



Responses to Violence (CCJS 225)

Term: Fall 2026
Credits: 3
Dates: September 2nd – December 9th, 2026
Times: 3:00-5:30pm, Wednesdays
Classroom: LeFrak 2166

Professor: Thomas Abt
Email: tabt@umd.edu
Office Hours: By appointment, 2147 LeFrak

Course Description

Responses to Violence is an I-Series course that engages students in critical reading, writing, thinking, and discussion about how to address a critically important issue: the enduring challenge of violence. Violence is complex, so the course uses an interdisciplinary approach to analyze its various historical, psychological, sociological, and criminological components.

The course begins with examining the issue of violence in the broadest possible terms, using Steven Pinker's Better Angels text as a guide. Next, the course studies one form of violence – community gun violence – in depth, with Professor Abt's Bleeding Out as a roadmap. For remaining classes, other forms of violence are examined, such as intimate partner and family violence.

Along the way, Professor Abt will try to use his real-world experiences to help bring the subject matter to life. Abt has been working to address violence for most of his career – for more, feel free to review his bio [here](#).

Students will be also introduced to various responses to violence by guest speakers, either in person, by video, or via prerecorded presentations. Some of these speakers are leaders in academia, some have held high-level positions in government, and some who possess lived experience providing direct services in communities.

Required Resources

Course Website: This course uses the web-based tool, ELMS, to provide students with easy and anytime access to course-related information. To access ELMS, students must first register for class. Once registered, students can use their Directory ID and password to log onto the website which contains course information including the syllabus, assignment details, and other reading and viewing materials. ELMS also contains important course announcements. Students can access their grades (but not those of others) through ELMS once posted. The ELMS address is: <http://elms.umd.edu> and has a link for "ELMS support."

Books:

Steven Pinker, The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined, ISBN: 978-0-670-02295-3

Thomas Abt, Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence, and a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets, ISBN-13: 9781541645714

The UMD Libraries purchase textbooks for the largest courses on campus, including this one. They are available at the McKeldin Library Services Desk, and you can borrow them for 4 hours at a time. Find out more at <https://www.lib.umd.edu/find/reserves/students>.

Additional materials: Additional assigned articles and videos are described below and can be also found on ELMS. **Reading/viewing these materials is required.**

Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Place the challenge of violence into context in terms of nature, history, culture, and society.
- Recognize the basic drivers of violence in society, and how those drivers have (or have not) been addressed over time.
- Understand particular types of violence and potential strategies for reducing them.
- Appreciate the role of evidence and data in policymaking, as well as the practical and political obstacles to such policymaking.

Sensitive Content Disclaimer

This is a class about violence. Due to the nature of the subject, some class content will contain explicit, graphic, and/or vulgar images and/or speech. Some topics such as murder, rape, or genocide, to name just a few, may generate discomfort. If a student believes any such content would be triggering to learn about and talk about, the student should carefully consider whether this class is appropriate for them to enroll in.

Course Structure

Classes. Classes will generally feature a lecture featuring PowerPoint slides with questions and answers interspersed, class exercises and discussions, guest lectures and videos and more. Slides will be made available on ELMS after each class.

Class attendance and participation. Given the interactive style of this class, consistent attendance and participation are a major component of student learning. Attendance is encouraged for every session and students are expected to arrive on time and remain throughout the entire class. Students with a legitimate reason to miss class should communicate in advance with the instructor absent an emergency. Students who miss class are responsible for learning what they missed from that session.

Participation grades are based on active participation, however, and not just attendance. Students should come prepared to contribute to class discussions by asking or answering relevant questions or by sharing informed thoughts or observations, based on current and previously assigned class materials. Participation is an ongoing process, so participation grades will not be posted until the end of the semester. See the “Tips for Success” section below for more information.

At least once during the semester, students will be “on deck” for a class, meaning that are expected to thoroughly prepare and help lead class discussion. **Active participation will count for 15% of a student’s overall grade.**

Tests. Three in-class tests (multiple choice and/or short answer questions) will cover course materials to date, including assignments, lectures, and in-class discussions. **The test with the lowest grade counts for 15%. The test with the highest counts for 25%. The middle counts for 20%**

Exam. The final exam will be in-class and ask broad questions demanding long-form answers to assess whether students have achieved the learning outcomes described above, namely placing violence in context, recognizing its basic drivers, understanding particular types of violence and corresponding strategies for controlling them, and appreciating evidence and data. **The exam counts for 25% of a student's overall grade.**

More detailed descriptions of these assignments will be provided in class.

Tips for Success

- **Read.** Doing the reading is essential. Period.
- **Show up.** As a famous comedian once said, "80% of success is just showing up." Come to class. Be on time.
- **Participate.** Try to make a verbal contribution every class, but beyond that it's about quality, not quantity. The best questions, thoughts, and/or observations do two things at the same time: (1) demonstrate knowledge of class materials and (2) push the conversation a step or two beyond those materials, inspired by your own creative thinking, with extra credit for contributions that positively build on the comments of other students.
- **Enable notifications.** Pro tip – ELMS can ensure students receive timely notifications via email or text. Enable notifications to be sent instantly or daily.
- **Ask for help.** If you're struggling in any way, reach out to Professor Abt sooner rather than later. You can't get help if you don't ask for it. However, for help with ELMS or other technology, contact IT Support.

Course Grades

All grades will be posted on ELMS. If students would like to review any of their grades or have questions about how something was scored, please email Professor Abt to schedule a time to meet and discuss. Formal grade disputes must be submitted in writing within one week of receiving the grade.

Assignment	Percentage %
Active participation	15%
Tests	60% total (15%, 20%, 25%)
Exam	25%
Total	100%

Final letter grades are assigned based on the percentage of total assessment points earned. To be fair to everyone there must be clear standards that are applied consistently. Understand that being close to a cutoff is not the same as making the cut (89.99 $\neq$ 90.00), and it would be unethical to make exceptions for some and not others.

Final Grade Cutoffs									
+	97.00%	+	87.00%	+	77.00%	+	67.00%	+	
A	94.00%	B	84.00%	C	74.00%	D	64.00%	F	<60.0%
-	90.00%	-	80.00%	-	70.00%	-	60.00%	-	

Policies and Resources for Undergraduate Courses

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- Academic integrity,
- Student and instructor conduct,
- Accessibility and accommodations,
- Attendance and excused absences,
- Grades and appeals, and
- Copyright and intellectual property.

Please visit www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html for the Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with Professor Abt with any questions.

Course Guidelines

Communication with Instructor

If students need to communicate with Professor Abt, please email him at tabt@umd.edu. Do NOT email him with questions that are easily found in the syllabus or on ELMS (i.e. When is this assignment due? How much is it worth? etc.). Professor Abt will do his best to respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays. Note: The University has decided that the students' TERPMAIL email must be used in all classes. Therefore, students should communicate with Professor Abt through their TERPMAIL email accounts.

Communication with Peers

With a diversity of perspectives and experiences, students may find themselves in disagreement and/or debate with one another. That is normal, even welcome. That said, it is important that students agree to conduct themselves in a professional manner and that they work together to foster and preserve a virtual classroom environment in which they can respectfully discuss controversial questions.

Students are encouraged to confidently exercise their right to free speech – bearing in mind, of course, that they will be expected to craft and defend arguments that support their positions using facts, data, research, and other forms of evidence found in class materials and elsewhere. Also keep in mind that free speech has limits; this course is NOT the space for hate speech, harassment, disrespectful, or derogatory language. Professor Abt will make every reasonable attempt to create an atmosphere in which each student feels comfortable voicing their positions without fear of being personally attacked, mocked, demeaned, or devalued.

Any behavior (including harassment, sexual harassment, and racially and/or culturally derogatory language) that threatens this atmosphere will not be tolerated. Please alert Professor Abt immediately if you feel threatened, dismissed, or silenced at any point during our semester together and/or if your engagement in discussion has been in some way hindered by the learning environment. Talking in class should be fun!

Academic Integrity

The University's Code of Academic Integrity is designed to ensure that the principles of academic honesty and integrity are upheld. In accordance with this code, the University of Maryland does not tolerate academic dishonesty. Students must fully understand this code and its implications because all acts of academic dishonesty will be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of this code. All students are expected to adhere to this Code. It is the student's responsibility to read it and know what it says, so they can start their professional life on the right path. **As future professionals, your commitment to high ethical standards and honesty begins with your time at the University of Maryland.**

It is important to note that course assistance websites, such as CourseHero, or AI generated content are not permitted sources, unless the instructor explicitly gives permission. Material taken or copied from these sites can be deemed unauthorized material and a violation of academic integrity. These sites offer information that might be inaccurate or biased and most importantly, relying on restricted sources will hamper student's learning processes, particularly the critical thinking steps necessary for college-level assignments.

Additionally, students may naturally choose to use online forums for course-wide discussions (e.g., Group lists or chats) to discuss concepts in the course. However, collaboration on graded assignments is strictly prohibited unless otherwise stated. Examples of prohibited collaboration include: asking classmates for answers on quizzes or exams, contributing to each others' short papers, etc. Students should visit the [Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies](#) and reach out if they have questions.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools Prohibited

In this course, Professor Abt's expectation is that students will not use artificial intelligence (AI)-powered programs such as ChatGPT to help you with assignments. Abt's reasoning for this is that these programs may provide inaccurate or biased information, but more importantly, they do not serve the individual development of the student. In this course students will learn valuable skills from outlining, generating, and editing their own work. If students have questions about this policy or are not sure if a resource they have found will violate this policy, please ask.

Course Outline

Date	Topic	Assignment
9/2	Welcome, introduction, syllabus review	None
9/9	Pacification; Civilization and Humanitarianism	Abt, Towards a framework for preventing community violence among youth (pages 1-8 only) Pinker – Chapters 1 (skim only), 2 (whole chapter), 3 (pages 59-85), 4 (pages 168-188)

9/16	The Long Peace and the New Peace; Rights Revolutions and Inner Demons	Pinker – Chapters 5 (pages 189-200, 249-251, 268-294), 6 (pages 295-297, 376-377); 7 (pages 378-382), 8 (pages 482-492, 497-547, 569-570)
9/23	Better Angels and Conclusion Guest Lecture: James “JT” Timpson, Roca	Pinker – Chapters 9 (pages 571-611, 642-670), 10 (whole chapter); Fazal, Is War in Decline?
9/30	Test 1; Bleeding Out; Triage	Abt – Chapters 1, 2
10/7	Sticky Situations; Carrot and Stick; No Justice, No Peace Guest Lecture: Brooklynn Hitchens, CCJS UMD	ICJIA, What is Program Evaluation? Abt – Chapters 3, 4, 5
10/14	Pacifying Shooters; Cooling Hot Spots; Guns, Gangs, and Drugs	Abt – Chapters 6, 7, 8
10/21	How Talk Informs Action; Redemption and Recovery	Abt – Chapters 9,10
10/28	Getting Started; Getting Connected Guest Lecture: Rob Wilcox, Fund for a Safer Future	Abt – Chapter 11, Appendix A Abt & Magori, Applying “What Works” to Stop Violence and Save Lives Kania & Kramer, Collective Impact Abt, Towards a framework for preventing community violence among youth (pages 4-9 only, sections on frameworks)
11/4	Test 2; Violence Abroad Guest Lecture: Ben Rempell, USAID (former)	UNODC, Global Study on Homicide 2023, Executive Summary
11/11	Intimate Partner/Family Violence Guest Lecture: Jen Pauliukonis, Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention	Alvarez & Bachman, Chapter 5
11/18	Organized criminal violence; Terrorism	Wikipedia, Organized Crime ; UNODC, Introduction to International Terrorism
12/2	State violence; Genocide; Paper outline due	Blattman, The Roots of War; Alvarez & Bachman, Chapter 11, NPR, Genocide; A question of intent: Is what's happening in Gaza genocide?

12/9	Test 3; Exam review	None
	Final Exam (date to be confirmed)	None

Note: This is a tentative schedule that will be updated as necessary – students should monitor the course ELMS page for the most up to date assignments. In the unlikely event of a prolonged university closing, or an extended absence from the university, adjustments to the course schedule, deadlines, and assignments will be made based on the duration of the closing and the specific dates missed.

Resources & Accommodations

Accessibility and Disability Services

The University of Maryland is committed to creating and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive educational, working, and living environment for people of all abilities. The University of Maryland is also committed to the principle that no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of the University, or be subjected to discrimination. The [Accessibility & Disability Service \(ADS\)](#) provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals to provide equal access to services, programs and activities. ADS cannot assist retroactively, so it is generally best to request accommodations several weeks before the semester begins or as soon as a disability becomes known.

Any student who needs accommodations should contact Professor Abt and provide him with a University of Maryland ADS Accommodation form.

For assistance in obtaining an accommodation, contact ADS at 301-314-7682, or email them at adsfrontdesk@umd.edu. Information about [sharing accommodations with instructors, note taking assistance](#) and more is available from the [Counseling Center](#).

Religious Observances

If students are restricted from meeting course requirements due to a religious observance, they will need to discuss this with Professor Abt.

Student Resources and Services

Taking personal responsibility for one's own learning means acknowledging when your performance does not match your goals and doing something about it. Professor Abt hopes that students will come talk to him so that he can help them find the right approach to success in this course, and he encourages students to visit [UMD's Student Academic Support Services website](#) to learn more about the wide range of campus resources available to them.

In particular, almost everyone can use some help sharpening their communication skills (and improving their grade) by visiting [UMD's Writing Center](#) and schedule an appointment with the campus Writing Center.

Students should also know there is a wide range of resources to support them with whatever they might need ([UMD's Student Resources and Services website](#) may help). If you feel it would be helpful to have someone to talk to, visit [UMD's Counseling Center](#) or [one of the many other mental health resources on campus](#).

Notice of Mandatory Reporting

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking: As a faculty member, Professor is Abt designated as a "Responsible University Employee," and must report all

disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking to UMD's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy on Sexual Harassment and Other Sexual Misconduct.

If a student wishes to speak with someone confidentially, they should contact one of UMD's confidential resources, such as [CARE to Stop Violence](#) (located on the Ground Floor of the Health Center) at 301-741-3442 or the [Counseling Center](#) (located at the Shoemaker Building) at 301-314-7651.

They may also seek assistance or supportive measures from UMD's Title IX Coordinator, Angela Nastase, by calling 301-405-1142, or emailing titleIXcoordinator@umd.edu.

To view further information on the above, please visit the [Office of Civil Rights and Sexual Misconduct's](#) website at ocrsm.umd.edu.

Basic Needs Security

If students have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or lack a safe and stable place to live, they should visit [UMD's Division of Student Affairs website](#) for information about the resources the campus offers them.

Veteran Resources

UMD provides some additional supports to our student veterans. Students can access those resources at the office of [Veteran Student life](#) and the [Counseling Center](#). Veterans and active duty military personnel with special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployments, drill requirements, disabilities) are welcome and encouraged to communicate these, in advance if possible, to the instructor.

Course Evaluation

Students should submit a course evaluation through Student Feedback on Course Experiences in order to help faculty and administrators improve teaching and learning at Maryland. All information submitted to Course Experiences is confidential. Campus will notify students when Student Feedback on Course Experiences is open for them to complete their evaluations at the end of the semester. Please go directly to the [Student Feedback on Course Experiences](#) to complete evaluations. By completing all evaluations each semester, students will have the privilege of accessing through Testudo the evaluation reports for the thousands of courses for which 70% or more students submitted their evaluations.

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