American policing is in crisis. Many demand change. Few know what to do, or how to do it. Yet criminology offers a vast store of ideas and facts that are often overlooked in public policy discussions of policing. This course examines criminological knowledge about policing, and how criminologists can help to put knowledge into practice.

The central aim of this course is to equip students with better conceptual frameworks, theoretical insights, and experimental skills to address the central policy concerns about policing, including:

- Creating and sustaining police legitimacy,
- Improving police effectiveness in maintaining community safety, and
- Minimizing the use of force deployed by police in proportion to its necessity.

Our premise will be that we do not know nearly enough about how societies can accomplish these objectives, although we do know how to learn more soon.

Case Study: Procedural Justice. The heavy reliance on “procedural justice” theory in the 2015 Task Force Report on 21st Century Policing, for example, is a case in point about the need for criminology to contribute more empirical evidence. What may be theoretically appealing in journal articles may prove in practice to be vague and volatile concepts that are difficult to implement. The course places the psychological framework of procedural justice in a broader theoretical context. It then concludes with updates from recent experimental tests of procedural justice, providing a basis for synthesizing the semester’s discussions of how to build a theoretically informed body of experimental evidence that demonstrates what works and what doesn’t to improve the fairness and effectiveness of democratic policing.

The course has three parts. Part I introduces students to a history of criminological ideas about policing. Part II reviews the evidence on each of the major levels of analysis of the causes of police behavior: community-level causes, organizational, situational, individual and legal factors. Part III reviews the evidence of the effects of seven major dimensions of police behavior on crime, detections, and the extent to which the public feels that police conduct is “legitimate.”
**Requirements.** The course requires students to attend all seminars, to read required materials before each seminar, to discuss the readings thoughtfully during the seminar, to write a paper, and to deliver a 15-minute, powerpoint slide-assisted presentation summarizing the paper in class, which will then be discussed immediately afterwards in class and prior to the due date for the written version of the paper (May 19, 5:00 pm).

**Grading.** Grades will be based on the following work elements in the indicated proportions:
- Class participation (50%)
- Written paper (25%)
- Oral Presentation (25%)

**Class Media.** Class meetings will be held mostly face-to-face, with a few short videos for discussion and a few video-linked seminars. All classes will meet in the small conference room.

**Paper.** The paper should identify and address a key issue in **one** of the three central policy areas (Legitimacy, Public Safety or Police Use of Force) in an integrated analysis that answers all three of these questions:

1. What is the state of criminological theory relevant to this issue?
2. What is the state of the evidence about this issue, and the biggest gaps in what we know for both theoretical and policy purposes?
3. What plan would you propose that any large US police agency, such as the Baltimore, Chicago or Los Angeles Police, should follow to develop an iterative research program that could improve the relevant outcomes of policing.

By an “issue” in a policy area I mean one clearly delimited subject of public debate, such as police shootings of citizens, body-worn video cameras, stop and search, or preventing gang violence. The paper should not exceed 6,000 words (excluding references and graphics).

**Readings:** All students will receive a free copy of POLICING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (1992) and several reprints. All other assigned readings will be available by PDF, and are listed below for each class meeting.

This syllabus incorporates all policies stated at [http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html](http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html).
Summary Schedule

I. Introduction
1. January 25: Reading Day—No Class Meeting

II. Causes of Police Behavior
3. February 8: Theoretical Approaches to the Causes of Police Behavior
4. February 15: Community and Organizational Causes of Police Behavior
5. February 22: Situational Causes of Police Behavior
6. March 1: Individual Officer-Level Causes of Police Behavior
7. March 8: Legal Causes of Police Behavior

III. Effects of Police Behavior on Crime, Detections and Legitimacy
8. March 15: Effects of Police Behavior: Theories & Experimental Approaches

March 22—Spring Break
10. April 5: Effects of Police Patrols on Crime (Guest: Dr. Renee Mitchell)
11. April 12: Effects of Police Diversion: Nudging Offenders into Desistance (Guest: Chief Constable Peter Neyroud)
12. April 19: Effects of Proactive Investigations on Crime & Legitimacy
13. April 26: Effects of Arrests on Individuals, Victims and Communities
15. May 10: Student Presentations and Discussions
16. May 17: Student Presentations and Discussions

Detailed Schedule and Readings

I. Introduction

Week 1. January 25: Reading Day; no class meeting. Please read through one of the following classic treatises on policing. Come prepared to our first class (on February 1) to offer a five-minute oral summary on the main points of the one book you read:


**Week 2. February 1: What is Policing, as Distinct From Law Enforcement? A History of Criminological Ideas**

**Required Reading (for All students):** Egon Bittner (1970), The Functions of Police in Modern Society (sections VI, II, III and IX).

- Key concepts: prevention vs. enforcement; police institutions and Progressivism; reactive vs. proactive policing; speed and delay; deterrence vs. persuasion; co-production of public safety; skill vs. knowledge; organizational compliance with policy.
- Key Thinkers: Cesare Beccaria, Jeremy Bentham, Robert Peel, Edwin Sutherland, August Vollmer, Albert Reiss, James Q. Wilson, Egon Bittner, Herman Goldstein

**II. Causes of Police Behavior**

**Week 3. February 8: Theoretical Approaches to the Causes of Police Behavior**


Is there a substantive theory that explains police behavior, or the behavior of law-enforcing more generally (cf. Sutherland)? If not, what is the state of explanation for the wide variance in police behavior at all levels of analysis? How can we induce some theoretical coherence out of a disparate collection of findings at all levels of analysis?

**Notes:** Levels of analysis for measuring and explaining police behavior roughly correspond to the disciplinary perspectives of sociology and political science (community and organizational causes), social psychology (situational causes) and psychology (individual causes). A legal theory of causation, in contrast, mobilizes any and all social science to justify its logic. These categories are increasingly blurred in contemporary research. If a substantive theory is to have any value, perhaps that blurring is just what is needed for combining multiple frameworks into a new general theory of policing.

**Moral vs. Empirical Theory:** Policing is increasingly a battleground between moral theories of police conduct that become blurred with empirical facts about what police do and why. These dimensions underlie the debate between “peacekeeping” and “law enforcement,” with the enforcement perspective providing moral justification for shooting suspects far more often than may be required by peacekeeping. This different is readily apparent in cross-national analysis (e.g., UK vs. US), as well as between large
urban police agencies and small police forces in small towns, the latter having the higher rates of shooting deaths of civilians in the US.

**Week 4. February 15: Community and Organizational Causes of Police Behavior**

*Reading:* Wilson and Boland (1978); Smith, 1986; Jacobs and Britt 1979; Fyfe 1980.

*Notes:* How does community context—including population and police force size--translate into organizational culture to produce such huge differences across cities and police agencies in the US, as well as internationally? Understanding the centrality of community and cultural context is essential for translating Bittner’s thoughts about what is situationally appropriate, especially in the use of force and decisions to arrest suspects. The sociology of both communities and organizations are difficult to separate, but crucial for comprehending the “handicap” factors police organizations face in different kinds of political entities (like cities) as well as neighborhoods within them. These handicaps include the community structures associated with “legal cynicism” (Kirk & Matsuda 2007 at [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David_Kirk8/publication/228194809_Legal_Cynicism_Collective_Efficacy_and_the_Ecology_of_Arrest/links/55cd6efc08aeeaeb209b52f2.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David_Kirk8/publication/228194809_Legal_Cynicism_Collective_Efficacy_and_the_Ecology_of_Arrest/links/55cd6efc08aeeaeb209b52f2.pdf)) as well as legal and political restrictions on who must be hired or cannot be fired as police officers.

**Week 5. February 22: Situational Causes of Police Behavior**


*Notes:* The structure of police encounters with the public varies widely on multiple dimensions of the participants in each situation, including whether police are engaged by a complainant (or not), the numbers present, demographics and “demeanor” of police officers, complainants and suspects, and the legal status of the alleged harms at issue. These variables have been studied by academics with virtually no translation into practical policies for police operations--with the exception of policies on whether each police car has one or two officers (or four in France and Trinidad). Police legitimacy may depend more on such social structuring of situations, as Reiss suggested, than on recruitment or training of police (also see McCluskey et al 2000 at [https://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?q=Mccluskey+Mastrofski+Parks+rebel+2000&btnG=&hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5](https://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?q=Mccluskey+Mastrofski+Parks+rebel+2000&btnG=&hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5)).

**Week 6. March 1: Individual Causes of Police Behavior**


*Notes:* As Muir’s 5-year ethnography of some 40 Oakland police officers shows, there are strong individual differences among police officers. The 1991 LAPD study led by Warren Christopher after the Rodney King beating showed a high concentration of complaints against police among a small proportion of officers. What implications do the
theory and data in this week’s readings have for re-shaping police recruitment, selection, training, supervision, internal investigations and discipline? A 2015 New Yorker story on the Albuquerque NM police (see http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/02/son-deceased ) suggests that a few officers can do massive damage to police organizational conduct, and that more discussion should be engaged about the system of banning police fired in Florida and the UK from further police work (see http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/crime/article4159401.ece ).

Week 7. March 8: Legal Causes of Police Behavior

Notes: Whether legal regulation can shape police conduct is a broad question, with the answer depending heavily on the social structure of monitoring police actions—which in turn is increasingly dependent on technology. In addition to discussing research findings, this class will review several videos of police killings in relation to jury reactions, thus linking legal theory of causation to community factors. Legal policy restricting and regulating the powers of police to shoot at fleeing felony suspects substantially reduced police killings of citizens in US cities (Fyfe, 1980; Sherman, 1983; Tennenbaum, 1991), but “self-defense” may be stretched by juries for cultural reasons of moral theory. The Supreme Court may be crucial as a symbolic arbiter of moral reasoning, as is professional police leadership. But so is low visibility, as studies of the impact of the Miranda decision suggest (Leo 1996) as well as recent hung juries in prosecutions of police.

III. Effects of Police Behavior

Week 8. March 15:
Effects of Police Behavior: Theories & Experimental Approaches

Required reading: Sherman 2013, “The Rise of Evidence-Based Policing.”

Notes: 20th-century criminologists argued from limited evidence that policing was either criminogenic (labeling theory) or irrelevant to crime rates (general crime theory, e.g. Gottfredson & Hirschi 1990), especially given what was seen evidence that police spent little time in dealing with “crime” as distinct from many non-criminal events (Wilson, 1968; Goldstein, 1979). 21st-Century criminologists describe a far broader range of police effects, including criminogenic ones (Sherman 1992), using much stronger research methods. As of 2014, at least 129 randomized controlled trials had been conducted on police practices in English-speaking countries, mostly using crime as an outcome (Neyroud 2016). The growing body of experimental and quasi-experimental tests of police actions may be more driven by contemporary practices than by an explicit interest in theory-testing, but the research maps onto a set of criminological theories that are ripe for translation. Deterrence is the prime example, including celerity as well as certainty and (to a much lesser extent) severity. But life-course theory (Sampson and Laub 2003) is now part of a growing body of police research on diversion from prosecution, while crackdown theory (Sherman 1990) is the basis for much hot spots policing research and practice, including the “Koper Curve” hypothesis about optimal patrol time at crime hot
spots (Koper, 1995). There is great potential for policing research to be further enriched by criminological theory, as well as to return the favor by enriching theory with new evidence. This class session will consider the points of convergence, or missed opportunities, for growing numbers of experiments with developments in theories of crime.

March 22—Spring Break

**Week 9. March 29: Effects of Reactive Investigations on Detections**


Note: Innovations in investigation techniques have been found to raise detection rates, but have not been widely rolled out. A test of processing DNA samples from crime scenes where such samples were collected showed a 25% increase in the detection rate (Roman, et al, 2009), for example, but many police agencies cannot afford the tests. A series of new but never-used experimental designs will be presented for advancing knowledge about how to bring more offenders to justice.

**Week 10. April 5: Effects of Police Patrols on Crime (Guest: Dr. Renee Mitchell)**

**Reading:** Sherman & Weisburd (1995), Minneapolis Hot Spots Experiment


Notes: This class begins with a short critique of the Kansas City Patrol Experiment, showing why its findings are not reliable as to the effect of police “dosage” in large areas. We then examine the development of hot spots policing research, which reveals new and major issues in the advancement of the evidence-base for policing. These include definitions of units of analysis (what is a hot spot?), measurement of the dosage of policing in each hot spot (missing from most such experiments), distinguishing total police patrol time from the celerity or intermittency of arrivals and return visits, qualitative analysis of the activities police undertake (if any) while they are present in hot spots, and conditional analyses of the kinds of places in which more patrol time or activity does—or does not—have an effect; e.g., Mitchell’s (2016) Sacramento finding that hot spots that do not sell alcohol show no effect of extra patrol time, but where alcohol is sold more police time reduces crime. How can we define a research agenda that will advance theory as well as evidence on crime prevention by police patrol?

**Week 11. April 12:** Effects of Police Diversion: Nudging Offenders into Desistance

(Guest: Chief Constable Peter Neyroud)

**Reading:** Petrosino et al 2010; Sherman, 2011 “Offender-Desistance Policing.” And TBA

Note: Police cultures can be oriented to a “hunting” framework in which the main objective is to make an arrest or a prosecution. Less value is often placed on preventing crime, least of all by promoting offender desistance, which may sound too much like
social work. Yet each arrest is an opportunity to examine how desistance might be made more likely. The concept of offender-desistance policing, building on Laub and Sampson’s life-course theory, has been applied in three police agencies in the UK and Australia, with political support for its vision. The initial implementation of these strategies is difficult but successful, with a Maryland grad student playing a key role in one project in the UK. Its success in saving money may be reason alone for its adoption—or resistance to it.

Other evidence shows that

a. police proactively contacting crime “recruiters” to say they and their “recruits” are under surveillance reduced arrests, relative to controls, among the recruiters, their recruits, and their entire network of co-offenders (Ariel and Englefield, 2014).


How should future research develop criminological theory, as well as police policy, from such evidence?

Week 12. April 19: Effect of Arrests on Offenders, Victims and Communities. Reading: Sherman, 1992 (selected chapters & appendix 4); Sherman & Harris 2014.

Note: Another “climate change denial” in policing is the insistence that arresting misdemeanor domestic abusers is helpful to their victims. Since 1992, the experimental evidence has found heterogeneous effects of arrest for misdemeanor domestic assault, with more victimization resulting from arrests of some offenders than if they had simply been warned (the longstanding police practice pre-1984). This class meeting will discuss evidence that mandatory arrest policies actually harm victims, who died from all causes in one large experiment over 23 years if their abusers had been arrested, as well as evidence that mandatory arrest increases domestic homicide at the state level of analysis. How should research progress in a context of public refusal to accept counter-intuitive findings?

Week 13. April 26 Effects of Proactive Investigations on Detections, Crime & Legitimacy


Note: Proactive policing has been stigmatized since 2010 for several reasons, many of them related to the issue of stop and search in the NYPD. Yet since 1978 criminological evidence has shown that proactive enforcement predicts lower robbery rates, and also can reduce homicide against young black men. These findings are never discussed in the news media, nor by anti-police advocacy groups, omissions which may be tantamount to denial of climate change. Confusing excessive use of force with degrees of proactive engagement is an empirical error, yet it also reflects the theoretical importance of a key fact: the lower legitimacy of proactive encounters relative to reactive ones, as first
observed by Reiss in 1971. The class will consider a range of evidence, including a test
of covert surveillance of repeat offenders identified from police intelligence; this test found
substantial increases in arrests, convictions and incarceration compared to a control group
(Martin and Sherman, 1986 a,b,c). A test of post-arrest “case enhancement” investigations
found no increase in convictions, but did achieve substantial increases in sentences to
Is that a good thing or a bad? Yet one expensive failure of proactive policing is the use of
automatic license plate recognition (LPR) devices in auto crime hot spots over many hours
failed to yield more than marginal increases in arrests for auto crime (Taylor et al 2011),
while also supporting crackdown theory for hot spots policing.

Reading: Presidential Task Force on 21st-Century Policing (2015); Paternoster et al

Note: The evidence that procedural justice training can improve police legitimacy is
limited, with no RCT testing the claim that better policing can increase either voluntary
compliance with law or macro-level legitimacy. Does that mean training on police
encounters is a dead-end for developing policing innovations? New experiments in
training may suggest otherwise, as preliminary results from them will suggest in this final
class. The final problem this all suggests is how to get beyond theory into operational
detail, so that theorists become more interested in the precise ways in which the theory is
applied—rather than battling contrary evidence with a “my theory, right or wrong”
strategy?

Week 15. May 10: Student Paper Presentations

Week 16. May 17: Student Paper Presentations
Causes and Effects of Police Behavior: A Selected Bibliography


Black, Donald. 1971 “The Social Organization of Arrest.”


Kubrin et al 2010.


