Black Swans and Burstiness: Countering Myths about Terrorism

Terrorism has two characteristic that make it especially challenging from a public policy perspective: Its black swan quality and its burstiness. Black swan incidents fall outside the realm of regular expectations, have a high impact, and defy prediction. The 9/11 terrorist attacks are a good example. At the same time, terrorism tends to be bursty; highly concentrated in time and space. My talk will put high profile attacks like 9/11 into a broad context by showing how they compare to the thousands of other attacks that have taken place around the world since 1970. Thus, in stark contrast to the 9/11 attacks, many terrorist attacks produce no fatalities, they frequently rely on common, low technology weapons, they do not involve a great deal of planning, and they are carried out by groups whose life expectancy is often less than a year. At the same time, when terrorist organizations find methods that work they often use them rapidly and repeatedly. Balancing the mundane everyday nature of terrorism with its occasional capacity for mass destruction is a unique policy challenge of the twenty-first century.

Friday, April 22, 1:00 pm
Husted Hall, Room 106A
UAlbany Downtown Campus, 135 Western Avenue

This event is free and open to the public.

Event hosted by the School of Criminal Justice.