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PSYX 391.01: Special Topics - Forensic Psychology

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Psychology 391
Forensic Psychology
Spring 2015

Course Location and Time

Chem 123
Tues/Thurs 9:40am – 11:00am

Instructor Information

Instructor: Laura Kirsch, Ph.D.
Office: Skaggs 364
Office hours: Thursdays 12:30-2pm, or by appointment
Email: laura.kirsch@umontana.edu
Phone: 406-243-6817 (Office)

Course Description

This course examines the many areas of forensic psychology, or the application of psychological concepts and theories to the legal system. This interface will be explored with an emphasis on empirical research findings from cognitive, social, experimental, and clinical psychology. Topics covered will include the variety of roles that psychologists play in the criminal justice system, the identification and evaluation of criminal suspects, the accuracy of eyewitness memory, the process of jury decision-making, competency to stand trial and the insanity defense, criminal sentencing, and offender rehabilitation, among others.

Educational Goals

After taking this course, you should:

- Have an appreciation for how psychological science can be applied to legal issues and the criminal justice system.
- Understand the diverse ways that psychologists can interact with the legal system, including conducting research that informs criminal justice practice and policy; providing clinical services to litigants, defendants and inmates; and assisting the courts in making decisions.
- Be able to critically evaluate the assumptions of the legal system in light of findings from psychological research.
- Understand and apply psychological information to particular criminal and civil cases.

Required Readings

Textbook: Greene, E., & Heilbrun, K. (2014). *Wrightsmen's Psychology and the Legal System* (8th Ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

There may be additional readings assigned throughout the semester. These will be available in electronic format on the course website in advance of their due date.

Student Evaluation

Exams

There will be two exams in this course: a midterm and a final (which is cumulative). The exams will be based on both lecture material and the required readings, and will consist of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The midterm is worth 100 points and the final is worth 125 points. Details for each test will be discussed in class prior to the exam as well as in a post on Moodle. Questions about exam grades should be raised within one week of receiving the exam grade.

The Midterm will be given on: Tuesday, March 17th

The Final is scheduled for: Tuesday, May 12th at 8:00am

You are expected to take the exams on the scheduled dates. If you have an UNAVOIDABLE conflict with one of the exams, please speak with me prior to the exam to schedule a make-up exam. Make-up exams will be essay exams. Sleeping through your alarm, getting a flat tire on the way to the test, and any sickness without a doctor's note are NOT grounds for a make-up and you will receive a grade of 0 on the missed exam.

Thought Papers

Throughout the semester, you will be expected to complete 2 short (2-3 page) thought papers on course topics. These papers will be designed to allow you to apply your knowledge of course material to current events, real-life cases, or to comment on current criminal justice practices using information from class to support your position. Each paper will be worth 50 points. Due dates are noted in the syllabus.

Grading

Points toward your final course grade will be counted as follows:

Midterm Exam	100 points
Final Exam	125 points
Thought Paper 1	50 points
Thought Paper 2	50 points

Total:	325 points
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Course grades will be based on total points earned at the end of the semester out of a possible 325 points. Your letter grade will be determined in the following way: your two exam grades, your two thought paper grades, and any extra credit you receive will be added together to determine your point total for the course. Your point total will be divided by 325 points to arrive at a percentage score, and the following scale will be applied:

COURSE GRADING SCALE

93 - 100% = A	80 - 82% = B-	67 - 69% = D+
90 - 92% = A-	77 - 79% = C+	63 - 66% = D
87 - 89% = B+	73 - 76% = C	60 - 62% = D-
83 - 86% = B	70 - 72% = C-	Below 60% = F

Please note: I **will not** bump up grades that are close to the cutoff. There are no exceptions to this rule.

Course Guidelines and Policies

Course Website

Materials for the course (besides the textbook) will be available on the internet through Moodle.

Incomplete versions of the PowerPoint slides for the lectures will be posted (at the latest) by 10pm the night before class, so that you can print them and use them in class. Any readings for the course besides the required text will also be posted on the site well in advance of their due date. Class announcements and assignments will also be posted when necessary, so please check the website on a regular basis. In addition to checking Moodle, you are also responsible for checking your UM email regularly, as you may receive course-related emails from time to time.

Missed Classes

Although your attendance is not mandatory and attendance will not be taken, in order to do well in this course you should attend every lecture, since exams and assignments are based heavily on lecture material. In the event that you have to miss a class, come late, or leave early, you are responsible for obtaining the notes from another class member. You will also be held responsible for any changes or additions to the syllabus that were announced in class. Copies of handouts and announcements will be posted on Moodle, and films will be available either via a link on Moodle or on reserve at the library.

Email Policy

You are welcome to email me with general questions about the course, and I will typically respond within a business day. However, if you have a lot of questions, I prefer you come to office hours. Also, I will not answer emails sent to me after 8pm the night before an exam. Please do your best to study in advance so that you have enough time to expect a response.

The Learning Environment

I would like this class to have a relaxed atmosphere where students can feel free to ask questions and comment on the material being presented and discussed. Please do not hesitate to raise your hand for clarification on a topic, to ask about related material, or to raise an interesting point. However, remember that not everyone has similar viewpoints, so please try to be respectful of your classmates and their opinions. Also, please note that some of the subject matter in this course is sensitive, and at times, the material may be upsetting to some students. Moreover, there may be students who have had personal experiences with the criminal justice system or as victims of crime. As such, please be considerate of others, and voice your opinions or comments with others' feelings in mind.

Another way to create a respectful and productive learning environment is to ensure that it is free from distractions. Therefore, please turn off your cell phones and other personal electronic devices prior to coming to class. Repeated use of personal electronic devices during class time will result in points being deducted from your course grade. If you wish, you may use a laptop or tablet to take notes. However, if I see that you are emailing, surfing the web, or using it for any non-class-related purposes, you will lose the privilege of using it in class. Although coming to class late and/or leaving early is discouraged, on those occasions that it is unavoidable, please do it in such a way as to minimize disruption.

Disability Modifications

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and [Disability Services for Students](#). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with Disability Services, please contact Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 or call 406-243-2243. I will work with you and Disability Services to provide an appropriate modification.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to adhere to the University of Montana's [Student Conduct Code](#) with regard to academic integrity. Academic misconduct in this course will result in an academic penalty commensurate with the offense as well as possible disciplinary action by the university.

Add/Drop Deadline

Please take note of important registration dates listed in the Spring academic calendar. April 6th is last day to drop classes with an add/drop form. After that date, no petitions to drop the course will be signed and no Incompletes will be given except in documentable emergency situations.

Feedback

I hope to make this an enjoyable learning experience for everyone in the class. If you have any suggestions as to how to improve the class, please feel free to give me constructive feedback.

Course Calendar

Please note that the dates and topics listed below are tentative, and are subject to change with proper notification. Readings and assignments are due by the date listed below.

Date	Topic Covered	Readings and Assignments Due
1/27	Introduction and Overview	
1/29	Psychology and the Law	Ch. 1
2/3	The Legal System	Ch. 2
2/5	The Legal System	
2/10	Psychology of Crime	Ch. 3
2/12	Psychology of Crime	
2/17	Psychology of Police	Ch. 4
2/19	Psychology of Police	
2/24	Eyewitnesses	Ch. 5
2/26	Eyewitnesses	
3/3	Eyewitnesses	<i>Thought Paper 1 Due</i>
3/5	Evaluating Suspects	Ch. 7
3/10	Evaluating Suspects	
3/12	Evaluating Suspects	
3/17	MIDTERM EXAM	
3/19	"A Case of Insanity"	
3/24	Criminal Forensic Assessment	Ch. 10
3/26	Criminal Forensic Assessment	
3/31	NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK	
4/2	NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK	
4/7	Criminal Forensic Assessment	
4/9	Civil Forensic Assessment	Ch. 11
4/14	Jurors and Juries	Ch. 13
4/16	Jurors and Juries	
4/21	Punishment and Sentencing	Ch. 14
4/23	Punishment and Sentencing	
4/28	Punishment and Sentencing	<i>Thought Paper 2 due</i>
4/30	Corrections	Ch. 15
5/5	Corrections	
5/7	Wrap-Up and Review	
Tuesday 5/12, 8am	FINAL EXAM	