
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, DC

Department of Sociology
SOC 2189: Terrorism and Extremism

Meeting:

Location:

INSTRUCTOR:

Professor Kaitlyn DaVisio

Email: k.davisio@email.gwu.edu

Office Hours:

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will discuss a variety of politically extreme ideologies and terrorist movements domestically and internationally throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. The course will first discuss theoretical and conceptual understandings of terrorism and extremism, and briefly review the pre-9/11 history of terrorism and counter-terrorism. It will then turn to specific instances, case studies, and explanations of a variety of politically extreme movements. Through an interdisciplinary lens, we will discuss contemporary instances of extremism and terrorism, and consider ways to counter and prevent them. This class is designed to give students an introductory overview of the broader field of terrorism studies and implications for P/CVE (Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism). Material discussed throughout the duration of the class may be sensitive or uncomfortable; enrollment discretion is advised.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Throughout this course, students will...

1. Identify and assess extremism and terrorism;
2. Evaluate and compare primary drivers of radicalization across varied ideological and international domains;
3. Evaluate and compare counter-terrorism and radicalization prevention tactics;
4. Enhance verbal and written communication skills, particularly in the topics of terrorism and extremism;
5. Demonstrate the ability to think critically about how social, political, and economic factors contribute to extremism and/or terrorism.

TEXTBOOKS

There are no required textbooks for this course. Weekly readings will be posted as pdfs on Blackboard or should be accessible through the GW library or Google Scholar.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Class Time:

Classes occur twice a week. It is incredibly important for you to attend every class, save for illness or extenuating circumstances. Please make every effort to attend each class. Should unforeseen interferences arise, please notify your professor.

Outside Class:

You are expected to dedicate time outside of class weekly to complete the required readings and any other assignments prior to attending class. You may struggle to grasp core course content or participate in discussions without actively reading all assigned materials.

According to school policy, students are expected to spend a minimum of 100 minutes doing out-of-class work for every 50 minutes of direct instruction. This 3-credit course has 150 minutes of in-class instruction, which would equal **5 hours weekly of independent learning**. Find more information here: <https://provost.gwu.edu/resources>.

GRADED REQUIREMENTS

You will be evaluated in the following manner...

Assignment	Due Date	% of grade
Attendance	<i>Ongoing</i>	20%
Weekly Reflections	<i>Ongoing</i>	20%
Group Presentation	<i>Ongoing</i>	20%
Final Project Outline	<i>April 9</i>	10%
Final Project	<i>April 30</i>	30%

Grading Scale:

Acceptable

A = 93+

A- = 90-92

B+ = 85-89

B = 80-84

Unacceptable*

C+ = 75-79

C = 70-74

D+ = 65-69

D = 60-64

Extenuating Circumstances*

F = <59

Z = Withdraw

I = Incomplete (*with contract*)

** Should your grade (on any assignment or in the class overall) fall in the Unacceptable or Extenuating Circumstances category, please meet with me as soon as possible! I am here to help you succeed, but I can't help if I don't know what is going on.*

Attendance:

Attendance will be taken each class through “exit tickets” – you will be asked to briefly respond to a question related to the lecture material. These responses will not be graded except for completion. Should you miss a class and want to make up your attendance point, you can choose from the list of bonus assignments to regain lost points.

Bonus assignments can be submitted on Blackboard at any point throughout the semester. Towards the end of the semester, your professor will communicate the final deadline for bonus assignment submissions. No more than **3** bonus assignments can be completed in a semester, and each assignment type can only be used **once**.

Bonus Assignments

- (1) Attend your professor's office hours with 2-3 *prepared* questions from course content – submit a short note to Blackboard with your questions and date attended.
- (2) Read a current (within the last week) news article and write a reflection on how it relates back to course content – should be no less than 350 words.
- (3) Read an academic journal article (not included in our readings) that relates to course content and write a reflection on what you've learned – should be no less than 350 words.
- (4) Go for a walk outside (should be at least 15 minutes) and send photo evidence of your walk.
- (5) Record yourself telling a friend or family member about something you have learned in class for at least five minutes and submit the recording.
- (6) Go to a museum (either local or not) and write a reflection on something in the museum that relates to course content – should be no less than 350 words.

Reflections:

Between Weeks 2-14, you will be asked to provide a short, written reflection on that week's material, for 11 of the 13 included weeks. Reflections should include thoughts on a reading, class discussion, and/or lecture from that week. To receive maximum credit, reflections should clearly demonstrate thoughtful engagement with course content. Reflections will be due at 11:59pm each Friday, and worth 20% of your overall grade.

Group Presentation:

Starting in week 4, students will lead the course discussion. You will sign up for presentation days in weeks 2-3. You can sign up by yourself or in a group, but no more than 5 students should be in a single group. Student-led presentations will fall between weeks 4 – 12.

Group presentations will follow a “flipped classroom” format, where you will: 1) Review the readings from the week; 2) Present a real-world case study related to the lecture topic; 3) Relate core themes from the reading to the case study; and 4) Propose a handful (3-5) questions for class discussion.

The presentation can take whatever form you feel most comfortable with, such as a PowerPoint, oral presentation, vlog, photo essay, etc. The discussion questions should facilitate classroom discussion and follow from the main topic or theme of assigned readings.

You must get your group's case study approved by your professor at least 24 hours prior to your presentation date, so please plan accordingly.

Creative Final Project:

This is a “choose your own adventure” project. It can be completed alone, in pairs, or a group of up to 5 people. Regardless the topic, your project should *clearly* and *substantially* integrate course readings. This project can take whatever form you prefer – a traditional paper, a presentation, a video or audio recording, a game, an oral exam, a course design, you name it!

This is your time to think outside the box, but your project should demonstrate thoughtful engagement with course content and put in effort commensurate with a final project. Your final project grade will be made up of 2 parts: an outline (5%) and the final product (30%).

Should the use of AI be suspected in the creation of your final project, you will be given the choice between A) accepting a 0 on the assignment and B) completing a proctored essay exam.

Outline:

The final project outline should 1) propose your case study, 2) discuss the approach taken to address the case, and 3) detail the format of your final project. There is no length requirement here, so long as you meet these 3 necessary elements. This is worth 5% of your grade and will be graded solely for completion.

Final Project:

Your final project should show *thoughtful engagement* with course content and *critical thinking*. There is no length requirement, so long as you meet the required components and demonstrate effort commensurate with a final project. Accompanying the final product, you should have a bibliography (in APA citation formatting) that includes multiple course readings, as well as some external sources. This is worth 30% of your grade. Please review the course policies on Late Work, Academic Integrity, and the Use of Artificial Intelligence.

COURSE POLICIES

Classroom Etiquette:

This class will cover content that may be uncomfortable to discuss or may bring about emotions that are difficult to process. If at any point you feel uncomfortable in class or with the material, please notify me and we will work together to ensure this is an environment that everyone feels safe and comfortable learning in. Though unexpected, students who behave unacceptably may be asked to leave.

We will generate classroom community guidelines in the first week for both the students and the professor. These guidelines are intended to ensure the classroom remains a safe environment for everyone and to foster productive dialogue. It will be expected that students adhere to these guidelines throughout the duration of the class, in-person and virtually. The agreed upon classroom community guidelines will be posted to the course Blackboard page.

Late Work Policy:

I will allow a 24-hour grace period following all assignment deadlines. However, any assignments submitted after this 24-hour grace period *without prior approval from your professor* will automatically lose 10 points for every additional day it is late (i.e., if you turn in a paper two days after the assignment grace period, it will be graded as a C). **Assignments over 1 week late will not be accepted without prior communication.**

Should something come up that impacts your ability to submit an assignment, please communicate with me as soon as possible – I will make every effort to be accommodating.

Academic Integrity:

The rule of thumb here is: “If you didn’t write it, you must cite it” (Malet, 2023). Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, or use artificial intelligence (AI) to *originally* create text for a written submission. Academic integrity is an essential part of the educational process, and all members of the GW community take these matters very seriously. Any violations of this Academic Integrity policy will result in a zero for the assignment and will be considered as violations of the university’s Academic Integrity Code of Conduct.

The Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI):

With the recent developments of AI, it has become a useful technological tool; but it is incredibly important to remember that it is just that – a *tool*. Over the duration of the semester, we will discuss the responsible use of artificial intelligence as a student.

However, **using AI to draft a written submission (in whole or in part) is strictly prohibited**. Should a submitted assignment be suspected of inappropriate AI usage, an in-person meeting with your professor will be required to discuss how to proceed – this may include, but is not limited to, receiving a 0 on the assignment or escalating the matter to investigation for Academic Integrity Code of Conduct violation.

My expectations for the quality of your work is much higher than what any current large language model can produce – why even risk it?

Diversity and Inclusion:

I am committed to creating a learning environment and experience that is accessible, safe, and comfortable to all students, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, abilities, etc. Should you require any accommodations throughout the course, such as for learning differences or religious observances, please communicate them to me as early as possible.

How you identify and your personal experience is integral to forming your view of the world and of yourself, so it is recognized and encouraged that each individual will bring something wonderful and unique to the classroom! Students should feel comfortable to discuss how their identity shapes their world views and stances on what we are learning, but you should not feel pressured to disclose anything you do not wish to. If you do wish to share parts of your identity (i.e., your preferred name or nickname, pronouns, sharing personal experiences, etc.), this classroom will be a safe space to do so.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS!

1. Come to class and pay attention!
2. Do the readings thoroughly and ahead of time.
3. Ask questions – you’re here to learn and it is more than okay to not know or understand everything, and chances are someone else has the same question! Don’t be afraid of being wrong or changing your views, these are a part of the academic journey.
4. Know your work style – if you need to take notes to be fully engaged, do that. If you prefer to just listen and return to the lecture slides later, do that! You know yourself best.
5. Enjoy it! Education is one of the best things you can do for yourself – it truly is a privilege! Knowledge is the one thing no one can take from you.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Should any changes be necessary, your professor will communicate them with you via Blackboard.

CONTENT WARNING: Material discussed throughout the duration of this class may be uncomfortable: terrorism and extremism are sensitive and subjective topics. The aim of this class is to explore a range of diverse arguments and perspectives, even if you personally disagree with some of them. While I promise not to discuss any sensitive or offensive content gratuitously, some uncomfortable material may be necessary to meet the course aims. Should you have concerns regarding any of the class content, please reach out to me ASAP – I am more than willing to work with you to ensure that you feel comfortable learning and participating in this class.

Week/Day	Topic	Readings	Assignment
Module 1: Mechanisms of Terrorism and Extremism			
Week 1			
Jan 13	Course Introduction	1. Schmid (2011) “The Definition of Terrorism” 2. Berger (2018) “What is Extremism?”	
Jan 15	What is Terrorism & Extremism		
Week 2			
Jan 20	Theoretical Perspectives	1. LaFree & Schwarzenbach (2021) “Micro & Macro-level risk factors for extremism and terrorism” 2. Bjørgo & Silke (2018) “Root causes of Terrorism”	
Jan 22	Is Terrorism Ever Justified?		
Week 3			
Jan 27	NO CLASS – Snow Day	1. Rapoport (2004) “The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism” 2. <i>America After 9/11</i> film	
Jan 29	NO CLASS – Snow Day		
Week 4			
Feb 3	History of Terrorism	1. Fair & Shepherd (2006) “Who Supports Terrorism” 2. King et al (2011) “Normative Support for Terrorism”	
Feb 5	Who Supports Terrorism & Extremism?		
Week 5			
Feb 10	Radicalization & Recruitment	1. Crenshaw (1981) “Preconditions & Precipitants” 2. Borum (2012) “Radicalization to Violent Extremism” 3. Gill et al (2017) Terrorism and the Internet	
Feb 12	Internet & Social Media		
Module 2: Extremist Ideologies, Groups, and Movements			
Week 6			
Feb 17	Terrorist Group Organization	1. Shapiro (2013) “The Terrorist’s Dilemma” 2. Ging (2017) “Alphas, Betas, and Incels”	
Feb 19	Male Supremacy Guest Speaker [REDACTED]		

Week 7			
Feb 24	Left Wing Extremism	1. Davies and Zdjelar (2023) “The Evolution of Left-Wing Extremism”	
Feb 26	Movie Day – <i>If a Tree Falls</i>		
Week 8			
Mar 3	Anti-Government Extremism	1. Jackson (2022) “Defining Anti-Government Extremism”	
Mar 5	NO CLASS (ESS)	2. Hwang (2021) “Examining U.S. Militant Anarchists”	
Spring Break			
Week 9			
Mar 17	White Supremacy	1. Miller-Idriss (2020) <i>Hate in the Homeland</i> 2. Li (2023) “The Duality of Christian nationalism”	
Mar 19	Christian Nationalism Guest Speaker [REDACTED]		
Week 10			
Mar 24	Islamist Extremism Guest Speaker [REDACTED]	1. Juergensmeyer (2000) “Terror in the Mind of God” 2. Soueid and Merhej (2024) “Understanding Islamic Extremism...”	
Mar 26	Other Religious Extremism		
Week 11			
Mar 31	Transnational & International Terrorism	1. Malet (2010) “Why Foreign Fighters” 2. Jones (2016) <i>Waging Insurgent Warfare</i>	
Apr 2	Insurgency		
Week 12			
Apr 7	Nihilistic Violent Extremism Guest Speaker – Luke Baumgartner	1. Schuurman et al. (2018) “End of the Lone Wolf” 2. Klebold (2017) “My son was a Columbine shooter. This is my story” <i>TedTalk</i>	
Apr 9	Mass Shooters & Lone Actors		Final Project Outline Due 4/9
Module 3: Mitigating and Thwarting Terrorism and Extremism			
Week 13			
Apr 14	Movie Day – <i>Terror in Europe</i>	1. Jordan (2009) “When Heads Roll” 2. Lehrke & Schomaker (2016) “Kill, Capture, or Defend” 3. Ahmad (1998) “Terrorism: Theirs and Ours”	
Apr 16	Counterterrorism Guest Speaker [REDACTED]		
Week 14			
Apr 21	P/CVE: Intervention	1. Ellefson & Sandberg (2021) “Everyday Preventions of Radicalization” 2. Köhler (2014) “Deradicalization”	
Apr 23	P/CVE: Prevention Guest Speaker [REDACTED]		
Final Project Due 4/30			

University Policies

Academic Integrity Code

Academic integrity is an essential part of the educational process, and all members of the GW community take these matters very seriously. As the instructor of record for this course, my role is to provide clear expectations and uphold them in all assessments. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and otherwise violate the Code of Academic Integrity. If you have any questions about whether particular academic practices or resources are permitted, you should ask me for clarification. If you are reported for an academic integrity violation, you should contact Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) to learn more about your rights and options in the process. Consequences can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the University and may include a transcript notation. For more information, refer to the SRR website at studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity, email rights@gwu.edu, or call 202-994-6757.

University policy on observance of religious holidays

Students must notify faculty during the first week of the semester in which they are enrolled in the course, or as early as possible, but no later than three weeks prior to the absence, of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. If the holiday falls within the first three weeks of class, the student must inform faculty in the first week of the semester. For details and policy, see provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines.

Use of Electronic Course Materials and Class Recordings

Students are encouraged to use electronic course materials, including recorded class sessions, for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. Electronic course materials and recorded class sessions should not be shared or used for non-course related purposes unless express permission has been granted by the instructor. Students who impermissibly share any electronic course materials are subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct. Contact the instructor if you have questions regarding what constitutes permissible or impermissible use of electronic course materials and/or recorded class sessions. Contact Disability Support Services at disabilitysupport.gwu.edu if you have questions or need assistance in accessing electronic course materials.

Academic Support

Academic Commons

Academic Commons is the central location for academic support resources for GW students. To schedule a peer tutoring session for a variety of courses visit go.gwu.edu/tutoring.

Visit academiccommons.gwu.edu for study skills tips, finding help with research, and connecting with other campus resources. For questions email academiccommons@gwu.edu.

GW Writing Center

GW Writing Center cultivates confident writers in the University community by facilitating collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations at all stages of the writing process. Working alongside peer mentors, writers develop strategies to write independently in academic and public settings. Appointments can be booked online at gwu.mywconline.

Disability Support Services (DSS)

202-994-8250

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services at disabilitysupport.gwu.edu to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Student Health Center

202-994-5300, 24/7

The Student Health Center (SHC) offers medical, counseling/psychological, and psychiatric services to GW students. More information about the SHC is available at healthcenter.gwu.edu. Students experiencing a medical or mental health emergency on campus should contact GW Emergency Services at 202-994-6111, or off campus at 911.

GW Campus Emergency Information

GW Emergency Services

202-994-6111

For situation-specific instructions, refer to [GW's Emergency Procedures guide](#).

GW Alert

GW Alert is an emergency notification system that sends alerts to the GW community. GW requests students, faculty, and staff maintain current contact information by logging on to alert.gwu.edu. Alerts are sent via email, text, social media, and other means, including the Guardian app. The Guardian app is a safety app that allows you to communicate quickly with GW Emergency Services, 911, and other resources. Learn more at safety.gwu.edu.

Protective Actions

GW prescribes four protective actions that can be issued by university officials depending on the type of emergency. All GW community members are expected to follow directions according to the specified protective action. The protective actions are Shelter, Evacuate, Secure, and Lockdown (details below). Learn more at safety.gwu.edu/gw-standard-emergency-statuses.

Shelter

- Protection from a specific hazard
- The hazard could be a tornado, earthquake, hazardous material spill, or other environmental emergency.
- Specific safety guidance will be shared on a case-by-case basis.

Action:

- Follow safety guidance for the hazard.

Evacuate

- Need to move people from one location to another.
- Students and staff should be prepared to follow specific instructions given by first responders and University officials.

Action:

- Evacuate to a designated location.
- Leave belongings behind.
- Follow additional instructions from first responders.

Secure

- Threat or hazard outside of buildings or around campus.
- Increased security, secured building perimeter, increased situational awareness, and restricted access to entry doors.

Action:

- Go inside and stay inside.
- Activities inside may continue.

Lockdown

- Threat or hazard with the potential to impact individuals inside buildings.
- Room-based protocol that requires locking interior doors, turning off lights, and staying out of sight of corridor window.

Action:

- Locks, lights, out of sight
- Consider Run, Hide, Fight