

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
Department of Sociology
2016-2017
Sociology 4432G-001
Forensics and Criminal Investigation
Wednesdays 2:30-5:30 SSC-5406

Instructor(s)

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Office hours: by appointment

Course Description

This course is intended to offer students an overview of various elements of the criminal investigation process, from police detective work to forensic science processes. We will explore such topics as: death investigation, cold case files, police investigative techniques, the role of Ident personnel and some of the issues surrounding the collection and use of forensic evidence.

Be advised: in this course, we deal with disturbing topics and graphic images.

Prerequisite(s): Sociology 2253A/B and enrolment in fourth year of one of the Honors Specializations or Honors Double Major in Sociology. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Antirequisite(s) : none

Learning Objectives

1. To learn how a complex criminal investigation is conducted from police work to autopsy to forensic lab analysis.
2. To analyse ethical and legal issues related to criminal investigation and forensic science.
3. To articulate the major tools and technologies used in the criminal investigation field.
4. To develop a better understanding of public perceptions of criminal investigation and forensics and how the impact of these perceptions on the field as a whole.

Required Texts

None

Evaluation

Research assignment #1 (February 12)	20%
Research assignment #2 (March 19)	20%
Mid-term exam (March 6)	50%
Participation	10%

Mini-research assignment #1:

I have selected a number of different types of poison for you to research. Your job is to sign up for one of the poisons below and then prepare a 4-5 page report that answers the following questions:

What the properties are of the poison (what is made of?)

How it is administered to victims?

What effects do this poison have on the individual?

What symptoms or signs might alert investigators to the use of this poison?

How is this poison detected post-mortem?

Can you identify one or more notable cases in which this poison was used?

How possible would it be to commit the 'perfect crime' using this type of poison?

The poisons to choose from are: mercury, curare, antimony, atropine and thallium.

You do not need to use in-text citations (unless using direct quotes, which should be avoided in favor of your own paraphrasing). However, all sources should be cited on a separate bibliography, so I can see what sources you consulted

You will be evaluated as follows:

10 marks on quality and overall thoroughness of content (did you answer all of the above? Did you answer them well?)

5 marks on the quality of your assessment as to using your poison to commit the perfect crime

3 marks on quality of research (books and peer-reviewed journal articles through the library get the best marks; websites do not).

2 marks on presentation of information (it should be written in a logical, coherent manner without excessive repetition, run-on sentences, faulty grammar or punctuation, or ideas being carried from one paragraph to the next).

During our final class together, you will be expected to discuss your research and findings with your classmates and this discussion will count towards your participation marks.

Mini-research assignment #2:

I have also selected a number of different forensic science techniques for you to research. Your job is to sign up for one of these techniques and then prepare a 4-5 page report that addresses the following:

A succinct discussion of the technique (how, when, where, why is it used)?

The origins of the technique (how was it developed?)

Notable cases in which the technique was used

If someone was to try to commit the perfect crime, how might the technique you selected expose the murder or provide clues as to the murderer?

The techniques are: entomology, blood spatter analysis, ballistics, fingerprinting and forensic odontology?

You will be evaluated as follows:

10 marks on quality and overall thoroughness of content (did you address everything noted above? Did you answer them well?)

5 marks on the quality of your assessment as to how well your technique might work when dealing with the perfect crime

3 marks on quality of research (books and peer-reviewed journal articles through the library get the best marks; websites do not).

2 marks on presentation of information (it should be written in a logical, coherent manner without excessive repetition, run-on sentences, faulty grammar or punctuation, or ideas being carried from one paragraph to the next).

During our final class together, you will be expected to discuss your research and findings with your classmates and this discussion will count towards your participation marks.

Exam

The midterm exam is a mixed format exam consisting of multiple choice, fill in the blank, and long answer. You will have a choice of questions to answer for short and long answer. Exams will draw primarily from lecture notes and in-class videos.

If you answer more than the required number of questions, that only the necessary number will be graded; extra answers will not be. Exams are non-cumulative. The mid-term will be held in our usual classroom on the date/time noted. Your exam scores will be posted on webct when available (don't email me to as when). *The score posted is half your score out of 100 - that is 50% of your exam raw score which computes to 50% of your final grade in this course. If you want to know what your raw score was on the exam, double what is posted.*

Class participation

Students in 4th year seminars are expected by the Department to be attending classes and actively participating in class discussion - this is also my expectation.

Each week I will be taking notes on who is present and who is actively participating (asking questions, offering comments, engaging in debate and discussion, etc.). To be clear: being present is not enough if you spend 3 hours being silent.

Missed Exam/assignment policies

Send me an email then take yourself and all relevant document immediately to the relevant Academic Counseling office. Academic Counseling will then send me an email informing me of a request to provide accommodation. Please do NOT bring your documentation to me or ask me about making exceptions for you or your situation. Also see the attached policy section regarding missed exams and assignments.

Videos

On the weekly lecture list, I have indicated which videos are available online. For those that are not noted as “online” (YouTube or use Google search), you are responsible to get notes from other students. I cannot help you locate copies and I don’t loan my videos out.

Please note that this syllabus does NOT constitute a legal contract. Although we will stick fairly closely to the topics/schedules outlined herein, I reserve the right to make adjustments as necessary.

Lecture Schedule

Week 1 - January 11 – Course introduction

Criminal investigation

Week 2 - January 18 – The Criminal Investigative Process: An overview

Film: The First 48 (A Serial Killer calls)

Week 3 - January 25 – Good Cop/Bad Cop: Examining Police Interviewing and other Techniques

Film: The Confession (5th Estate) (online)

Week 4 – February 1 – At the Crime Scene

Group Exercise: Investigating Forensics (SFU online museum)

Forensics

Week 5 - February 8 – An overview of the forensic sciences

Film: How to Commit the Perfect Murder (available online)

Week 6 - February 15 – Establishing the cause and manner of death I

Film: The Mystery of the Disembodied Feet

Assignment #1 due

Week 7 - February 22 – Spring break

Week 8 – March 1 – Mid-term exam

Week 9 - March 8 – Establishing the cause and manner of death II

Film: Post Mortem

Week 10 - March 15 – Old cases & cold cases

Film: Secrets of the Dead: Executed in Error

Assignment #2 due

Week 11 - March 29 – Forensic issues I

Film: Death By Fire

Week 12 – April 5 – Course wrap up

Relevant Policies

A Note on Plagiarism:

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence (the Scholastic Offence Policy can be viewed in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (www.turnitin.com).

Policies on Examinations

Electronic devices will not be permitted to be used during tests of other examinations.

Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness

Western's policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness can be found at www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Students must see the Academic Counsellor and submit all required documentation in order to be approved for certain accommodation:

http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/medical_accommodation.html

Accessibility Options:

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website:

www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html

Scholastic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site:

www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Mental Health

Students who are in **emotional/mental distress** should refer to Mental Health@Western (http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html) for a complete list of options how to obtain help.