

# Economics of Crime (ECON 300)

Department of Economics  
William & Mary

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Office Hours: Wednesday 5:00- 6:00 pm;

Friday 1:00- 2:00 pm

Hours: M-W 3:30 pm- 4:50 pm

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## Course Description and Purpose

This course provides an introduction to the study of crime and crime-control policies using standard economic techniques. It is grounded in rational criminal theory, which suggests that an individual engages in criminal behavior after carefully weighing the cost and benefits associated with their actions. The primary focus is on understanding the incentives that drive individuals to commit crimes and how public policies can alter these incentives. The course enables the evaluation of policies aimed at preventing or reducing crime.

## Learning Outcomes and Objectives

- Understand the economic approach to crime by analyzing the benefits and costs of crime
- Explore the impact of public policies on crime incentives and develop the ability to assess the potential consequences of proposed policies.
- Improve proficiency in data analysis, including identifying correlations and trends to draw meaningful insights.
- Enhance communication and presentation abilities throughout the course.

## Prerequisites

ECON 101 is a required course for this class, and we will build upon the concepts learned in Principles of Microeconomics.

## Topics

I will do my best to stick to the course schedule as closely as possible. However, it may be necessary to make some adjustments to the pace and coverage of material as we go through the semester. The course schedule is intended to provide an outline of what we plan to cover over the course of the semester, but deviations from the schedule are possible.

1. Becker's model and rational crime basics
2. Crime and certainty of punishment
3. Fines and efficient punishment
4. Prisons and crime
5. Death Penalty
6. Racial bias and the criminal justice system
7. Female crimes
8. The war on drugs
9. Private crime deterrence
10. Organized crimes and gangs
11. White collar crime
12. Sports crime
13. Alcohol and crime

## Course Materials

No specific textbook is mandatory for this course. Initially, we will use material adapted from [The Economics of Crime](#) by Harold Winter during the first part of the semester. You can access a free previous edition of this material [here](#). I will also provide slides, and share research and news articles during the semester.

As supplementary reading, I recommend the following two books: [American Prison](#) by Shane Bauer (\$ 13) and [Narconomics: How to Run a Drug Cartel](#) by Tom Wainwright (\$ 14). These books will offer valuable insights into related topics covered in the course.

## Course Technology

- I will provide podcast assignments, papers, and news articles on Perusall. You can read and leave comments on them. To get started, please create an account on [Perusall](#) and use the course code **HIRISCAU-PLJNB**.
- To create data visualization effectively, sign up for a free account on [Datawrapper](#).
- During lectures, you will be using [Pear Deck](#) to answer questions. No registration is necessary. Just bring your phone or laptop to class.

## Grading Policy

The grade will be calculated using the following proportions:

- 15% of your grade will be determined by three Podcast summaries
- 15% of your grade will be determined by three Data Visualizations (group project)
- 10% of your grade will be determined by Group Presentation on Data Visualizations
- 5% of your grade will be determined by in-class participation
- 25% of your grade will be determined by the midterm exam
- 30% of your grade will be determined by the final exam

Table 1: Sample Grading Scheme

Grade	Range	Grade	Range	Grade	Range
A	93%- 100%	B-	80%- 82.99%	D+	67%- 69.99%
A-	90%- 92.99%	C+	77%- 79.99%	D	63%- 66.99%
B+	87%- 89.99%	C	73%- 76.99%	D-	60%- 62.99%
B	83%- 86.99%	C-	70%- 72.99%	F	less than 59.99%

## Podcasts

- Three podcasts ([Probable Causation](#)) related to research papers will be assigned, and your task will be to summarize them. Your focus should be on the paper's motivation, results, and data.

## Exams

- There are two exams throughout the course: a midterm and a final exam. Both exams are hard-copy and will be taken in the classroom.
- The exams will cover two types of questions: basic recall questions related to the papers and topics we have studied, and essay-based questions that require you to connect various themes.
- You will be given specific papers to study, focusing on understanding their motivations and results.
- Unless you have a university-approved schedule conflict, there will be no make-up exams. If you believe you have a schedule conflict, please let me know at least two weeks before the exam.
- Midterm exam is scheduled on **October 16<sup>th</sup>**
- Final exam schedule is available [here](#) (December 13<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 am, Boswell Hall- Room 39). The final exam is not cumulative.

## Data Visualization

- As part of your assignments, you are required to create three graphs on a topic of your choice. You can learn how to build charts, maps, and tables with Datawrapper [here](#).
- This is a group project, each consisting of three members. You can upload your group information using the link on the Blackboard in the Group Project tab.
- These three graphs will be presented at the end of the semester. Each group's presentation is expected to last around 10 minutes. This assignment will be discussed in greater detail later in the semester.

## Class Participation

- The majority of questions asked in class are subjective, meaning there are no right or wrong answers. As a result, class participation will be evaluated based on completion.
- Your grade will not be affected if you miss up to two lectures.

## Policies

### Office Hours

My office hours are on Wednesday from 5:00- 6:00 pm and Friday 1:00- 2:00 pm in Chancellors 464. What do office hours look like? You can find more information from these [Hidden Rules of Office Hours](#). Please use the following link to schedule an appointment [Calendly](#).

### Emails

My email address is [ahiriscau@wm.edu](mailto:ahiriscau@wm.edu). Emails will be periodically checked Monday- Friday from 9:00 am – 5:00 pm. Please allow 24 business hours for a response. Emails will not be checked on the weekends.

### Technology Policy

During the class, you have the option to bring your laptop or use your phone to access the lecture presentations and participate in answering questions. We will be utilizing the Pear Deck Add-on for this purpose. *The add-on allows me to receive notifications if you close the presentation on your laptop, ensuring engagement during the session.*

The best part is that you don't need to install anything on your computer. To get started, I will share a code at the beginning of the lecture, which you will use to join the [interactive lesson](#). If you are curious about how Pear Deck works, you can watch the following [video](#) for a quick demonstration.

### Chat GPT

The use or incorporation of any AI-generated content (from ChatGPT, Dall-e, etc.) in assignments is not allowed. Submitted work may be reviewed, as needed, for AI-generated content.

## Academic Integrity and Honesty

Students are required to comply with the William & Mary College policy on academic integrity found in the [The Honor Code](#). Cheating in exams, homework or any other assignment will not be tolerated. Students found cheating on an exam will be given a score of "0" and will not be replaced with the final exam grade. In addition, they will be reported to the relevant authorities of the university.

## This Course was Designed with You in Mind <sup>1</sup>

### Interested on a career in economics or graduate school?

It is never too early to start thinking about what to do after college. An undergraduate degree in economics offers many opportunities. Below are a few websites from the American Economic Association that provide great information about careers and graduate school.

- [American Economic Association student resources](#)
- [American Economic Association graduate school information](#)
- [Majoring or minoring in Economics at William & Mary](#)
- [Course Syllabi Archive for Economics Courses](#)

### This class's community is inclusive

Students in this class represent a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives. I am committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity and creates inclusive environments in our course. While working together to build this community, I ask you to:

- Understand that we are bound to make mistakes in this space, as anyone does when approaching complex tasks or learning new skills. Strive to see your mistakes and others' as valuable elements of the learning process.
- Understand that your words have effects on others. Speak with care. If you learn that something you have said was experienced as disrespectful or marginalizing, listen carefully and try to understand that perspective. Learn how you can do better in the future.
- It is important to take pair work or small group work seriously, as your peers' learning is dependent on your engagement. By actively participating and collaborating with others, you can contribute to a more positive and effective learning experience for everyone.
- It is crucial to recognize that others may have different experiences and perspectives than your own. When participating in discussions, try to be mindful of assumptions and generalizations that you make based solely on your own experiences. Instead, approach discussions with an open mind and be willing to listen and learn from the perspectives of others. By being open to hearing and considering different viewpoints, you can expand your understanding and deepen your learning.

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<sup>1</sup>This section was adapted from Bayer, Amanda, 2021. American Economic Association Committee on the Status of Minority Groups in the Economics Profession. [Diversifying Economic Quality](#)

## **This course is accessible to students with disabilities**

William & Mary accommodates students with disabilities following federal laws and university policy. Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact Student Accessibility Services staff at 757-221-2512 or [sas@wm.edu](mailto:sas@wm.edu) to determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more information, please see [Student Accessibility Services](#).

- Exams must be scheduled at the SAS center **AT LEAST ONE WEEK IN ADVANCE**. Students are responsible for ensuring that they have made a reservation for the exam at the appropriate time and day.

## **Mental and Physical Well-Being**

William & Mary recognizes that students juggle different responsibilities and can face challenges that make learning difficult. Many resources are available at W&M to help students navigate emotional/psychological, physical/medical, and material/accessibility concerns. Asking for help is a sign of courage and strength. If you or someone you know is experiencing any of these challenges, we encourage you to reach out to the following offices:

- For psychological/emotional stress, please consider reaching out to the [WM Counseling Center](#); or (757) 221-3620, 240 Gooch Dr., 2nd floor. Services are free and confidential.
- For physical/medical concerns, please consider reaching out to the [WM Health Center](#) ; or (757) 221-4386, 240 Gooch Drive.
- For additional support or resources, please contact the [Dean of Students](#) by submitting a Care Report at; or by calling 757-221-2510, or by emailing [deanofstudents@wm.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@wm.edu).
- For a list of many other resources available to students, see [Health and Wellness Resources for Students](#)

As your professor, I also ask you to reach out to me if you face challenges inside or outside the classroom; I will guide you to appropriate resources on campus.