**Trinity College**

**Department of Economics**

**ECON 431: Drug Policy**

**Final Course Syllabus, Fall 2020**

**Instructor Information**

Professor: Dr. Mark Stater Class Location: Library 181

Office: Williams 313 Class Time: TU/TH 11:15AM – 12:55 PM

Phone: 860-297-2462 Mode of Instruction: In-person; Course Length: 10 weeks

E-mail: Mark.Stater@trincoll.edu Office Hours: TU/TH 3:15-4:15PM on Zoom

<https://trincoll.zoom.us/j/7031002979>

**Course Description.** Humans have consumed psychoactive substances such as cannabis, opium, coca, and magic mushrooms for medicinal, religious, and recreational purposes for thousands of years. Yet, many of these substances, as well as more recent psychoactive concoctions, such as heroin and cocaine, are prohibited in contemporary societies on the grounds that they are harmful to users and others. The cost of drug prohibition in the U.S. is substantial, as federal, state, and local governments spend over $50 billion per year on enforcement, 1.6 million drug-related arrests are made per year, and half a million Americans are incarcerated for drug-related offenses, with black men sentenced to state prison on drug charges at over 10 times the rate of white men. Up to 10,000 deaths per year in the U.S. can be attributed to drug-related violence, and more than 30,000 people in the U.S. die each year from overdoses of opioids such as prescription pills, heroin, and fentanyl.

How and why might society’s view of these drugs’ harmfulness have changed over time? Is the underlying motivation for drug prohibition really what it seems? What impact do prohibition policies have on the prices and consumption of drugs, and what kinds of unintended consequences do they have for society as a whole, and for marginalized groups in particular? Are there alternative policies that can deter drug consumption with fewer unintended effects? This course will apply economic analysis to offer answers to these questions, while examining how drug policies have evolved over time, how the current framework is codified, some of the recent policy innovations, particularly for marijuana, in the U.S. and around the world, and prospects for future reforms.

**Books.** 1- *Drugs and Drug Policy: What Everyone Needs to Know*, by Mark Kleiman, Jonathan Caulkins, and Angela Hawken; 2- *Chasing the Scream*, by Johann Hari; 3- *Dreamland*, by Sam Quinones, 4- *The New Jim Crow*, by Michelle Alexander.

**Grading.** Class Participation 15%, Presentations (2 journal articles) 5%, Papers 80%

**Calendar.** Current Policy Landscape: Weeks 1-2. *Drugs and Drug Policy*. Paper 1 due Sept. 22.

History of the Drug War: Weeks 3-5. *Chasing the Scream*. Paper 2 due Oct. 13.

Opioid Epidemic: Weeks 6-8. *Dreamland*. Paper 3 due Nov. 3.

Mass Incarceration: Weeks 9-10. *The New Jim Crow*. Paper 4 due Nov. 19.

**Academic Integrity.** In all academic exercises, students are expected to abide by the standards of intellectual honesty set forth in the Trinity College Student Handbook (see p. 13). This assumes students do their own work and properly credit those upon whose work and thought they draw.

**ADA Accommodations.** Trinity College is committed to creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you have approval for academic accommodations, please notify faculty a minimum of 10 days prior to needing the accommodations. Please be sure to meet with me privately to discuss implementation.