

CCJS 225
Responses to Violence
University of Maryland
Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Spring 2026

Class Time: T TH 11:00am-12:15pm

Class Location: Van Munching Hall 1207

Professor: Min Xie, PhD

Office: LeFrak 2220K

Phone: 301-405-7063 (email me if I am not in
my office)

Office Hours: Tuesday 1pm to 2pm, or by
appointment

Email: mxie@umd.edu

Course Description

We will integrate criminological theories with empirical data to develop different intervention strategies for violent situations. You will read the required books, identify a type of violence that plagues us today, and develop an intervention strategy based on the principles learned in this course. Group work is a crucial component of this course. Also important are public speaking and presentation skills.

Required Books

Pinker, Steven. (2011). *The Better Angels of our Nature: Why Violence has Declined*. New York: Penguin.

Abt, Thomas. (2019). *Bleeding out: The devastating consequences of urban violence—and a bold new plan for peace in the streets*. New York: Basic Books.

ELMS

The course uses the web-based tool, ELMS, to provide you with easy and anytime access to information and notices about the class. In order to access ELMS you must first be registered for the class. Once registered, use your Directory ID and password to log onto the website. This website will contain a wealth of information about the class such as a copy of the syllabus, lecture slides, details on each assignment, and other materials. You can access your grades (but not others') in ELMS once they are posted. The site address is: <http://elms.umd.edu>. I encourage you to use ELMS regularly. The site has a link for “ELMS support.”

Course Grading

The goal of the class is for you to learn how to think critically about the problem of violence. Grades will be based on how engaged you are in class (participation and group work in class), how much you have learned (exams), and how you apply the knowledge (presentation).

Grading Breakdown:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Participation/group work in class | 20% |
| Exam 1 | 25% |

| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| Exam 2 | 25% |
| Group presentation | 30% |

Final course grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

Table: Grading scale

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| A+ = 96.5% - 100% | C+ = 76.5% - 79.49% |
| A = 92.5% - 96.49% | C = 72.5% - 76.49% |
| A- = 89.5% - 92.49% | C- = 69.5% - 72.49% |
| B+ = 86.5% - 89.49% | D+ = 66.5% - 69.49% |
| B = 82.5% - 86.49% | D = 62.5% - 66.49% |
| B- = 79.5% - 82.49% | D- = 59.5% - 62.49% |
| | F = Any grade < 59.5% |

Participation and Group Work in Class

The assessment of your participation and group work in class is based on several factors, including your level of engagement during class discussions, the quantity and quality of your contributions to discussions, and the feedback you provide and engagement you demonstrate during group work throughout the semester. As an I-Series class, it is important that students remain engaged to enhance their learning. If you complete the assignments and come to class ready to learn and discuss, you should learn a lot.

Two Exams

The exams will cover an overview of the course materials, including readings, lectures, and in-class discussions. We will have a review session before each exam.

Group Presentation

For the class, you will be assigned to one of four groups to develop a group presentation that educates the rest of the class on a contemporary issue of violence. The group will have an entire class period (1.25 hours) to present material and engage the audience in whatever manner they choose. The purpose of these presentations is to provide group members with an opportunity to collaborate, educate the audience about a current issue of violence, and present possible ways to reduce or mitigate that violence.

Students' participation in the group assignments will affect their grade. Each member of the group will review the performance of other group members. Furthermore, if any group member is found to be free-riding on others' work, their grade will be lowered. A more detailed guide on the assignment and grading criteria will be given in class.

Each group will be informed of the day they will present at the time of the assignment. If you are unable to attend class that day due to an excusable event, you have until two weeks after the assignment to request a switch.

You must be present for other students' presentations regardless of whether you have done your own presentation. You will lose a significant number of participation points for missing presentation sessions unless you have an acceptable excuse (see the course attendance and makeup policy). To show respect for your classmates, you will lose points for coming to class late or leaving early without proper notification and acceptable excuses.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic dishonesty of any form will NOT be tolerated. The University of Maryland has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at the University of Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student, you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. You need to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit <https://policies.umd.edu/academic-affairs/university-of-maryland-code-of-academic-integrity> and <https://studentconduct.umd.edu/>.

DISABILITY SUPPORT

I make every effort to accommodate students registered with the Accessibility and Disability (ADS) Office and who have a University of Maryland ADS Accommodation form. I am unable to accommodate students who are not registered with ADS or who do not provide documentation reviewed by ADS.

MISSED CLASSES

The student must notify the instructor in a timely manner. The notification should be provided either before the absence or as soon after as possible. In the case of religious observances, athletic events, and planned absences known at the beginning of the semester, **the student must inform the instructor during the schedule adjustment period**. All other absences must be reported as soon as practical.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

If you are unable to meet your course requirements due to a religious observance, please let me know. Please submit a request to reschedule an assignment.

ATHLETIC EVENTS

Official athletic schedules must be submitted to me. Practices do not count as an excused absence, but competitive events do. Athletes who fail to submit their expected missed classes and who miss class assignments or major scheduled events listed under the Course Schedule below will receive a grade of zero for the missed events.

CLASSROOM CODE OF CONDUCT

The success of the class depends not only on my abilities and talents as an instructor to communicate new and complex ideas, but also on our ability as a class to work together to create an environment conducive to learning. As a Department and University, we expect the faculty and students to be prepared for class and to be actively engaged in classroom activities. Unfortunately, disruptive behaviors in the classroom cheat other students out of their opportunity to learn. The University of Maryland's Code of Academic Integrity defines classroom disruption as "behavior a reasonable person would view as substantially or repeatedly interfering with the conduct of a class." Examples include arriving late to class, repeatedly entering and leaving the classroom without authorization, making loud or distracting noises, and persisting in speaking without being recognized. As the instructor, I also find the following distracting: reading outside material, sleeping, loud side conversations with other students, text messaging, and using laptops for non-academic functions (IM, e-mail, Facebook, surfing, etc.). I also request that you silence your cell phones and other electronic devices during class.

Students are expected to treat each other with respect. Disruptive behavior of any kind will not be tolerated. Students who are unable to show civility with one another, the teaching assistants (when available), or me will be subject to referral to the Office of Student Conduct or to Campus Police. You are expected to adhere to the Code of Student Conduct.

MISSED EXAM OR PRESENTATION

Makeup assessments will NOT be offered for unexcused or undocumented absences. Excused absences include religious observances, mandatory military obligation, illness of the student or an immediate family member, required participation in university activities, death in the family, and required court appearances. Changes in employment schedules, personal travel, technical/internet problems, etc., do not qualify as excused absences.

Prior notification is required in all instances for excused absences for major scheduled graded events listed under the Course Schedule below. Additionally, documentation including an obituary/death notice, an official health center excused absence form, or hospital records must be provided. **Make-up work must be completed within one week of its original due date.** All necessary arrangements must be made with the instructor via email. Preserving this agreement in writing ensures there are no discrepancies at a later point. I reserve the right to alter the assignment's content, including making the make-up exam a short-answer or essay format.

Addendum on Medical Absences: The in-class presentations and exams are considered major scheduled events and therefore the new university medical excuse policy, which allows one student-signed honor statement attesting to illness, does **NOT** apply to them (<https://www.president.umd.edu/administration/policies/section-v-student-affairs/v-100g>). In the event you become chronically absent, missing more than two consecutive weeks of class, due to the same persistent illness, this must be verified by a health professional in writing. Any absences from major scheduled events will be recorded as zeroes if you fail to inform the instructor of these developments. Please refer to the link above to locate the items that must be included in the chronic absence verification.

GRADE DISPUTES

If you have questions or concerns about your grade(s) and believe that I should review them, you must submit a written request via email that describes your concern in detail. This request must be submitted within one week of the day that grades for the relevant assignment are disseminated.

COURSE EVALUATION

Your feedback about this course is very important to me. Completing a course evaluation is part of being a member of the UMD academic community. At the end of the semester, I would very much like you to fill out the online course evaluation. CourseEvalUM will be open for you to complete your course evaluation. You can go directly to the website (www.courseevalum.umd.edu) to complete your evaluation starting in late November.

INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

On occasion, classes may be cancelled due to inclement weather. If the university is closed on the day a graded item is scheduled, the assignment will be rescheduled to the next class meeting when the university is open. If an exam is cancelled, we will follow the university's rescheduling rules.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Class meetings and course materials, including instructions, presentations, assessments, content outlines, and similar materials, are the intellectual property of the course instructor and protected by legal copyright. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own personal use. You may not, nor may you allow others to, distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly, whether or not a fee is charged, without the express written consent of the instructor. Similarly, you own copyright in any work products that you create for this course. If I am interested in sharing your work with others, I will ask for your written permission. Copyright violations may result in referrals to the Office of Student Conduct and/or civil penalties under State and Federal law (www.copyright.gov/title17).

For more information on the University of Maryland's Policies for Undergraduate Students, visit <http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html>

COURSE SCHEDULE

| DATE | TOPIC | READING ASSIGNMENT |
|------|--|--|
| 1/27 | Syllabus review | |
| 1/29 | Reexamine how you think about crime and violence Violence Then, Violence Today | Bleeding out, chapters 1 & 2 |
| 2/3 | How we measure crime – US crime statistics The Historic Decline in Violence & Overview of Conclusions Reexamine how you think about violence prevention and treatment strategies (1) The Pacification and Civilizing Processes The Humanitarian Revolution | Bleeding out, chapters 3 & 4 Pinker 692-696 (“Reflections”) |
| 2/5 | Reexamine how you think about violence prevention and treatment strategies (2) The Rights Revolution Procedural justice; explaining US crime drop | Bleeding out, chapter 5 |
| 2/10 | Violence today: school shootings Violence Today: School Shootings & Other Types of Violence | Bleeding out, chapter 6 |
| 2/12 | Crime hot spots Rational Choice Theory & Deterrence | Bleeding out, chapter 7 |
| 2/17 | Guns, gangs, drugs Social structures and gun violence | Bleeding out, chapter 8 |
| 2/19 | Identify a form of violence and design response plans Violence Today: General & Violence Against Women | Bleeding out, chapter 11 |
| 2/24 | Take stock: review for exam | |

| DATE | TOPIC | READING ASSIGNMENT |
|------------|--|--|
| 2/26 | No class—prepare for the exam | |
| 3/3 | Exam #1 | |
| 3/5 | Theories of crime: our inner demons Inner Demons: Predation, Dominance, Revenge, Sadism, Ideology, & Pure Evil | Pinker 508-509 (“a four-part scheme” of violence) (Optional: read Pinker 509-570 for details) |
| 3/10 | Better Angels: Empathy & Self-Control Self-control vs. social control | Pinker 582-583, 592-593 (sympathy-altruism hypothesis vs. prospective-taking; concept of self-control) (Optional: read Pinker 571-611 for details) |
| 3/12 | Better Angels: Biological Evolution & Morality | Pinker 616-618, 625-628, (Optional: read Pinker 611-642 for details) |
| 3/17-3/19 | No class – spring break | |
| 3/24 | Better Angels: Reason | Pinker 642-646 (Optional: read Pinker 642-670 for details) |
| 3/26 | Developments Contributing to the Reduction of Violence | Pinker 672-678, 678-692 (Optional: read Pinker Chapter 10 for a review) |
| 3/31 | Policing/Corrections Possibilities | Bleeding out, chapters 9 and 10 |
| 4/2 | No class – instructor at conference | |
| 4/7 | Procedural and Restorative Justice | No reading assignment |

| DATE | TOPIC | READING ASSIGNMENT |
|-------------|--|-----------------------|
| 4/9 | Take stock: review for exam | |
| 4/14 | Exam #2 | |
| 4/16 | Innovation Lecture, Allow Your imagination (Group work) | |
| 4/21 | Allow Your Imagination (Group Work) | |
| 4/23 | Presentation I | |
| 4/28 | Presentation II | |
| 4/30 | No class – instructor at ASC Board Meeting | |
| 5/5 | Presentation III | |
| 5/7 | Presentation IV | |

This is an approximate schedule and is subject to change. However, the bolded events should always occur on the dates marked above, except in the event of an emergency.