
Syllabus: Economics of Crime and Corruption, Summer 2026

Instructor and About the Course

Contact Information

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Office Hours: Feel free to stop by, ask questions, and just chat. If you would like to talk to me but your schedule does not allow you to come during office hours, email or text me and we can arrange a personal appointment. I realize that coming to office hours may be uncomfortable and even a little scary. But once you do come to office hours, you'll probably realize it isn't as bad as you imagined. I also feel like going to office hours can be really useful: I can help you resolve a lot of questions and issues if we speak one on one. **Do not hesitate to reach out no matter how small or large your issue is. I am here to help.** I am available to you, your issues matter to me and office hours is the best way to discuss them.

Office hours on Zoom:

Saturday: 9-11am Mountain Time

Or By appointment (Just email or text me to schedule a time, I am very flexible and very happy to arrange a time to talk).

Here is the zoom link: <https://cuboulder.zoom.us/j/98511512971>

Term Start: May 26th, 2026

Term End: July 20th, 2026

Course Website

Canvas is our class website:

- Login using your University of Colorado Boulder identikey and password
<https://canvas.colorado.edu/>

Instructor Bio

I have been teaching Economics as an instructor of record for 10+ years. I have taught Economics of Crime and Corruption more than 10 times (both in person and online). It is my favorite class to teach by far! I consider myself not only a specialist in Economics but also a specialist in teaching. For example, I did my Postdoc at Cornell University where I was doing research on teaching and learning helping other professors make their teaching more research based. Engagement and inclusion are two main pillars of my teaching philosophy. I have published research on how to help underrepresented students succeed in an economic classroom.

I also love to read, paint (poorly), go to museums, paddleboard, snowboard, play pickleball, hats, tattoos, coffee, hang out with my three dogs and cat and change my hair styles frequently. Thinking about education and mental health and art is important to me.

Communication

1. My preferred method of communication is office hours. I find that I can add more warmth and nuance to answering questions when talking rather than over email. Feel free to email or text me to schedule an appointment.
2. Having said that, I am always happy to receive an email or a text from you. Email is a great way to communicate.
3. I will respond to emails in 24 hours during the work week. I typically do not answer emails during the weekends. I found out that I am able to be more thoughtful and show up at work as a better and happier person if I disconnect from work over the weekend.
4. If I didn't respond to you within 24 hours or by Monday afternoon (if you emailed during the weekend) please feel free to resend your email or text me at 781-267-2204 (text is better than call).

Course description

This course focuses on economic models of crime and punishment, and on empirical evidence that evaluates the models. The first part of the course will introduce economic models of crime and study what factors motivate and deter criminal behavior. Then we will turn to empirical evidence and will discuss the role of higher fines, imprisonment, death penalty, abortion, drugs, guns and other factors in deterring crime. In the end of the course, we will discuss corruption and whether it is harmful or beneficial to society.

Measurable Course Learning Objectives (things You will be graded on)

1. Describe what tools economics use to analyze empirical evidence;
-For example, describe what difference-in-differences method is.
2. Explain what are the assumptions for tools economics use to analyze empirical evidence.
-For example, explain the assumptions that need to be satisfied to use difference-in-differences method.
3. Apply theoretical economic analysis to issues related to criminal behavior;
-For example, predicting if change in unemployment is likely to affect property or violent crime.
4. Apply empirical economic analysis to issues related to criminal behavior;
- For example, examine whether evidence has a causal interpretation or not.
5. Further apply those theoretical and methodological insights to analyze other social phenomena (education, health, etc.).
-For example, identify which factors causally lead to LGBTQ+ individuals earning lower incomes on average.
6. Generate a proposal for a research study in economics of crime which could actually be implemented by a scholar. The research project will include the following components: the research question, theoretical approach, proposed empirical methodology and discussion of potential issues with the methodology;
-For example, creating a research proposal to study whether legalization of psychedelics affects crime.

Other Course Learning Goals (things I would like to promote in this class but You will not be graded on)

1. Getting a feel of what modern research in economics looks like;
2. Building some appreciation for economic research.
3. Getting a feel of how doing economic research could look like;
4. Appreciate the importance of understanding things causally rather than just on a correlation level.

Prerequisites

Requires prerequisite courses of (ECON 3070 and ECON 3818) or one of the following: APPM 4570, CHEN 3010, CSCI 3022, CVEN 3227, MATH 3510, MATH 4520, STAT 3100, STAT 4000 or STAT 4520 (all minimum grade C-).

Required Texts

There is no required textbook for this class. We will focus on reading academic articles (which our university has a subscription too). I will post all the necessary readings on the class website on Canvas, you do not need to purchase access to them.

Class Format

This course is delivered via distance education format using the CU Canvas system. The asynchronous format will use a combination of readings, online discussion, and other web-based resources. Asynchronous learning does not require real-time (or synchronous) interaction; instead, content is available online for you to access when it best suits your schedule, and assignments are completed prior to the deadlines listed in the schedule. You will interact with the instructor and other students using the communication functions provided by Canvas. You will submit assignments using Canvas. This class is fully asynchronous. The only synchronous component is office hours and review sessions.

There will be 8 modules corresponding to the 8 weeks of the course (1 module per week). You should proceed through one module per week, which will be comprised of readings from video lectures, discussions, homeworks (post-class questions) exams, research proposal and various outside sources of information such as additional readings and video content, among other content.

You will get most of the information in this class from asynchronous video lectures. You will evaluate your understanding of that information by answering post class questions after each lecture and receiving feedback on that (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday). You will further your understanding by reading academic articles and summarizing them (Summaries) and by creating your own article proposal (Little Research Proposal). There will be a Midterm and a Final exam. Exam are the highest share of the grade and post class questions are designed to prepare you for the exam (are very similar to exam questions).

There will be 5 assignments due most weeks: 4 post class questions every week (on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday) and a Saturday assignment, usually a Summary (4 summaries total). Some weeks for Saturday assignments we will have a discussion post, a little research proposal or an exam due instead of the summary. All assignments will be due at Midnight. There will be no assignments on Wednesday and Sunday.

Assignments and Grading

Grading

All the assignments for this semester are listed below with their corresponding weights in your overall grade:

15% Post class questions

15% Summaries (Readings)

20% Midterm Exam

30% Final Exam

15% Little Research Proposal

5% Essay Reflection

Grading Scale

93% and above corresponds to A, 90-92% corresponds to A-; 87-89% corresponds to B+, 83-86% is B, 80-82% is B-; 77-79% corresponds to C+, 73-76% is C, 70-72 is C-; 67-69% corresponds to D+, 63-66% is D, 60-62 is D-; below 60 corresponds to F.

There is no rounding. This rule holds regardless of how close you are to a grade cutoff. For example, 89.99 is a B+ and will not be rounded to an A-.

Assignments explained

Post class questions

There will be practice questions assigned after each video lecture (class), those are called Post Class Questions. There will typically be 4 lectures (classes) and hence 4 post class questions each week. These post class questions are designed to help you evaluate how well you understand the material, help you remember the content better (through applying it) and prepare you for the exams. The questions will be similar to those on the exam.

The goal of these is to help you learn rather than evaluate you, they will be graded largely on completion (as opposed to correctness) and you will receive extensive feedback on them. However, if I notice low effort on those and no incorporation of feedback day after day, I'll start grading them on correctness.

Missed post class questions cannot be made up for regardless of why they were missed. This is done in an attempt to treat all students the same way and not have to choose which excuses are more valid than others. However, you are allowed to miss two days of post class questions without any penalty to your grade.

Summary (Readings)

General Information: The summary should be printed in Times New Roman font size 12, single space, left and write margins equal to 1 inch. The summary should NOT be longer than 1 page (ideal size: 2/3 of a page to 1 page).

Summary should include:

1. *Research question*: What is the paper about? What question are the authors trying to answer in this paper? Note: Do not copy it directly from the paper, summarize it with your own words as concise as possible.
2. *Methodology*: How do the authors answer the research question? Do they use a theoretical model or analyze real data (what data do they use)? What is the method they use? Does this method allow for causal interpolation? What are the assumptions for causal interpretation?
3. *Conclusion*: What are the main results of this paper (ideally a direct answer to the research question);
4. *Opinion*: Any opinion you may have on the topic of the article or the article itself. For example, was there something you liked/found interesting in this paper? Was there something you didn't like about the paper?

Opinion part should not be more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the summary. Methodology and conclusions should be the largest part of the summary.

The first summary will be graded very leniently and will receive a lot of feedback, next summaries will be graded more on correctness.

The goal of this assignment is learning to summarize academic research and evaluate if the empirical methodology has a causal interpretation (one of the main learning goals in this class). There will be approximately 5 summaries during the semester.

The due date for any reading cannot be extended for any reason.

Exams

Note that the exams are the largest share of the grade: it is not possible to do well in the class without doing well on the exams.

Exams will consist of free response questions. The questions will be based on readings assigned during the semester and on the material covered during the video lectures. The questions will be similar to the post class questions we will do after each video lecture. There will be one Midterm Exam and a Final Exam.

Midterm Exam will take place during the week 4 (June 18-21)

Final Exam will take place during week 8 (July 18-20).

The exams will be 1 hour in length.

The exams will be closed book and closed note.

No communication with others or chat GPT (or similar services) is allowed during exams.

This course requires proctored examinations. Exams are proctored which will require planning on your part. Proctors are individuals who administer the exam process following the guidelines provided by University of Colorado Boulder to ensure academic integrity.

Who can be my proctor?

If you are in Boulder or nearby, you can take your exam:

1. **With me** at the Department of Economics. There is no cost for using this proctor. This option is only on selected days during the exam period.
2. With **Proctorio or a comparable online proctoring service as determined by your instructor**. Online proctoring is a service that uses a webcam and microphone to ensure academic integrity. To use this service, you must have access to a computer with a webcam and a microphone. There is no cost for using this proctor.

If you outside of Boulder, you can take your exam:

1. At **an accredited college or university testing center** in your town or nearby. There may be a cost for using this testing center.
2. With **Proctorio or a comparable online proctoring service as determined by your instructor**. Online proctoring is a service that uses a webcam and microphone to ensure academic integrity. To use this service, you must have access to a computer with a webcam and a microphone. There is no cost for using this proctor.

Please see Canvas for detailed information about proctoring, Proctorio, and a nationwide list of accredited college or university testing centers. If you are in a rural area or on a military base, you may need to be approved to use a person as a proctor and information is provided on Canvas for this approval process.

Little Research Proposal

This assignment allows you the freedom to work on any topic of your interest. It also allows you to create your own study rather than evaluate other studies. Creating your own requires higher mastery of the empirical and theoretical tools from this class.

Research Proposal can be written in group (2 to 5 people). If you want to have a group but don't have one, I'll send an email with a form where you'll be able to sign up for a group and I will randomly match you with others who are also searching. Looking at discussion board and what others post there is a good way to think about finding group members.

To write a Research Proposal you will pick a topic (or a question) in the economics of crime. For example, what are the effects of gun violence on student performance at school, are longer prison sentences helping to prevent crime, do crime rates increase when unemployment does, etc. Then you will describe how one could answer this question using data. You will provide data sources and detailed information about the empirical strategy. You don't have to actually perform the analysis but rather describe instructions of how someone could perform the analysis. Ideally you would come up with an empirical strategy that gets at causality, rather than just correlation (papers that just get at correlation will be graded out of 90 points rather than 100).

The research Proposal should be 3-5 pages long (Times New Roman 12 point font, single space, left and write margins equal to 1 inch).

More detailed rules about the research proposal will be specified later during the semester. I will post a video explaining all the components of the proposal. These components will make more sense once we have practiced talking about various research papers.

I understand that it is a difficult exercise. I expect you to ask me questions about it and ask me whether your empirical strategy is valid. I am here to help: you do not need to figure out everything alone. Questions are especially welcomed if they are asked in advance (at least 2-3 days before the due date) but last-minute questions are ok too.

The Research Proposal will be due on **Saturday, July 11th at Midnight**. It is enough for one group member to submit it. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Essay reflection

This is 1/3 page to 1 page (single spaced) essay reflection on any topic in economics of crime. A lot of this class is focused on analyzing theory and data. However, a lot of topics we discuss in this class are such that they may trigger strong emotional responses or opinions. This assignment is a good outlet for those opinions.

This assignment will be graded on completion not on correctness (all opinions are valid). Every student will submit the assignment as a post on the discussion board for week 5 of class. Any of your classmates will be able to read your opinion. Comments on opinions of others are encouraged but not required.

Here are some examples of what you could do in your reflection paper:

- if you could know a precise and causal answer to one question in economics of crime, what would it be?
- what topic did you find the most interesting in class so far?
- what aspect of crime interests you the most?
- what is some hypothesis you have about something relate to crime?

-what is some observation regarding crime you find interesting?

-..... (any other opinion on crime).

The discussion post will be due on **Saturday, June 27th at Midnight**. Submissions as early as first of July are encouraged. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Feedback on assignments

Feedback on all assignments will be provided within one week from submission (but typically faster).

Classroom environment and expectations

In this class I expect us (both you and me) to:

- Try;
- Make mistakes;
- Listen;
- Improve;
- Ask questions;
- Answer questions;
- Explain;
- Struggle;
- Have Fun;
- Support each other;
- Push each other;

Expectations from Students in this class

I expect you to submit assignments of high quality on time. I will notice if you do not and will email you about it. This is not to be judgmental but rather to be supportive and check in. I understand we are all humans and various things come up and assignments can be missed or done poorly: I am committed to your success through it all.

Late work will not be accepted (however you can miss 2 post class questions and one summary during the semester without grade penalty). Exceptions: extended illness or religious holidays.

Time commitment: It is hard to know exactly how long each assignment will take you to complete. I would plan for 1.5 hours per video lecture and post class question (1.5 hours 4 times a week) + about 7 hours to do the summary + about 1 hour to mindfully review received feedback. I anticipate a time commitment of about 14 hours a week on regular week and higher commitment on the week the Term Report is due.

Your participation matters. What you will get out of this class depends at least partly on what you will put in. I encourage you to be thoughtful about it. You are already here. Might as well get the

most out of it. From my side, I assure you I am putting in my absolute best effort and it brings me joy when you do too.

Accommodation for Disabilities

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) on the Disability Services website.

Talk to me after class or at office hours or email me if you need any accommodations besides the extended time for the exams. If you only need extended time just mention it to me the week before the Midterm Exam 1 so we can arrange an alternative time.

If your disability isn't documented but there are still things I can do for you, let me know. I am committed to your success.

Honor Code

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code academic integrity policy. Violations of the Honor Code may include, but are not limited to: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code (honor@colorado.edu); 303-492-5550). Students found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the Honor Code academic integrity policy can be found on the Honor Code website.

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct (harassment, exploitation, and assault), intimate partner violence (dating or domestic violence), stalking, or protected-class discrimination or harassment by or against members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or email cureport@colorado.edu. Information about OIEC, university policies, reporting options, and the campus resources can be found on the OIEC website.

Please know that faculty and graduate instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, dating and domestic violence, stalking, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about their rights, support resources, and reporting options.

Classroom Behavior

Both students and faculty are responsible for maintaining an appropriate learning environment in all instructional settings, whether in person, remote or online. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. For more information, see the classroom behavior policy, the Student Code of Conduct, and the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance.

Student Names and Pronouns

CU Boulder recognizes that students' legal information doesn't always align with how they identify. Students may update their names and pronouns via the student portal; those names and pronouns are listed on instructors' class rosters. In the absence of such updates, the name that appears on the class roster is the student's legal name.

Most importantly feel free to email me any information you find important regarding this matter. I want to make sure that you are addressed appropriately and feel welcomed and comfortable as you are.

Religious Holidays

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. In this class, please email me if you have any conflicts for religious reasons.

The class policies are subject to change due to unexpected external conditions and to ensure better student learning.