

**University of Chicago
Winter Quarter 2019**

CRIME PREVENTION

Instructor:

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Class meetings:

Mondays, 9:30am-12:20pm
Keller Center 0021

Course Objectives:

The goals of this course are to introduce students to some key concepts in crime policy and help develop their policy analysis skills, including the ability to frame problems and policy alternatives, think critically about empirical evidence, use cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis to compare policy alternatives, and write effective policy memos. The course seeks to develop these skills by considering the relative efficacy of different policy approaches to controlling crime including imprisonment, policing, drug regulation, and gun-oriented regulation or enforcement, as well as education, social programs, and active labor market policies that may influence people's propensity to commit crime or be victims of crime. While policy choices about punishment and crime prevention involve a range of legal and normative considerations, the focus in this class will be mostly on answering positive (factual) questions about the consequences of different policies.

Course Requirements:

The first meeting will discuss the key objectives of the class, provide background on how to think like a policy analyst, how to read an empirical paper, and how to write a policy memo.

All students are then required to write a memo for the second class meeting. The memos themselves should be no longer than two double-spaced pages (one-inch margins all around, 12 point font), and should be written in plain English without jargon for a client (decision maker) who should be assumed not to know much social science. These memos will be graded on the following criteria:

- *Critical evaluation of the conceptual claims being made on both sides of some policy question or debate, and critical evaluation of the empirical evidence that is available.* While every policy memo will make a recommendation, arguably the most important contribution of each memo is to highlight for the decision maker what we know about the benefits and costs associated with different courses of action, and how confident we can be in those conclusions. Doing a good job will require playing devil's advocate and trying to see where holes might be poked in the arguments of all of the papers that provide relevant evidence on the larger issue.
- *Quality of the memo writing.* All two-page memos should start off with a one paragraph summary that lays out your entire argument very briefly. The body of the memo should elaborate on those key points; the first sentence of each paragraph should summarize the argument of that paragraph. Condensing complicated policy analyses into two double-spaced pages is incredibly difficult, so you will also need to think very carefully about how to prioritize the arguments you make in your memo. I myself typically find it helpful to write a longer version of my paper first to lay out the basic argument, and then spend a considerable amount of time once the key ideas are on paper thinking about whether I have the basic argument and overall structure right, then go through and cut out the least essential points and condense presentation of those points that are most central.
- *Objectivity.* Your job (in these memos) is to help a decision maker get as realistic and honest an assessment as possible about the benefits and costs of different policy or programmatic decisions. I have heard repeatedly from people in policymaking positions (even those who have very strong ideological views themselves) that the most useful people on their staff are the ones who are able to be most dispassionate in assessing the arguments on all sides of the issue. It's fine for you to have strong political views that shape how you personally weight the consequences of different courses of action, but for purposes of writing these memos it is important to be able to assess the claims and counter-claims in as objective manner as possible. The policymakers will usually have little difficulty understanding the value tradeoffs associated with different courses of action, so your greatest value-added is to help them critically evaluate the different empirical claims about the costs and benefits of different policy options.

The remaining eight class meetings will each also be built around a memo writing assignment. Students are required to *select three of the remaining eight classes for which they write memos* (so every student will write **4 memos** over the course of the quarter, plus take the final exam).

Course grading:

Each memo will count for 15 percent of the final course grade, so that the four memos (the memo written for week 2, plus the three other memos you will write at your choosing over weeks 3-10) together count for 60 percent of the course grade. Students will also be required to write a final paper at the end of the quarter that will count for 30 percent of the course grade. Constructive class participation will count for 10 percent of the course grade.

Main Texts:

Supplemental readings are all available online and will also be posted on the course Chalk site. Note that some of these online sources for readings, such as www.jstor.org or www.nber.org, may only work from an on-campus computer or IP address

Optional Field Trip:

I usually organize a few *optional* field trips to the Cook County criminal courts at 26th and California Avenue to observe bond court. This is where arrestees are taken within 48 hours of their arrest to have a judge decide where they will be as they await adjudication of their case – in the jail, or free to go home. Given space constraints in the jury box (where we will sit during each bond court visit), we can only take about 10 students per outing. The bond court visit will involve being there for about three or four hours; please only sign up if you will be sure you can come and stay for the entire time.

Syllabus:

Class 1: Introduction (January 7)

Betsy Powell, “Has mass incarceration failed?” *The Toronto Star*, July 23, 2008.
<http://www.thestar.com/SpecialSections/Crime/article/460767>

James Q. Wilson, “Do the time, lower the crime,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 2008.
<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-op-wilson30mar30,0,7917289.story>

Kessler, Daniel and Steven D. Levitt (1999) “Using sentence enhancements to distinguish between deterrence and incapacitation.” *Journal of Law and Economics*. 42(1): 343-363
www.jstor.org (or see course Chalk site)

Cheryl Marie Webster, Anthony N. Doob, and Franklin E. Zimring (2006) “Proposition 8 and crime rates in California: The case of the disappearing deterrent.” *Criminology and Public Policy*. 5(3): 417-448.
<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/118577088/issue> (or see course Chalk site)

Steven D. Levitt (2006) “The case of the critics who missed the point: A reply to Webster et al.” *Criminology and Public Policy*. 5(3): 449-460 <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/118577088/issue> (or see course Chalk site)

Harris School of Public Policy Writing Program, Policy Memo Writing Guide (see course chalk site)

Additional background on how to write a policy memo:

http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/images/syllabi/weimer/Writing_Memoranda.pdf

Class 2: Do we have too many or too few people in prison? (January 14)

Suppose that you are an advisor to California Governor Jerry Brown, who is worried about the financial and human costs associated with the large number of people imprisoned in Illinois – both also appreciates that crime is an important problem, particularly in the most disadvantaged urban neighborhoods throughout the state. A lawsuit in federal court filed several years ago requires the state to reduce its prison population from 150,000 to 100,000. Governor Brown is wondering whether the state should abide by that decision or instead try to appeal it. What can the best available empirical evidence tell us about whether the public safety benefits to the people of California from the marginal 50,000 prisoners outweigh the marginal costs?

Steven D. Levitt (1996) “The effect of prison population size on crime rates: Evidence from prison overcrowding litigation.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. 111(2): 319-351. (see course Chalk site).

John J. Donohue, “Assessing the Relative Benefits of Incarceration: The Overall Change Over the Previous Decades and the Benefits on the Margin,” in Steven Raphael and Michael Stoll, eds., “*Do Prisons Make Us Safer? The Benefits and Costs of the Prison Boom*,” pp. 269-341 (2009).

Mark A. Cohen, Roland T. Rust, Sara Steen, and Simon T. Tidd (2004) “Willingness to pay for crime control programs.” *Criminology*. 42(1): 55-88. (see course Chalk site)

January 21 – No class meeting (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)

Class 4: Juvenile justice (January 28)

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle has in the past raised the possibility of closing the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, which is where youth who are deemed to be public safety risks (or who do not have a home to go to after they are arrested) are held in detention while they wait for their cases to be adjudicated in juvenile court. President Preckwinkle proposes putting youth in community-based programs as much as possible instead. Some people believe that this shift will be more humane and have no harmful effects on public safety, because they believe that the threat of punishment does not do much to deter criminal behavior by adolescents, and because they believe that getting youth out of detention settings like the JTDC will increase their access to therapeutic rehabilitation services. Others have expressed concerns that this plan will further undermine the deterrent effect of the juvenile justice system on the criminal behavior of teenage offenders, both because of the possible ripple effects of closing the JTDC on the likelihood that youth are sent by judges to juvenile prisons after adjudication, and because for many youth the time they spend at the JTDC is the only detention they will receive as a result of their arrest (relatively few juveniles who are adjudicated delinquent get sentenced to juvenile prison; most are given some form of probation or other alternative sanction). Please prepare a memo for President Preckwinkle about what you think the most likely net effect would be on public safety if the JTDC were closed and all the residents were required as a

condition of probation to participate in the Youth Guidance Becoming a Man (BAM) program instead.

Erika Slife and Duaa Eldeib “New goal for juvenile center: clear it out” *Chicago Tribune*. December 9, 2011. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-12-09/news/ct-met-cook-county-juvenile-detention-center-20111209_1_transitional-administrator-juvenile-justice-bart-lubow

Steven Levitt (1998) “Juvenile crime and punishment,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 106(December): 1156-1185. (see course Chalk site or <http://pricetheory.uchicago.edu/levitt/Papers/LevittJuvenileCrimePunishment1998.pdf>)

Lee, David S. and Justin McCrary (2005) “Crime, punishment, and myopia.” Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 11491. (see course chalk site or www.nber.org). Can just focus on the empirical results for this paper, no need to get bogged down in the conceptual model.

Anna Aizer and Joseph J. Doyle, Jr. (2013) “Juvenile incarceration, human capital and future crime: Evidence from randomly-assigned judges.” Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 19102. (see course chalk site or www.nber.org)

Sara B. Heller, Anuj K. Shah, Jonathan Guryan, Jens Ludwig, Sendhil Mullainathan and Harold A. Pollack (2017) “Thinking, fast and slow? Some field experiments to reduce crime and dropout in Chicago.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. 132(1): 1-54.

Class 4: Policing (February 4)

In 1991, at the peak of the crack epidemic in the U.S., the homicide rates in New York City and Chicago were nearly identical (just over 30 murders per 100,000 city residents per year). Today New York’s homicide rate is about one-third of ours (around 5 or 6 per 100,000, compared to a rate of 15 to 18 per 100,000 in Chicago). Much of the NYC drop is often credited to policing strategies, including implementation of Compstat, the use of targeted anti-gun policing (“stop, question, and frisk”), broken windows policing, and hiring more police (the city’s police force went from 30,000 to 40,000 over the course of the 1990s). Understanding which of these factors is responsible for the drop is relevant for thinking about which if any strategies Chicago should adopt. Please prepare a memo for Chicago Police Department Superintendent Garry McCarthy that describes your best judgment about the effects of different NYC policing innovations on crime, as well as the likely consequences of each of these innovations on the city’s jail population as well.

William N. Evans and Emily G. Owens (2007) “COPS and crime.” *Journal of Public Economics*. 91: 181-201. (see course chalk site)

Emily G. Owens (2011) “COPS and Cuffs.” Working Paper. (see course chalk site)

James Q. Wilson and George Kelling, “Broken Windows.” *The Atlantic*. http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/_atlantic_monthly-broken_windows.pdf

George Kelling and William Sousa (2001) “*Do police matter? An analysis of the impact of New York City’s police reforms.*” Manhattan Institute Civic Report Number 22 (see course chalk site)

Lawrence W. Sherman, James W. Shaw and Dennis P. Rogan (1995) “*The Kansas City Gun Experiment.*” Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, US Department of Justice (see course Chalk site)

Class 5: Community corrections and re-entry (February 11)

The average prison spell in the U.S. is on the order of two to three years, which means that almost everyone who spends time in prison in America winds up re-entering society at some point. Recidivism rates tend to be quite high, which has generated growing policy concern about identifying ways to improve the re-entry experience for ex-offenders to reduce their risk of recidivism and increase the likelihood they can become economically self sufficient and lead healthy, productive lives. This policy issue is particularly important here in Chicago, as over half of all people leaving prison in the state of Illinois each year return to a Chicago neighborhood. Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner is receiving a great deal of pressure from advocacy organizations to spend more on helping ex-offenders improve their labor market outcomes (with many people believing transitional jobs to be the most promising approach there), educational attainment (many people focus on prison education), and reduce their drug use (the Hawaii HOPE model is often pointed to now as the most promising model). Please write a memo for Governor Rauner outlining what we know (or don’t know) about which of these approaches seems to represent the most cost-effective way to reduce recidivism rates.

Angela Hawken and Mark Kleiman (2009) “Managing drug involved probationers with swift and certain sanctions: Evaluating Hawaii’s HOPE.” Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/229023.pdf>

Cindy Redcross, Megan Millenky, Timothy Rudd and Valerie Levshin (2012) “More than a Job: Final Results from the Evaluation of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) Transitional Jobs Program.” MDRC final report to the Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation, US Department of Health and Human Services, OPRE Report 2011-18. (see chalk site)

Jacobs, Erin (2012) *Returning to Work After Prison: Final Results from the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration.* New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.
http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_626.pdf

Tyler, John H. and Jeffrey R. Kling (2006) “Prison-based education and re-entry into the mainstream labor market.” Cambridge MA: National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 12114.

Class 6: Root causes (February 18)

Every time there is an increase in the crime rate, particularly the juvenile crime rate, public discussion focuses on how today’s teenagers are “worse” than yesterday’s. These usual concerns become compounded when we have demographic bulges like the Echo Boomers (the unusually large birth cohorts born in the 1980s into the 1990s who are the children of the Baby Boomers). Suppose Mayor Emanuel is aware of these

demographic realities and has expressed some concern about the problem. Please come to class prepared to discuss the evidence for and against this hypothesis of “cohort effects” as an explanation for the increase in crime rates in America during the late 1980s, and the potential for both changes in cohort criminality and cohort size to cause crime rates to increase in Chicago in upcoming years. Every mayor of Chicago is also always under a great deal of political pressure to figure out ways to steer funding towards religious organizations in the city that have a great deal of political power. So please also include in your memo a discussion of what we know about the potential benefits, costs, and implementation challenges of policies designed to address the “root causes” of crime, specifically increased government support for religious institutions (as suggested by DiIulio’s *The Weekly Standard* essay) and efforts to reduce youth violence.

DiIulio, John J. (1995) “The Coming of the Super-Predators.” *The Weekly Standard*. November 27. pp. 23-28. <http://www.mcsm.org/predator.html>

Cook, Philip J. and John H. Laub (1998) “The Unprecedented Epidemic in Youth Violence.” In *Youth Violence*. Edited by Michael Tonry and Mark H. Moore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 27-64. www.jstor.org

Larson, David B. and Byron R. Johnson (1998) *Religion: The forgotten factor in cutting youth crime and saving at-risk youth*. Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. <http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/jpr-28-2.htm>

Class 7: Social policy as crime prevention (February 25)

Disparities in measured rates of aggression between children growing up in poor versus non-poor households have been measured at ages as young as 18 months, and are predictive of later rates of criminal involvement during adolescence and early adulthood. This has led to a great deal of interest in increasing investments in early childhood education as a way to reduce crime rates over the long term. Please prepare a memo for Mayor Emanuel describing what we know about whether early childhood investments actually reduce criminal behavior later on. Even if the Mayor is convinced that this is a good long-term investment in the city’s future, given the current budget situation there is no way that the city will be able to provide as much intensive early childhood programming to every family that would potentially benefit. Please include in your memo a discussion of what we know about whether the city would receive highest return-on-investment if additional early childhood spending was devoted to the most intensive sorts of preschool programming (like Abecedarian), to a relatively low-intensity early childhood program (like Head Start), or something in the middle (like Perry Preschool), or whether you think that all of the preschool programs are even starting too late and that the highest return-on-investment program is nurse home visits.

Clive R. Belfield, Milagros Nores, Steve Barnett and Lawrence Schweinhart (2006) “The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program: Cost Benefit-Analysis Using Data from the Age-40 Followup.” *Journal of Human Resources*. 41(1): 162-190. <http://jhr.uwpress.org/cgi/content/abstract/XLI/1/162>

Garces, Eliana, Duncan Thomas and Janet Currie (2002) “Longer-Term Effects of Head Start.” *American*

Economic Review. 92(4): 999-1012.
www.jstor.org

Deming, David (2009) "Early childhood intervention and life-cycle skill development: Evidence from Head Start." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*. 1(3): 111-34.
(course chalk site)

Campbell, Frances A., Craig T. Ramey, Elizabeth Pungello, Joseph Sparling, Shari Miller-Johnson (2002) "Early childhood education: Young adult outcomes from the Abecedarian project." *Applied Developmental Science*. 6(1): 42-57.
(course chalk site)

David Olds, Charles R. Henderson, Robert Cole, et al. (1998) "Long-term effects of nurse home visitation on children's criminal and anti-social behavior: 15-year follow-up of a randomized controlled trial." *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 280 (14): 1238-1244.
<http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/reprint/280/14/1238>
See also Child Trends summary of study and replications at:
<http://www.childtrends.org/lifecourse/programs/nursehomevisitingprogram.htm>

Class 8: Drug Policy (March 4)

One of the few things that almost everyone can agree on is that current drug policy in the U.S. is not optimal. However people disagree about what the problem is. Some think that trying to prohibit illegal drugs is a mistake and almost all restrictions on the sale or use of drugs should be eliminated. The extreme view on the other side is that we do not do enough to enforce existing laws, since illegal drug use is so rampant with seemingly few legal consequences for the vast majority of users or sellers. Please prepare a memo for Office of National Drug Control Policy Director ("drug czar") Gil Kerlikowski about what we currently know about what would happen if we legalized drugs, or if the government just dramatically scaled back enforcement of existing drug laws. How does your answer depend on which type of drug would be legalized (or would have enforcement scaled back for)?

"Drugs, Crime and Public Policy,"(David A. Boyum, Jonathan P. Caulkins and Mark A.R. Kleiman), in *Crime and Public Policy*, James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia eds., Oxford University Press, December, 2010.

Owens, Emily G. (2011) "Are Underground Markets Really That Violent? Evidence from Early 20th Century America," *The American Law and Economics Review*. 13(1) 1-44. (course chalk site)

Kuziemko, Ilyana and Steven D. Levitt (2004) "An Empirical Analysis of Imprisoning Drug Offenders." *Journal of Public Economics*. 88(9-10), pp. 2043-66.
<http://pricetheory.uchicago.edu/levitt/Papers/KuziemkoLevitt2004.pdf>

[Distribute final writing assignment].

Class 9: Gun policy (March 11)

In June 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the city of Chicago's handgun ban by a 5-4 decision (*McDonald vs. Chicago*), after striking down Washington DC's handgun ban two years earlier (*District of Columbia v. Heller*). Suppose that we are five years into the future and the composition of the Supreme Court has changed, so that the fifth (swing) vote on the court is now someone who is politically neutral, whose vote on a given issue is hard to predict just on the basis of the political party of the president who appointed her. The city of Chicago is considering whether to try to get the Supreme Court to overturn the McDonald decision. Please prepare a memo for the city's corporation counsel about whether a repeal of the ban on the ban (that is, the ability to legally re-instate the ban) would substantially improve public safety in Chicago.

Loftin, Colin, David McDowall, Brian Wiersema, and Talbert Cottey (1991) "Effects of restrictive licensing of handguns on homicide and suicide in the District of Columbia." *New England Journal of Medicine*. 325: 1625.

Chester Britt, Gary Kleck and David J. Bordua (1996) "A Reassessment of the D.C. Gun Law: Some Cautionary Notes on the Use of Interrupted Time Series Designs for Policy Impact Assessment." *Law & Society Review*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 361-380. www.jstor.org

David McDowall, Colin Loftin and Brian Wiersema (1996) "Using quasi-experiments to evaluate firearm laws: Comment on Britt et al.'s reassessment of the DC gun law." *Law and Society Review*, vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 381-392. www.jstor.org

Philip J. Cook, Jens Ludwig, Sudhir A. Venkatesh and Anthony A. Braga (2007) "Underground gun markets." *Economic Journal*. 117: F558-588. <http://home.uchicago.edu/~ludwigj/>