

Economics of Crime (ECON 300)

Department of Economics
William & Mary

Spring, 2024

Instructor: Andra Hiriscau
Office: Chancellor 464
Chancellors Hall- Room:134

Email: ahiriscau@wm.edu
Office Hours: W-Th 3:30- 4:30 pm;
Hours: T-Th 5:00 pm- 6:20 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.

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.

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.

Course Technology

- I will provide 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-YBW73**.
- To create data visualization effectively, sign up for a free account on [Datawrapper](#).

Grading Policy

The grade will be calculated using the following proportions:

- 20% of your grade will be determined by the midterm exam
- 30% of your grade will be determined by the final exam
- 20% of your grade will be determined by homework (5 assignments)
- 10% of your grade will be determined by Group Project on Data Visualizations
- 10% of your grade will be determined by questions on research papers (Discussion Leader)
- 5% of your grade will be determined by three Podcast summaries
- 5% of your grade will be determined by participation on Perusall articles and in-class participation

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%

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. Exams will be similar to homework assignments.
- You will be given specific papers to study, focusing on understanding their motivations and results.
- Midterm exam is scheduled on **March 7th**
- Final exam schedule is available [here](#) (May 9th, 7:00 pm, Chancellors Hall Room 134). The final exam is not cumulative.

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.
- The guidelines for the podcast can be found on Gradescope, along with the due dates. You should write the summary and then submit it as a PDF through Gradescope.
- You can find the grading rubric on Blackboard under the *Grading Rubrics* tab.

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 (or four). 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 minutes. This assignment will be discussed in greater detail later in the semester.
- You can find the grading rubric on Blackboard under the *Grading Rubrics* tab, and examples of past projects under the *Project Examples* tab.

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.
- 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](#).

Course Participation

- Your participation in the course will be evaluated based on your engagement with Perusall, an automatic grading system that assesses your comments on articles. Your course participation grade can be improved by actively participating in class discussions. The majority of questions asked in class are subjective, which means that there are no right or wrong answers.

Discussion Leader

- To facilitate class discussion about research, we will be using a discussion leader approach. On the Google sheet, you will find your name listed under either Team Member A, B, C or D columns. These columns represent the discussion leader, and the discussions are listed on the schedule. The objective is to use these questions to discuss the assigned paper with your group.
- As a leader, your grade will be based on the quality of questions submitted on Gradescope and your ability to lead and participate in a group discussion for around 20 minutes.
- If you are absent during a class in which you are the leader, you must submit your questions on Gradescope and will receive a 20% penalty.

Topics

Week	Date	Day	Topic
Introduction to Rational Crime			
1	1/25/24	Thursday	Syllabus & Crime trends
2	1/20/24	Tuesday	Becker's Model
2	2/1/24	Thursday	Rational Crime Basics
3	2/6/24	Tuesday	Crime and certainty of punishment
3	2/8/24	Thursday	Severity of punishment I: Fines
4	2/13/24	Tuesday	Severity of punishment II: Prisons
4	2/15/24	Thursday	Severity of punishment II: Prisons
5	2/20/24	Tuesday	Severity of punishment III: The Death Penalty and Crime
5	2/22/24	Thursday	Severity of punishment III: The Death Penalty and Crime
Applying Economic Theory to Crime			
6	2/27/24	Tuesday	The market for "victimless" crime
6	2/29/24	Thursday	The market for crime with victims
7	3/5/24	Tuesday	<i>Enforcement Games</i>
7	3/7/24	Thursday	MIDTERM
8	3/12/24	Spring break	
8	3/14/24	Spring break	
Economics of Specific Enforcement Issues			
9	3/19/24	Tuesday	Economics of Profiling
9	3/21/24	Thursday	Economics of Profiling
10	3/26/24	Tuesday	Drugs and Crime
10	3/28/24	Thursday	Drugs and Crime
11	4/2/24	Tuesday	Guns and Crime
11	4/4/24	Thursday	Guns and Crime
12	4/9/24	Tuesday	Organized Crime
12	4/11/24	Thursday	Organized Crime
13	4/16/24	Tuesday	Economics Effects of Private Enforcement
13	4/18/24	Thursday	Juvenile Crime
14	4/23/24	Tuesday	Crime and Economic Development
14	4/25/24	Thursday	White Collar Crime
15	4/30/24	Tuesday	Presentations
15	5/2/24	Thursday	Presentations
Final Exam May 9, 7:00-9:00 PM, Chancellors Hall--Room:134			

I will do my best to follow the course schedule closely. However, there may be some necessary adjustments to the pace and material coverage as we proceed through the semester. The course schedule provides an outline of what we intend to cover throughout the semester, but there could be some deviations from the schedule.

Policies

Assignments

- Please submit your assignments by Monday 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 due date. Late submissions are allowed until Wednesday at 11:59 PM of the same week.
- Podcast summaries can be submitted until 11:59 PM on Wednesday of the same week without penalty.
- Homework extension requests will not be granted, as solutions will be posted immediately after the deadline. However, in case of an emergency, the lowest grade will be dropped.

Office Hours

My office hours are on Wednesday and Thursday from 3:30- 4:30 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 ahiriscou@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.

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 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

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](#)

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.

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 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.
- 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.