing and interpreting qualitative data.

While there is a lower level of assigned reading than in other courses, you should be reading on the topic of your research throughout the semester to inform the content of your paper.

Students with Disabilities:

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodation, please see me and also contact the Disability Resource Center at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Academic Integrity:

GMU's Honor Code requires all students to pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal or lie in matters related to academic work. All work submitted is to be solely your product. You may not rely on projects, papers, or other written work previously prepared by another student, and no paper or work of any type submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of another course may be used a second time to satisfy a requirement. No assistance is to be obtained from commercial organizations which sell or lease research help or written papers. All violations will be reported to the Honor Committee. See: <http://oai.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/George-Mason-University-Honor-Code-2018-2019-final.pdf>

Enrollment:

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in the class. Last day to add classes is Tues., Jan. 28. Last day to drop classes is Fri., Feb. 21. After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing requires the approval of the Dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.

Communications:

Students must activate their Mason email account, use it to communicate with the Criminology Department, and check it regularly for University information, including messages about this class. Email is the best way to reach me; I check email multiple times a day.

Class Schedule:

Jan. 23

Introduction and Overview

Purposes and goals for the course; plans for the semester
Specific expectations and timetable; student introductions
Initial discussion of topics for white papers
Key underlying criminal justice issues today

Assignment for this class: Read Strunk and White (all chapters);
Ch. 1, "An Introduction to Qualitative Methods," in M.Q. Patton.

Note: Initial progress report forms will be distributed at this class -
to be filled out and turned in at the Jan. 30 class.

Jan. 30

Project goals: Planning and implementation

Student reports on selection of topics/justice agencies
The agency relationship
Framing the question, organizing your timeline
What represents a good white paper?

Assignments: Students turn in Initial Progress Reports; read Ch. 2,
"When to Use Qualitative Methods," in M.Q. Patton; bring a
sample of a good and a poor white paper; read the 3 sample white
papers posted on Blackboard, identifying strong and weak points.

Feb. 6

Research methods: Qualitative interviews

Guest speaker:

Professor James Willis

Assignments: Read Ch. 5, "Depth Interviewing" in M.Q. Patton;
Nancy Fichtman Dana et al., "Qualitative Interviewing and the Art of
Questioning: Promises, Possibilities, Problems and Pitfalls"; and
readings from Professor Willis posted on Blackboard. Also note
that Prof. Willis has assigned an exercise also posted on Blackboard
that is due to Prof. Willis by Noon, Mon., Feb. 3.

Please also bring to this class the Assignment Sheet for next week's class
from Prof. Mastrofski (see Blackboard), since you will be conducting an
exercise at this class (watching a video) for which you will need instruction.

Feb. 13

Research methods: Observational research

Guest speaker:

Professor Stephen Mastrofski

Assignment: Read Ch. 4 in M.Q. Patton. Review and undertake Dr. Mastrofski's two assignments on the sheet on Blackboard. The two narratives you will need for his 2nd assignment are posted on Blackboard. Note that assignment is due to Prof. Mastrofski by 5 pm, Mon., Feb. 10.

Feb. 20

**"Lessons learned": Experiences and examples from past
Research Practicum alums**

Guest speakers:

Reyna Cartagena and Tarren Smarr, Spring 2013 Class

Angela Acosta and Kideuk Kim, Spring 2014 Class

Paige Thompson, Spring 2018 Class (Tentative)

Nicky Brady and Justine Burke, Spring 2019 Class

Assignment: (1) Read former student white papers on Blackboard and come prepared to ask questions of the guests. (2) Progress report forms will be distributed at this class - to be filled out and turned in at the Feb. 27 class. (Forms also posted on Blackboard.)

Feb. 27

From 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. on Feb. 27, the MS Speakers Series is sponsoring a talk by Nancy La Vigne, Vice President for Justice Policy at the Urban Institute. In light of the assignment for the speakers paper (due April 9) – and the fact Nancy La Vigne is so expert on Washington criminal justice policy-making – I urge you, if you can, to attend (Fenwick Room 2001). **You are also invited to join the noon lunch** with Dr. La Vigne (Fenwick 1014B).

GMU Libraries: What resources they can offer for your research projects

Guest speaker:

Chris Magee, Social Sciences Librarian, GMU Libraries

6:00 p.m.: Students will each present a progress report on their projects, detailing status of project, any problems/issues being encountered. Discussion and brainstorming/problem-solving.

Assignment: Completed progress reports, using form from Blackboard. Be prepared to present in class.

- March 5** **Guest speaker:**
Michael Berkow , Director
Coast Guard Investigative Service, U.S. Coast Guard
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Assignment: (1) Read Ch. 6, “Analyzing and Interpreting Qualitative Data,” in M.Q. Patton. (2) Come prepared with 3 questions for Director Berkow.
- March 12** **SPRING BREAK**
- March 19** **Guest speaker:**
Mai Fernandez, Executive Director
National Center for Victims of Crime
- Assignment: (1) Students turn in an outline of their papers at this class. (This should include a paragraph or more under each heading describing what will be included in that section.) (2) Come to class with 3 questions for NCVIC Executive Director Fernandez.
- March 26** **No class this week**
Professor attending professional meeting.
- April 2** **Individual meetings about project progress**
Students will hold individual meetings during class time with the professor to receive feedback on their white paper outlines and discuss progress/any problems being encountered with their projects.
- April 9** **Student presentations of papers about guest speaker themes/issues**
- Assignment: Students turn in their 500-750 word papers on themes/ issues advanced by speakers (see p. 3 of syllabus for assignment details) and present these papers in the class. (Max. 7 - 8 minute informal oral presentations.)
- April 16** **Guest speaker:**
Timothy J. Quinn, Executive Director, Intergovernmental Public Liaison
U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP)
Former Acting Director and Chief of Staff, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), U.S. Department of Justice

Assignment: (1) A rough draft of your paper is due at this class. Comments will be provided to you this coming week. (2) Come to class with 3 questions for Executive Director Quinn.

April 23

Policy Report Presentations

Assignment: Students will practice a *trial run-through* of their final PowerPoint presentations in this class. Presentations should be a *succinct MAXIMUM of 5 minutes to allow time for all students to present and for questions and feedback from guests at the final class.*

April 30

Final Student Presentations

Students present their final findings and recommendations in PowerPoint format before a former government policy leader and guests (CLS Department leaders and class alums).

Special guest:

**Hon. James K. “Chips” Stewart, Former Director, National Institute of Justice (NIJ)
Director of Public Safety and Senior Fellow for Law Enforcement, CNA Corporation (Ret.)**

Assignment: Final white papers due