

George Mason University
Department of Criminology, Law and Society
CRIM 495-003 Capstone in Criminology, Law and Society: Violence: An Enduring Problem
Fall 2023

When and where does this course meet?

The lecture for this course meets on **Tuesdays** from **12:00 – 1:15pm** in **Horizon Hall 2010**. The recitations for this course meet on **Thursdays** from **10:30 – 11:45am** in **Peterson Hall 1111** and from **12:00 – 1:15pm** in **Horizon Hall 4001**.

Who is the instructor for this course?

Dr. Marie Mele Thomas, Associate Professor. I've been teaching criminology and criminal justice courses for many years, and this capstone is one of my favorite courses to teach! If you need to reach me outside of class, please email me at mmeletho@gmu.edu. I will be available throughout the semester for virtual and in-person meetings by appointment.

Who is the graduate teaching assistant (GTA) for this course?

Suraiya Hossain Shammi, doctoral student in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society. Suraiya received her M.S. in Criminal Justice Sciences from Illinois State University. Her research interests include mental health, guilty pleas, Miranda rights, and legal decision-making. Suraiya can be reached at sshammi@gmu.edu.

What is this course about?

This course will enhance your understanding of the nature, extent and dynamics of a variety of different, yet connected, forms of violence. In this course, you will examine violent behavior through an interdisciplinary lens that analyzes the patterns and correlates of interpersonal and collective violence, from rape and sexual assault to lynching and genocide. This analysis is essential to greater understanding and prevention of violence, which remains one of the most pressing issues facing our nation and our world. This course offers you an opportunity to explore why we as human beings engage in destructive and harmful behavior, and what we can do to better address this enduring social problem.

What are the course goals?

This course has two primary goals: to expand your critical thinking about violence as an enduring social problem, and to develop your writing skills. We will address the first goal by examining different forms of violence from an interdisciplinary perspective, as well as innovative and research-based strategies for addressing violence. You will develop your writing skills through foundational instruction in the principles of writing as well as writing assignments that will require you to apply those principles to a specific topic related to the course material.

What requirements are met by this course?

Mason Impact offers high-impact opportunities to all students, designed to develop problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication skills, and preparing them to make a real impact in the world. Mason

Impact is grounded in a strong education that explores how knowledge is created and used, investigates local and global challenges from multiple perspectives, and helps students develop relevant questions. Mason Impact Projects allow students to use inquiry methods to answer their questions and learn to communicate their results. These experiences are transformative; students are introduced to a more complicated and interesting world in which they can have an impact.

The purpose of the **synthesis course** is to provide students with the opportunity to synthesize the knowledge, skills and values gained from the **Mason Core curriculum**. Synthesis courses strive to expand students' ability to master new content, think critically, and develop life-long learning skills across the disciplines. While it is not feasible to design courses that cover "all" areas of general education, synthesis courses should function as a careful alignment of disciplinary goals with a range of Mason Core learning outcomes.

The purpose of the **capstone course** is to provide a high impact, culminating element of an undergraduate education, helping students develop a more comprehensive and integrative understanding of their area of study and to utilize critical thinking skills. Capstone courses provide students opportunities to apply and demonstrate their knowledge and generally involve integrative /applied/experiential projects. As such, this course examines a key foundational issue in the field.

What books will you read in this course?

Alvarez, A. and Bachman, R. (2021). Violence: The enduring problem, 4th Ed. Sage Publications. ISBN 1544355658 (paperback)

How will you succeed in this course?

Class Attendance/Participation

If you want to succeed in this course, you must attend class. Class attendance entails both active listening and participation in class discussions. **Your class attendance/participation will account for 10 points toward your final grade.** If you are absent from class, please read the material for that week and keep up to date with any course assignments due that day, including journals and quizzes.

Complete Readings prior to Class

The best way to prepare for class is to complete the assigned readings. Readings will introduce you to the course material and create a platform for class discussion. It's important that you complete the assigned readings prior to class meetings and use the readings to facilitate your participation in class discussions and the completion of weekly assignments.

Participate in Class Discussions

Class discussions are opportunities for you to share your insights on the course readings and ask questions that further facilitate your understanding of the issues. Given the sensitive nature of the topics we will discuss in this course, you are expected to contribute to class discussions in a mature and responsible manner. **Given the myriad differences in life experiences, it is essential to respect views or perspectives that differ from your own.** The expression of individual opinions is encouraged; however, prejudicial, derogatory, or demeaning remarks will not be tolerated. Before you speak, think about the impact your

words will have on others, and consider the extent to which the point you are making is informed by facts or personal bias. Be prepared to support your viewpoint with empirical data if challenged by a classmate.

How will your learning be assessed in this course?

Journals

Submit a journal entry at the conclusion of each week. Journals will ask you to identify key points made in the material and identify areas for further discussion or analysis. To receive full credit for this assignment, you must fully answer the prompt questions in approximately 300 words. Your answer must show your understanding of and critical thinking about the material. Weekly journals will be posted on Blackboard at 12am on Sundays and are due by 11:59pm on Fridays. Each journal is worth 10 points, for a total of 130 points.

Quizzes

Complete two quizzes on the course material. The purpose of each quiz is to assess your retention of the material in the first and second half of the course. The quiz is not “open book.” This means you cannot rely on the powerpoint slides, your class notes, or the assigned readings to complete the quizzes. Each quiz will consist of 30 questions, will be administered on Blackboard, and must be taken on the date assigned. Each quiz is worth 60 points, for a total of 120 points.

Writing Assignments

Complete two writing assignments: a case study and a research paper on a topic of your choice. Assignment details and grading rubrics will be posted on Blackboard. All assignments are due on the dates listed in the course schedule. Late assignments will not be accepted. The writing assignments are worth a total of 100 points.

How will your final grade be calculated?

Final grades will be calculated using the following course requirements:

Journals	130 points
Quizzes	120 points
Writing Assignments	100 points
Attendance/Participation	10 points
Total	360 points

Final grades will be calculated by dividing the total number of points accumulated by the total number of points available, and then multiplying that figure by 100. For example, if a student accumulates 300 points, the grade calculation is as follows: $300 / 360 \times 100 = 83\%$

Final grades will be determined using the following matrix:

A+	97-100	A	94-96	C+	77-79	C	74-76
A-	90-93	B+	87-89	C-	70-73	D	60-69
B	84-86	B-	80-83	F	0-59		

What policies are you expected to follow?

Cell Phones and Laptops

Cell phone and laptop use is not permitted in the classroom. Electronic devices are a significant distraction to you and your classmates, and impede your full participation in the class. As reported by a study in the academic journal *Communication Education*:

“Students who abstained from using their mobile devices earned a 10–17% higher percentage grade on a multiple-choice test, scored 53–70% higher on information recall, and scored 51–58% higher on notetaking, than those groups engaged mobile device use during class. These findings reinforce and extend those of other studies, and provide clear evidence that frequent messaging unrelated to class content interferes with student learning while in class” (Kuznekoff et al., 2015, 363). In keeping with this finding, you are expected to have **all devices turned off and put away for the duration of the class.**

Email

GMU policy provides email as the standard means of communication and requires that all email contact be through GMU email accounts. **Please check your GMU email regularly** so you don’t miss time-sensitive information and course announcements.

Blackboard

GMU’s online Blackboard program will be used for posting assignments, grades, readings, and course announcements. Here’s how to access Blackboard:

- Go to: mymason.gmu.edu and log in using your email username and password
- Click on the link toward the upper-right part of the screen that says “Courses”
- Under “Course List,” click on “CRIM 495 (Fall 2023)”

If you need assistance accessing or navigating Blackboard, you can email courses@gmu.edu, call (703) 993-3141, or go to Johnson Center room 311.

Diversity and Inclusion

Mason promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth. An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but is not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

University Honor Code

Following is a summary of Mason’s honor code; see the University Catalog and <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/> for additional information. Mason’s honor code will be strictly enforced in this class

and all violations will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. The Honor Code of George Mason University specifically prohibits cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing.

Cheating and attempted cheating include “willful giving or receiving of an unauthorized, unfair, dishonest, or unscrupulous advantage in academic work over other students.” Examples include the use of unauthorized resources during an exam, copying another student’s work (with or without their permission), allowing another student to copy your work, using an assignment or test from another student, accessing tests or grades electronically for the purpose of getting an unfair advantage, and any other behavior that fits the general definition above.

Plagiarism includes “presenting as one’s own the words, the work, the ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment. While direct quotations do need citations, so do paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information formerly unknown to the writers or which the writers did not discover themselves. Exceptions for this include factual information which can be obtained from a variety of sources, the writers’ own insights or findings from their own field research, and what has been termed common knowledge.” Examples include taking or buying a paper from someone else or the internet and presenting it as your own, and submitting as your own work a paper with substantial unacknowledged contributions from others. Information and graphics obtained from the internet (except for freeware clipart) must include source citations to avoid plagiarism. Your final paper will be submitted to Blackboard and screened by the SafeAssign plagiarism detection program. If you use another student’s paper as a significant, unacknowledged source for your paper, you will be referred to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) is a federal law that gives protection to student educational records and provides students with certain rights. For more information on your FERPA rights, please visit <https://registrar.gmu.edu/ferpa/>

Other policies are available at <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu>. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.

What University resources are available to you?

Health and Safety Concerns

WAVES: Wellness, Alcohol and Violence Education and Services

WAVES (Wellness, Alcohol and Violence Education and Services) promotes wellness within the Mason community through health education, alcohol/drug assessment and education, and violence awareness, prevention and sexual assault response. We help students make healthy, safe choices and encourage lifelong, thoughtful healthy decision-making through individualized support, creative programming, and evidence-based education and outreach. You can reach the WAVES office at 703-993-9999 or at waves.gmu.edu. The office is located in SUB (Student Union Building) I, Suite 3200. Additional resources include:

- 24-Hour Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Crisis Line 703-380-1434
- Fairfax County Office for Women and Domestic and Sexual Violence Services 703-360-7273

- Arlington County Domestic Violence Services 703-228-4848
- Prince William County Sexual Assault Victims Advocacy Services (SAVAS) 703-368-4141
- Virginia Family Violence and Sexual Assault 1-800-838-8238
- Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network 1-800-656-HOPE <https://ohl.rainn.org/online/>

CAPS: Counseling and Psychological Services

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides a wide range of free confidential services to students, faculty, and staff. Services are provided by a staff of professional clinical psychologists, social workers, counselors, learning specialists, and psychiatric providers. CAPS individual and group counseling, workshops, and outreach programs are designed to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance. Visit caps.gmu.edu for additional resources.

- For consultation or emergency assistance during office hours call 703-993-2380.
- For assistance during non-office hours, call University Police at 703-993-4357.

Additional resources include:

- 703-527-4077 (CrisisLink)
- 1-800-273-8255 (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline)
- 1-877-838-2838 (Veterans' Crisis Hotline)

Students with Disabilities

If you have (or think you may have) a disability or other condition that may affect your academic performance, please make sure documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Services (703-993-2474; ods.gmu.edu) to determine the necessary accommodations. By Mason policy, I can only make accommodations for students with certification from ODS.

English Language Skills

If you are not a native English speaker and are interested in linguistic or cultural enrichment services, you can contact Mason's English Language Institute at eli.gmu.edu.

Academic Skills

If you are interested in improving your academic skills, the university offers students assistance through Learning Services at caps.gmu.edu/learningservices. Learning Services offers workshops on the study cycle, effective note-taking techniques, individual learning styles, exam preparation, and effective time management.

Writing Skills

If you are interested in improving your writing skills, the university offers students assistance through the Writing Center at writingcenter.gmu.edu/

What is the course schedule for the Fall 2023 semester?

Date	Tuesday Lecture	Date	Thursday Recitations	Assignments Due Friday at 11:59pm
8/22	Review of Course Syllabus Introductory Slides	8/24	Overview of Recitations Discussion of Writing Assignments	Week 1 Journal
8/29	Chapter 1: Defining Violence	9/31	Visit from Librarian Discussion of Case Study	Week 2 Journal
9/5	Chapter 2: Why Do We Do it?	9/7	Review of Case Study Grading Rubric	Week 3 Journal
9/12	Chapter 3: Assault and Murder	9/14	GTA meeting to discuss draft of Case Study	Week 4 Journal
9/19	Chapter 4: Serial, Mass and Spree Killings	9/21	GTA meeting to discuss draft of Case Study	Week 5 Journal Writing Assignment #1
9/26	Chapter 5: Violence in the Home	9/28	Discussion of Writing Assignment #2	Week 6 Journal
10/3	Chapter 6: Rape and Sexual Assault	10/5	Empirical Literature on Research Paper Topic	Week 7 Journal
10/10	No Class – Fall Break Study for Quiz!	10/12	Kahoot Quiz Review	Quiz #1
10/17	Chapter 7: Stranger Crime and Street Violence	10/19	Organization and Structure of Research Paper	Week 9 Journal
10/24	Chapter 8: Hate Crimes	10/26	Review of Research Paper Grading Rubric	Week 10 Journal Draft of Research Paper
10/31	Chapter 9: Crowd Violence	11/2	GTA Meeting to discuss draft of research paper	Week 11 Journal
11/7	Chapter 10: Terrorism	11/9	GTA Meeting to discuss draft of research paper	Week 12 Journal
11/14	Chapter 11: Genocide	11/16	No Recitation Meetings	Week 13 Journal Writing Assignment #2
11/21-11/23 Thanksgiving Break – No Class Meetings – Enjoy the Holiday!				
11/28	Chapter 12: Violence Prevention	11/30	Kahoot Quiz Review	Week 14 Journal
12/5	No Class Meeting - Reading Day	12/7	No Recitations – Finals Week	Quiz #2