

Economics of Crime
ECON 300 and COLL 350
Department of Economics
William & Mary

Spring, 2025

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Office Hours: W 5:00- 6:00 pm
Hours: M-W 3:30 pm- 4:50 pm

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 course focuses on understanding the incentives that drive individuals to commit crimes and how public policies can change these incentives. It enables the evaluation of policies aimed at preventing or reducing crime. This course encourages students to participate in discussions about public issues where race, gender, and policy intersect. Students will evaluate the effects of previous policies and create new policies designed to foster a more equitable and just society.

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

COLL 350 Goals

- Analyze the influence of race, gender, and socioeconomic status on crime-related public policies
- Engage in discussions about the role of racial and gender disparities within law enforcement, judicial processes, and incarceration
- Develop policies that aim to reduce inequality and improve outcomes for marginalized communities
- Collaborate with peers to understand the complexities of policy-making in criminal justice reform
- Reflect on the economic impacts of criminal justice policies on different demographics: Explore how policies related to crime impact employment, income inequality, and overall economic well-being across communities

Prerequisites

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

Course Materials

No specific textbook is mandatory for this course. I will provide slides adapted from:

- [The Economics of Crime](#) by Harold Winter. You can access a free previous edition of this material [here](#).
- [Economics of crime and enforcement](#) by Anthony Yezer

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.

How to be Successful in this Course

Active participation and daily attendance are vital for success in this class. Come prepared to engage in meaningful discussions. This course follows an active learning approach, focusing on developing knowledge and skills through discussions and activities, rather than passive listening.

To be successful in this course:

- Prepare Ahead: Complete the assigned readings before class, bring them with you, and check Blackboard for any updates.
- Reflect Thoughtfully: Consider how your own experiences, biases, and opinions shape your understanding as you read. Think about how others with different perspectives might view the same material.

- **Contribute Actively:** Share your thoughts, ask questions, and connect discussions to your prior knowledge.

Your active engagement is essential to making this class a dynamic learning experience for everyone.

Topics

Week	Date	Topic	Assignments	Discussion leader
Week 1	Wednesday, January 22, 2025	Syllabus & Economics of Crime Trends		
Week 2	Monday, January 27, 2025	Rational Crime		
	Wednesday, January 29, 2025	Crime and Certainty of Punishment	Podcast 1	Member A
Week 3	Monday, February 3, 2025	Severity of punishment I: Fines		Member B
	Wednesday, February 5, 2025	Severity of punishment II: Prisons	Homework 1	Member C
Week 4	Monday, February 10, 2025	Severity of punishment II: Prisons		Member A\D
	Wednesday, February 12, 2025	Severity of punishment III: The Death Penalty and Crime	Graph 1	Member B\A
Week 5	Monday, February 17, 2025	Memo: The Effect of Mass Incarceration on Minorities		
	Wednesday, February 19, 2025	The Market for "Victimless" Crime		
Week 6	Monday, February 24, 2025	Exam 1		
	Wednesday, February 26, 2025	Drugs and Crime	Podcast 2	Member C\B
Week 7	Monday, March 3, 2025	Memo: Marijuana Legalization		
	Wednesday, March 5, 2025	The Market for Crime with Victims	Graph 2	Member A\C
Week 8	Monday, March 10, 2025	Modeling Neighborhood		Member B\D
	Wednesday, March 12, 2025	Neighborhood Gangs & Organized Crime	Homework 2	Member C\A
Week 9	Monday, March 17, 2025	Spring Break		
	Wednesday, March 19, 2025	Spring Break		
Week 10	Monday, March 24, 2025	The Broken Windows Hypothesis		Member A\B
	Wednesday, March 26, 2025	Economic Effects of Private Enforcement	Homework 3	Member B\C
Week 11	Monday, March 31, 2025	Exam 2		
	Wednesday, April 2, 2025	Guns and Crime	Graph 3	Member C\D
Week 12	Monday, April 7, 2025	Enforcement games		Member A
	Wednesday, April 9, 2025	Economics of Profiling	Podcast 3	Member B
Week 13	Monday, April 14, 2025	Economics of Profiling		Member C
	Wednesday, April 16, 2025	Memo: Crafting Effective Criminal Justice Recommendations		
Week 14	Monday, April 21, 2025	Juvenile Crime		Member A\D
	Wednesday, April 23, 2025	Women and Crime	Homework 4	Member B\A
Week 15	Monday, April 28, 2025	Presentations		
	Wednesday, April 30, 2025	Presentations		
Week 16	Friday, May 9, 2025	Final exam 9:00 AM		

For the discussion leader, the first member letter pertains to groups of 3 members, while the second letter pertains to groups of 4 members. The course schedule provides an outline of what we intend to cover throughout the semester, but there could be some deviations from the schedule.

Course Technology

- To create data visualization effectively, sign up for a free account on [Datawrapper](#), and I will recommend [Canva](#) or PowerPoint for the info-graphics poster project

Grading Policy

The grade will be calculated using the following proportions:

- 15% of your grade will be determined by the Exam 1
- 15% of your grade will be determined by the Exam 2
- 20% of your grade will be determined by the Final Exam
- 10% of your grade will be determined by Homework
- 10% of your grade will be determined by group project on Infographic
- 10% of your grade will be determined by Discussion Leader Assignments
- 5% of your grade will be determined by three Podcast Reflections
- 15% of your grade will be determined by three Policy Brief

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%

Assignments

Policy Brief

Equity is a fundamental aspect of public policy that requires careful discussions about the role of government. Using key concepts and research from your readings, lectures, and class discussions, you will participate in a series of progressively challenging sessions on important public issues. The three formal policy briefs will require you to dedicate time outside of class to prepare and time in class to collaborate with your partner(s). Before each lab, you will submit an individual planning memo on Blackboard. After each lab, you will submit a team decision memo on Blackboard, explaining the decisions you and your partner(s) made regarding what actions the government should or should not take, along with your reasoning. Each planning and decision memo must be a maximum of one page, single-spaced.

Podcasts

For this assignment, you will listen to three selected podcasts of research papers related to the topics studied. After listening, you will answer a series of questions related to each podcast, covering the following areas:

1. Key Findings: Summarize the main findings discussed in each podcast.
2. Policy Concerns: Identify and explain the policy issues highlighted.
3. Marginalized Groups Affected: Describe the marginalized groups impacted by the policies discussed.
4. Reflection on Inequality: Reflect on how these policies relate to broader issues of inequality in our society.

Your responses should demonstrate an understanding of how economic theories and concepts apply to real-world crime policy issues and the effects on different social groups.

Structured Discussion Leader

In this assignment, you will work in groups of three (or four), with each member taking turns as the discussion leader. The discussion will be based on assigned readings related to the Economics of Crime.

Instructions:

- Each student will serve as the discussion leader rotating through different sessions.
- Each student should begin by asking one thought-provoking question based on the reading. The other group members will respond and engage in dialogue, building on each other's answers.
- The discussion leader will then guide the conversation with several additional questions to keep the discussion going for up to 30 minutes. The leader should ensure that every group member has the opportunity to respond and engage with each other's ideas.
- After the group discussion, I will ask a set of questions focused on drawing connections between the reading and contemporary issues in the United States. Be prepared to relate the ideas in the paper to real-life situations, policies, and current events.
- The discussion leader will take comprehensive notes on group members' responses, documenting each individual's viewpoint, and submit these discussion notes as a group assignment on Gradescope by the end of the day.

This assignment is designed to deepen your understanding of economic theories as they apply to crime, stimulate critical thinking, and encourage connections between academic concepts and the realities of crime policy in the U.S.

Infographics

- 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](#).
- Select a specific topic within the Economics of Crime such as: the economic costs of crime (eg incarceration, policing, lost productivity), the impact of crime on marginalized communities, cost-benefit analysis of specific crime-related policy, economic incentives and deterrence in criminal behavior, the relationship between economic inequality and crime rates etc.
- This is a group project, each consisting of three (or four) members. You can upload your group information using the link on the Blackboard in the *Group tab*.
- These three graphs will be presented at the end of the semester. Each group's presentation is expected to last around 10-15 minutes. This assignment will be discussed in greater detail later in the semester. You can choose to do infographics or poster presentation.

This assignment will help you synthesize economic concepts and present complex ideas in a visually compelling way, making them more accessible to a general audience.

Homework

- There will be four homework assignments focusing on the theoretical aspects of the Economics of Crime, primarily through the use of graphs.
- The main objective of these assignments is to help students apply economic theory to various policies in order to predict changes in crime rates. This will aid them in understanding and writing economic research papers.

Exams

- There are three exams throughout the course: two exams during the semester and a cumulative final exam. All 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. Exams will be similar to homework assignments.
- You will be given specific papers to read, focusing on understanding their motivations and results.
- Final exam schedule is available [here](#) (May 9th, 9:00 am). *The final exam is cumulative.*

Gradescope

- We will be using Gradescope to submit homework, podcasts and graphs. Gradescope allows me to provide quick and accurate feedback on your work. You can access the **Gradescope** tab on Blackboard to submit your assignment. As soon as grades are posted, you will receive a notification so you can log in and view your feedback.

- You may submit *Regrade Requests* on Gradescope if you feel I have made a mistake or need a clarification on grading.
- You need to scan hard copies of your pages and save them as PDF before submitting. No scanner? No problem. This [guide](#) will teach you how to scan your work using your phone. You can also use the scanners from [W&M library](#). Please ensure that you convert your answers to PDF format if you are typing them.
- After you have the PDF of your work, you will need to submit it through Gradescope. This [video](#) explains how to submit the PDF. Make sure you SELECT the pages for your submission.
- For graph assignments, only one member needs to submit the graph and add the other group members. Instructions on how to add members can be found [here](#).

Policies

Assignments

- Please submit your assignments by Wednesday at 11:59 PM of the week specified on the schedule. You can find a detailed schedule of all assignments on the *Syllabus* tab on Blackboard.
- Graphs for the group project are not graded, but feedback will be provided if submitted by the due date.
- Late submissions for graphs and podcasts are allowed until Friday at 11:59 PM of the same week.
- Homework extension requests will not be granted. Solutions will be posted immediately after the deadline. In case of emergency, you can submit one assignment with a 50% penalty.

Office Hours

My office hours are Wednesday from 5:00 to 6:00 pm in Chancellors 464. What do office hours look like? You can find more information from these [Hidden Rules of Office Hours](#).

Emails

To contact me, please use the Message tab on Blackboard. 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.

Chat GPT

The use or incorporation of any AI-generated content (from ChatGPT, Dall-e, etc.) in assignments is not allowed. You may be asked to explain your work and/or to defend the ideas presented. All work submitted in this course, whether in draft or final form, must be cited appropriately.

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 ¹

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](#)

Respectful Dialogue

William & Mary upholds values of diversity, inclusion, freedom of expression, and academic freedom, and I fully support these principles. Discussing complex and sensitive topics is a valuable life skill. In this course, you are encouraged to explore the complexities and implications of various crime policies openly. You will not be penalized for sharing your ideas and opinions. At the same time, this class emphasizes the importance of engaging in thoughtful and respectful dialogue. As a class, we will establish guidelines and ground rules to promote respectful conversation.

Students can use Blackboard form *Feedback COLL 350* any time during the semester to express any conflicts or discomfort they may have with the course material or dynamics. Students are encouraged to provide feedback throughout the course. Spei

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.

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

- 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.

Student Success

Student Success supports each student's personal growth, development, engagement, and belonging by providing holistic guidance as they navigate their own W&M journey. It encompasses the offices of Academic Wellbeing, Care Support Services, and Student Accessibility Services.

- For academic support such as tutoring, time management, study skills, and academic coaching, please contact [Academic Wellbeing](mailto:academicwellbeing@wm.edu) at (academicwellbeing@wm.edu)
- For concerns about the wellbeing of a member of the William & Mary community or to seek assistance for interpersonal, academic, and wellness challenges, please contact [Care Support Services](mailto:care@wm.edu) at (care@wm.edu)
- For accommodation needs or questions, please contact [Student Accessibility Services](mailto:sas@wm.edu) at (sas@wm.edu)
 - 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.

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.

Important Dates

Feel free to refer to [Academic Calendar](#) for a more comprehensive overview.

January 31 st	Last day to add/drop
March 8 th – 16 th	Spring Break
March 24 th	Last day to withdraw from a full-term course
	Last day to elect pass/fail
May 20 th	Final Grades Due