





CRIM 517: RESEARCH PRACTICUM IN JUSTICE POLICY & PRACTICE Fall 2023

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Department of Criminology, Law and Society, George Mason University
Mondays 4:30–7:10pm, Peterson Hall 2411 | In-Person - Fairfax Campus

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 Schedule a meeting with me at calendly.com/charlotte_gill
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Course Description and Learning Outcomes

This research practicum is the capstone course for the Master of Science in Criminal Justice program. You will work with a justice organization to plan, conduct, and write up a research project that focuses on a problem or issue relevant and useful to the organization. You will present your findings in a policy-oriented white paper and a final presentation. You will also reflect on lessons you have learned from criminal justice leaders from the MS Speaker Series during your time in the program. The goal of this course is to synthesize what you have learned about the translation of criminal justice research into policy and practice in justice organizations throughout your time in the MS program by directly experiencing the translation process.

On completion of this course you will have:

- Created an original research project
- Communicated knowledge from an original research project
- Engaged in scholarly inquiry by
 - Articulating and refining a research question
 - Following ethical principles
 - Gathering evidence appropriate to the question
 - Assessing the validity of key assumptions and evidence
- Synthesized knowledge on criminal justice research, policy, and practice in order to effectively translate the findings of your research project to your partner agency.

Course Format and Expectations

As the culminating experience of your MS degree, this capstone course is intense and requires a good deal of preparation! You should only take this course if you are in your final semester of the program. You will be successful if you prepare ahead of time by lining up an agency to collaborate with and thinking about what topic or area you want to research. The course is also structured to ensure you make progress on your project throughout the semester and don't wait until the last minute. There will be several milestones to meet along the way to keep you on track. **Remember, the capstone is the program's equivalent of a Masters thesis, so treat it with the time and energy such a project deserves.**

This course will be taught in person on the Fairfax campus. You are expected to attend classes when they are scheduled, but later in the semester we will have fewer formal classes and more opportunities for individual work time. You are also expected to work on your projects outside of class time, just as you would do reading and homework for any other course. While some classes will require you to read or prepare ahead of time, the workload will be balanced to give you time to work on your project as well.

Classes will focus on developing your research question, identifying appropriate research methods, and developing your writing and presentation skills. Later in the semester I will schedule individual meetings with you to ensure you are making progress on your project. During class sessions you may be expected to provide updates on the status of your project, as well as participate in discussion and small-group activities. See the [list of classes](#) starting on page 4 for more details about each class session and topic.

Assignments and Grading

Full assignment instructions will be posted on Blackboard, and assignments should be submitted on Blackboard unless otherwise stated. A [summary of key deadlines](#) is on page 4.

- **Participation: 10%.** You will submit a weekly journal detailing your progress on your research project. You are also expected to attend all scheduled sessions and required meetings and meet class deadlines (barring emergencies and other reasonable accommodations, which should be discussed with me ASAP).
- **Homework assignments: 10% total.** Several small homework assignments will be due near the beginning of the semester. These include reviewing a prior capstone paper, submitting CITI ethics training certification, and conducting an informational interview with a potential 'client' (i.e. a justice agency representative).
- **Preliminary project plan: 5%.** You will write up an initial description of your research question and client, and an annotated bibliography of relevant research.
- **Research design and data collection plan: 5%.** You will write up a summary of your research question(s) and how you plan to collect and analyze data to answer them.
- **Draft white paper: 15% total.** Throughout the semester you will have opportunities to submit drafts of each section of your report for review. These will be submitted in three parts: (1) the literature review and methodology sections; (2) the executive summary; and (3) the results, conclusions, and recommendations.
- **Paper on MS Speaker Series: 10%.** You will prepare a brief (500-750 words) paper synthesizing insights and information gained from attending the MS Speaker Series during your time in the program.
- **Final presentation: 15%.** You will give a brief practitioner-oriented presentation on your key findings during the final class of the semester.
- **Final white paper: 30%.** Your final report will contain revised versions of each of the draft sections submitted earlier in the semester. The final paper will be 20-25 pages long.

Letter grades for this course will be based on the following points breakdown, according to the Graduate Regular scale:

A+	97-100	A	93-96.9	A-	90-92.9
B+	87-89.9	B	83-86.9	B-	80-82.9
C	70-79.9	F	< 70		

Course Schedule and Important Dates

In-person class sessions will be held in Peterson Hall 2411 every Monday from 4:30 - 7:10pm, unless stated below. All readings and resources will be posted in the Course Materials section of Blackboard and should be completed *before* coming to that week's class. Note that while there are fewer assigned readings in this class than you may be used to, you will also be expected to work on your project consistently throughout the semester.

The weekly schedule is subject to change. Any changes will be announced on Blackboard and via email.

List of classes

Class	Date	Content
1	Aug 21	Introductions and expectations
2	Aug 28	Writing and framing your research question
	Sep 4	NO CLASS (Labor Day)
3	Sep 11	Working with an agency
4	Sep 18	Primary data collection
5	Sep 25	Secondary data collection
6	Oct 2	Analyzing qualitative data
7	Oct 10	Analyzing quantitative data NOTE: This week's class is on a TUESDAY
8	Oct 16	Individual work time and check-ins
9	Oct 23	Individual work time and check-ins
10	Oct 30	Communicating findings: The white paper
11	Nov 6	Communicating findings: The presentation
12	Nov 13	Individual work time and check-ins
13	Nov 20	Final presentations (Group 1)
14	Nov 27	Final presentations (Group 2)

Summary of key deadlines

Due date	Due time	Deliverable	%
Aug 28	End of day	Capstone reflection	5
Sep 11	End of day	CITI training and informational interview summary	5
Sep 18	End of day	Preliminary project plan	5
Oct 2	End of day	Research design & data collection plan	5
Oct 16	End of day	Draft report part 1 (Literature review and methodology)	5
Nov 6	End of day	Speaker Series paper	10
Nov 13	End of day	Draft report part 2 (Executive summary)	5
Nov 20/27	During class	Final presentations	15
Nov 27	End of day	Draft report part 3 (Results, conclusions and recommendations)	5
Dec 8	End of day	Final paper (all sections)	30

See the Course Materials section of Blackboard for links to readings, assignment instructions, etc.

Course Policies

Course Website and Communications

The syllabus, course schedule, readings, and additional information and announcements will be posted on [Blackboard](#). All course announcements and individual communication will be sent to your Mason email address, and you must always use your Mason email address to correspond with me due to federal regulations that protect students' privacy. Please check your Mason email regularly or ensure that you have set up email forwarding correctly.

My contact information is at the top of this document. **Email or text are the best ways to reach me.** I will reply to emails, voicemails, and text messages within 24 hours during the week and by Monday if messages are sent on Fridays or over the weekend. Please include the course name (CRIM 517) and your full name in all messages.

I don't have formal "office hours," but I'm available to meet in person or via Zoom at your convenience. You can schedule a meeting with me directly via [Calendly](#) (no need to email me to ask first!). If you don't see a time that works for you on Calendly please email me and suggest another time, and I'll do my best to work with your schedule.

My Commitment to Excellence, Inclusion, and Accessibility

I am determined to uphold the University's mission, which states that, "We hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards as educators, scholars, and professionals," and thus am committed to creating a culture of excellence, inclusion, and accessibility.

In my classes I seek to create a learning environment that fosters **respect for people across identities**. I welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, socioeconomic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, first language, religion, political or institutional affiliation, age, and ability. I encourage all members of the class to engage with the material from their own perspectives and also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different from their own.

I recognize that systemic racism is pervasive within our societies and institutions, and pledge to combat it through receiving critical feedback on how I can be more inclusive and being more self-aware of my privileged identities. I recognize that there is still much self- and systemic work to be done to make the spaces of the University safe and hospitable to all, and am committed to continuing to do that work. My door is open to any students seeking support and guidance.

Note: This statement is based on language developed by the [Mason Women and Gender Studies Center](#) and [Contemporary Student Services](#).

My Expectations for Classroom Conduct

Sometimes we may talk about uncomfortable or controversial topics where students have differing opinions. I aim to make my classroom a safe space in which you feel comfortable discussing your ideas, experiences, and opinions. This does not mean we avoid difficult subjects. I encourage **respectful, evidence-based** debate and disagreement, and you should always feel free to challenge what I say. I expect you to listen to others, stay on topic, present evidence from the class material to support your views, and be considerate of people's

privacy. Feel free to talk to me privately if there are any topics you are uncomfortable or concerned about discussing.

What To Do if you Miss a Class, Assignment, or Exam

I aim to find a balance between providing flexibility and ensuring you have the tools to succeed in the class. I also understand that you are adults making the challenging choice to get your degree while managing your own health, employment, and caring responsibilities. Please contact me ASAP if you are having difficulty meeting the course requirements and we will discuss how best to handle the situation. **Don't be afraid to reach out**—it's much better to be honest and get ahead of any problems that arise than find yourself staring down the end of the semester with incomplete work and a low grade.

Maintaining Academic Integrity

You are expected to abide by the [Honor Code](#), which prohibits lying, cheating, stealing, and plagiarizing, among other issues. I take the principle of academic integrity very seriously. I am required to report violations to the Mason Honor Committee. Violations will likely result in a failing grade for the assignment and may result in a failing grade for the course, plus any additional penalties determined by the Committee. Serious violations may result in dismissal from the university.

I know it is sometimes difficult to know whether you are in compliance with the Honor Code, especially when it comes to plagiarism and citing sources. I am here to help and you should always ask me if you are unsure. In general, academic integrity in this course means that you will properly cite the words, work, and ideas of others and submit your own work (or collaborative work created by your own group for a group assignment) for grading. I will include specific details in the instructions for each assignment. If you are struggling to get an assignment done and you're tempted to resort to plagiarism, **don't!** Come and talk to me—I am here to help. Judgment-free zone!

Note about generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT): We have multiple writing assignments in this class. Because the act of composing a response in your own words actually increases your learning, it's important that you complete the task yourself rather than relying on an artificial intelligence (AI) tool. Completing these writing assignments yourself will help strengthen your performance in this class on later assignments and activities, as well as help you develop professionally and succeed in your career goals. You should also be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; thus, they are not yet prepared to produce text that meets the standards of this course. With that said, I recognize that these tools will likely be important in your future careers too, and I am open to you experimenting with them for idea generation, etc. If you choose to do so, **you must indicate your use of it and give credit for text or ideas that have been generated by AI.** Use of AI-generated text or ideas without proper attribution is a violation of academic integrity.

Note: AI statement is based on language developed by the [Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning](#).

Students with Disabilities who Need Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability who needs academic accommodations, please contact [Disability Services](#) at (703) 993-2474. All formal academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. If you have already contacted Disability Services and you are waiting to hear from a counselor, please let me know.

Enrollment Information

You are responsible for verifying your enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the [Academic Calendar](#). The last day to add this class is **Monday, August 28**. The last day to drop without a tuition penalty is **Tuesday, September 5** (see the [Academic Calendar](#) for later drop dates and associated penalties). The final drop deadline is September 26. After the final deadline, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the Dean and is only allowed for [nonacademic reasons](#).

Student Resources and Support

Help with Blackboard

Visit the [IT Services Knowledge Base](#) for help and FAQs about using Blackboard. Assistance is also available at the [Collaborative Learning Hub \(CLUB\)](#), 311 Johnson Center, from 9am-7pm Mon-Thur and 10am-6pm Fri during the semester (hours differ during breaks). Reservations are strongly encouraged but walk-ins are accepted. Click the link above for details.

The Writing Center and Mason Library

Mason's [Writing Center](#) is a fantastic, free resource that provides information and one-on-one tutoring for writing assignments. I will be reviewing and providing feedback on your writing throughout the semester, but consider the Writing Center if you would like more intensive support (e.g. planning and organizing your paper, proof-reading, revising, English language support). I highly recommend it for this course, which requires substantial writing. Their website also has guides on best practices for reading, note-taking, and citation. Visit the website to learn more about the services the Writing Center provides and how to make an appointment.

[Mason Library](#) also has excellent [tutorials](#) on topics including writing, reading, note-taking, giving presentations, time management, and academic integrity. The library also has a dedicated [InfoGuide](#) for criminology and criminal justice, and you can contact our specialist librarian Chris Magee via that page. Chris can help you with many aspects of your research.

Personal and Academic Support

If you are struggling, in crisis, or just need information and resources, the [Offices of University Life](#) provide support and assistance for many areas of your personal and academic life, including (but not limited to):

- academic integrity
- mental health services
- disability services
- diversity, inclusivity, and racial justice
- health and wellness
- LGBTQ+ resources
- support for first-generation, undocumented, and international students

All Mason students can receive confidential support through the following services:

- [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#): (703) 993-2380
- [Student Support and Advocacy Center \(SSAC\)](#): (703) 993-3686

- **Student Health Services:** (703) 993-2831
- **TimelyCare.** This resource offers 24/7 virtual mental health services whether you are on or off campus and during breaks as well as throughout the semester.

If you are in crisis and need immediate support **call CAPS at (703) 993-2380 and/or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988 or (800) 273-8255.** For life-threatening emergencies **DIAL 911.**

Contemporary Student Services supports students who don't always see themselves reflected or fully supported in outreach materials and programming. This includes students who are 25 and older; commuters; married, widowed, or divorced; veterans or military-affiliated; pregnant or parenting; foster care alumni; and those who took 3 or more years off from college. CSS provides advising, support, resources, and even a campus lounge (The HUB 1012, 10am-7pm Mon-Thur and 10am-2pm Fri) where you can relax, grab a coffee, or refrigerate or heat up your food between classes.

The **First-Gen+ Center** supports students who are historically underrepresented in higher education and their allies while specifically centering college students who identify as first-generation, who identify as undocumented, have refugee status, and those who have families with limited income (\$30,000 per year or less). Visit the website for more information about programs, resources, and connection. As an **UndocuAlly-trained** instructor, I can also help connect students with resources on campus.

Notice of Mandatory Reporting of Sexual Assault, Interpersonal Violence, and Stalking

I am always available to support you if you need to discuss any issues that may be affecting your participation in class. However, please be aware that as a faculty member I am a "Responsible Employee," and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per **University Policy 1412** and Virginia law. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of the resources **listed above** (CAPS, SSAC, or Student Health). You may also seek assistance from Mason's **Title IX Coordinator** directly by calling (703) 993-8730 or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

Acknowledgments

This syllabus and course design draws heavily from a **capstone course** designed by Professor Nancy Augustine at the George Washington University and prior syllabi for CRIM 517 developed by Professor Laurie Robinson. The course learning objectives are based on learning objectives for undergraduate courses designated as Research and Scholarship Intensive by George Mason University's **Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research's (OSCAR)** Students as Scholars initiative.

Land Acknowledgment: At the place George Mason University occupies, we give greetings and thanksgivings to these Potomac River life sources, to the Doeg ancestors, who Virginia annihilated in violent campaigns while ripping their lands apart with the brutal system of African American enslavement, to the recognized Virginia tribes who have lovingly stewarded these lands for millennia including the Rappahannock, Pamunkey, Upper Mattaponi, Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Nansemond, Monacan, Mattaponi, Patawomeck, and Nottaway, past, present, and future, and to the Piscataway tribes, who have lived on both sides of the river from time immemorial.