



ECON 3P41: Economics of Crime

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Drop-in Hours: [Mon](#) & [Wed](#) 3:30pm-4:30pm

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Class Times

Monday 5:00pm-6:30pm TH258 Wednesday

5:00pm-6:30pm TH258 TA: TBA

How to ask questions

The best way to have questions answered is to ask in class. The second best is to come to drop-in hours (if the above time slot does not work for you, email me and we can make alternate arrangements). If neither of those is possible, then asking questions in our class discussion page is best (though if the question is long or technical I may simply say that we will talk about it next class). For questions that may contain personal information you do not wish to post about on the course discussion page, you may email me. If you email me, I will try to reply within two business days (I do not check or reply to emails on weekends or during evenings). I will not answer questions sent on Teams.

If you email me, please check the course website (including the announcements section) and the syllabus to see if your question is already answered there. If your question is already answered on the syllabus or course website, I will not reply.

When emailing, please use proper email etiquette. Here are two example guides: [guide 1](#), [guide 2](#).

Registration & Prerequisites

You are responsible for ensuring that you are registered in the correct courses. If you notice a problem with your registration, contact your academic counselor right away.

The prerequisites for this course are ECON 2P90/2P91 or PSYC 2F23. Please note that you are responsible for ensuring that you have successfully completed all course prerequisites. The lack of prerequisites will not lead to any preferential treatment and may not be used as basis for appeal.

Course Description

This course empirically analyzes the causes and consequences of crime and the criminal justice system using the tools of economics. Topics may include the effects of incarceration on the incarcerated, the impacts of policies intended to deter crime or reduce recidivism, racial disparities in the criminal justice system, and the causes and consequences of domestic violence.

Course Objectives

After completing this course, you should be able to:

1. Understand the theoretical framework(s) economists use to study crime and the criminal justice system;
2. Evaluate and interpret empirical research in the economics of crime;
3. Craft a policy brief advising government officials or senior bureaucrats about a topic related to the economics of crime.

Mandatory and Suggested Materials

There is no required textbook for this course. Information provided during readings, lectures, and in the slides will be sufficient to write the exams. Much of this course will be based around Winter, Harold. *The economics of crime: an introduction to rational crime analysis*. Routledge, 2019. If you would like to read this book to gain more insight, please feel free.

I expect you to read the highlighted articles each week. We will be discussing these in class and these discussions will influence participation grades. We will discuss how you should tackle reading articles.

Evaluation

The course grade will be based on the midterm exam, a final exam, a policy brief, podcast reflections, and participation.

The distribution of the marks is as follows:

Item	Weight	Date
Midterm	25%	Week 06, 10/09
Final	25%	TBD
Policy Brief	20%	Week 10
Podcast Reflection	15%	Week 14, 12/01 - 12/04
Participation	15%	Weeks 02-14

Exams

Midterm and final exams will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and long answer questions. **The midterm will be held in-class on Wednesday October 9.** The final exam will be held during the exam period. The final exam will be cumulative (covering all material in the course) but will more heavily feature material covered after the midterm.

There will be no make-up exams. In extraordinary, documented circumstances, the marks allocated to a missed midterm may be redistributed. My re-grading policy is that requests for re-grading must be made within 1 week of the exam being returned and accompanied by a written explanation of why a re-grade is necessary. The entire exam will be re-graded and your mark may go up or down.

Policy Brief

You will be required to draft a policy brief (1,000-2,000 words) about a topic related to the economics of crime. This brief will be due on **Wednesday November 6**. A policy brief is a short document given to policy makers to inform them about a particular topic. The goal of the brief can be to 1) inform the policy maker about a topic; 2) to outline policy options; or 3) to provide policy recommendations. It is your choice whether your brief will be advocating for an policy or simply providing policy options and information. Ultimately, a brief should help policy makers make informed decisions about the topic.

Podcast Reflection

Twice this semester you will listen to 2 episodes of the podcast [Probable Causation](#) (there are transcripts of episodes available) and write a reflection on it. There are some suggested episodes below but you may choose any episode you wish. The reflection should be about 1-2 pages long and should summarize the episode (using our “Big 5” questions introduced in class) and discuss how it relates to the course material. The first reflection is due on **Wednesday October 23** and the second is due on **Wednesday December 4**. Each reflection will be worth 7.5% of the final course grade.

Participation

Beginning with week 2 content, each group will answer a weekly question about one of the readings. Each group will be assigned one reading from one of the next week’s reading list. During the next class, the group will then answer one question about that reading. Questions will not be provided in advance (but will be one of the “Big 5” questions introduced in class that can be learned from reading the introduction) and should be answered orally on the spot. The group’s answer will be graded as satisfactory (full marks) or unsatisfactory (no marks). Each in-class question is worth 1.5% of the final course grade. There are 12 opportunities to answer in-class questions and 10 answers will be counted. I also expect participation and discussion during the question period for group presentations.

You may select groups yourselves but unassigned students will be assigned randomly into groups at the end of the first week.

You must complete a peer evaluation form for participation (only one for all weekly questions together). Grades will be adjusted based on the peer evaluation form. If a peer evaluation form is not completed, you will not receive a grade for the participation. If you are having trouble with group members, speak to me as soon as possible.

Course Schedule

Note that additional topics may be added or some of the below topics may be deleted or revised. Material may be covered in a different order. Students are reminded that attending lectures and keeping updated about all changes to the course curriculum is their responsibility.

Week 01: 09/01 - 09/04 - Introduction and the economist’s toolkit

Note that September 4 is the first day of classes.

Chalfin, Aaron, and Justin McCrary. “Criminal deterrence: A review of the literature.” *Journal of Economic Literature* 55.1 (2017): 5-48.

Doleac, Jennifer L. "Encouraging desistance from crime." *Journal of Economic Literature* 61.2 (2023): 383-427.

For the above, you only really need to read through the introduction and description of the model of crime.

Draca, Mirko, and Stephen Machin. "Crime and economic incentives." *Annual Review of Economics* 7.1 (2015): 389-408.

Week 02: 09/08 - 09/11 - Crime and the certainty of punishment

Winter Ch. 2

Doleac, Jennifer L. "The effects of DNA databases on crime." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 9.1 (2017): 165-201.

Gómez, Santiago, Daniel Mejía, and Santiago Tobón. "The deterrent effect of surveillance cameras on crime." *Journal of policy analysis and management* 40.2 (2021): 553-571.

[Probable causation Episode 90 with Matthew Ross](#)

Week 03: 09/15 - 09/18 - Severity of punishment I: fines and efficient punishment

Winter Ch. 3

Giles, Tyler. "The Government Revenue, Recidivism, and Financial Health Effects of Criminal Fines and Fees." *Recidivism, and Financial Health Effects of Criminal Fines and Fees* (September 9, 2023) (2023).

Finlay, Keith, et al. "The Impact of Criminal Financial Sanctions: A Multi-State Analysis of Survey and Administrative Data." *American Economic Review: Insights* (forthcoming).

[Probable causation Episode 86 with Elizabeth Luh](#) [Probable causation Episode 11 with Steven Raphael](#)

Week 04: 09/22 - 09/25 - Severity of punishment II: prison and crime

Winter Ch. 4

Lee, David S., and Justin McCrary. "The deterrence effect of prison: Dynamic theory and evidence." *Regression discontinuity designs: Theory and applications*. Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017. 73-146.

Ouss, Aurélie. "Misaligned incentives and the scale of incarceration in the United States." *Journal of Public Economics* 191 (2020): 104285.

[Probable causation Episode 79 with Jenny Williams](#) [Probable causation Episode 7 with Jeff Weaver](#)

Week 05: 09/29 - 10/02 - Severity of punishment III: the death penalty and crime

Note that September 30 is National Truth and Reconciliation Day and we will not have class.
Winter Ch. 5

Mocan, H. Naci, and R. Kaj Gittings. "Getting off death row: Commuted sentences and the deterrent effect of capital punishment." *The Journal of Law and Economics* 46.2 (2003): 453-478.

Battiston, Diego, and J. B. Vidal. "The local effect of executions on serious crime." (2022). https://diegobattiston.github.io/webtempl_files/Executions-Draft2.pdf

[Probable causation Episode 31 with Randi Hjalmarrsson](#)

Week 06: 10/06 - 10/09 - Overflow & Midterm

Midterm will be on Wednesday October 9.

Week 07: 10/13 - 10/16 - Reading Week

No classes.

Week 08: 10/20 - 10/23 - Racial bias and the criminal justice system

Winter Ch. 6

West, Jeremy. "Racial bias in police investigations." Retrieved from University of California, Santa Cruz website: <https://people.ucsc.edu/~jwest1/articles/WestRacialBiasPolice.pdf> (2018).

Hoekstra, Mark, and CarlyWill Sloan. "Does race matter for police use of force? Evidence from 911 calls." *American economic review* 112.3 (2022): 827-860.

[Probable causation Episode 99 with Ben Feigenberg](#) [Probable causation Episode 38 with CarlyWill Sloan](#)

Week 09: 10/27 - 10/30 - Private crime deterrence

Note that November 5 is the last day to withdraw without academic penalty. Winter Ch. 7

Amodio, Francesco. "Crime protection investment spillovers: Theory and evidence from the city of buenos aires." *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 159 (2019): 626-649.

Maheshri, Vikram, and Giovanni Mastrobuoni. "The race between deterrence and displacement: Theory and evidence from bank robberies." *Review of Economics and Statistics* 103.3 (2021): 547-562.

[Probable causation Episode 22 with Phillip Levine](#)

Week 10: 11/03 - 11/06 - The war on drugs

Winter Ch. 8

Doleac, Jennifer L., and Anita Mukherjee. "The effects of naloxone access laws on opioid abuse, mortality, and crime." *The Journal of Law and Economics* 65.2 (2022): 211-238.

Cox, Robynn, and Jamein P. Cunningham. "Financing the war on drugs: the impact of law enforcement grants on racial disparities in drug arrests." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 40.1 (2021): 191-224.

[Probable causation Episode 3 with Analisa Packham](#) [Probable causation Episode 76 with Time Moore](#)

Week 11: 11/10 - 11/13 - Behavioural crime and punishment

Winter Ch. 9

Apel, Robert. "Sanctions, perceptions, and crime." *Annual Review of Criminology* 5.1 (2022): 205-227.

Åkerlund, David, et al. "Time discounting and criminal behavior." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113.22 (2016): 6160-6165.

Mastrobuoni, Giovanni and Rivers, David, *Criminal Discount Factors and Deterrence* (February 7, 2016). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2730969> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2730969>

Week 12: 11/17 - 11/20 - Economists and crime

Winter Ch. 10

Week 13: 11/24 - 11/27 - Your suggestions**Week 14: 12/01 - 12/04 - Review & Overflow**

Note that December 3 is the last day of classes *but* December 4 is the make up for National Truth and Reconciliation Day.

Academic Integrity

Academic misconduct is a serious offence. The principle of academic integrity, particularly of doing one's own work, documenting properly (including use of quotation marks, appropriate paraphrasing and referencing/citation), collaborating appropriately, and avoiding misrepresentation, is a core principle in university study. Students should consult Section VII, "Academic Misconduct", in the "Academic Regulations and University Policies" entry in the Undergraduate Calendar, available at <http://brocku.ca/webcal> to view a fuller description of prohibited actions, and the procedures and penalties. Information on what constitutes academic integrity is available at <https://brocku.ca/academic-integrity/>

Accommodations

The University is committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all students and will adhere to the Human Rights principles that ensure respect for dignity, individualized accommodation, inclusion and full participation. The University provides a wide range of resources to assist students, as follows:

- a) If you require academic accommodation because of a disability or an ongoing health or mental health condition, please contact Student Accessibility Services at askSAS@brocku.ca or 905 688 5550 ext. 3240.
- b) Medical Self-Declaration Forms (short term) In the case of a short-term medical circumstance, if a student wishes to seek an academic consideration, please use the [Medical Self-Declaration Form](#). The request is to be made in good faith by the student requesting the academic consideration due to a short-term condition that impacts their academic activities (e.g., participation in academic classes, delay in assignments, etc.).

The period of this short-term medical condition for academic consideration must fall within a 72-hour (3 day) period. The form must be submitted to the instructor either during your brief absence or if you are too unwell, within 24 hours of the end of your 3 day brief absence.

The medical self-declaration form may only be used once per course per term. In the case of a request for a deferred exam, the Brock University Medical Verification form must be submitted.

Medical Verification Form (extended duration)

In cases where a student requests academic consideration due to a medical circumstance that exceeds 72 hours (three days) and will impact their academic activities (e.g., participation in academic classes, delay in assignments, etc.), or in the case of a final exam deferral, [the medical verification form](#) must be signed by the student and the health professional as per process set out in the [Faculty Handbook III:9.4.1](#).

- c) If you are experiencing mental health concerns, contact the Student Wellness and Accessibility Centre. [Good2Talk](#) is a service specifically for post-secondary students, available 24/7, 365 days a year, and provides anonymous assistance. For information on wellness, coping and resiliency, visit: <https://brocku.ca/mental-health/>
- d) If you require academic accommodation on religious grounds, you should make a formal, written request to your instructor(s) for alternative dates and/or means of satisfying requirements. Such requests should be made during the first two weeks of any given academic term, or as soon as possible after a need for accommodation is known to exist.
- e) If you have been affected by sexual violence, the Human Rights & Equity Office offers support, information, reasonable accommodations, and resources through the Sexual Violence Support & Education Coordinator. For information on sexual violence, visit Brock's Sexual Assault and Harassment Policy or contact the Sexual Violence Support & Response Coordinator at humanrights@brocku.ca or 905 688 5550 ext. 4387.
- f) If you feel you have experienced discrimination or harassment on any of the above grounds, including racial, gender or other forms of discrimination, contact the Human Rights and Equity Office at humanrights@brocku.ca.

Acknowledgements

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