

Forensic Psychology
Psyc 350

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Office hours: M-Th, 10:30-11:00; or by appointment.

No Text. I have a web page with links to readings and other resources:

<http://www.msubillings.edu/psychology/forensic>

Required readings should be printed out and placed into a three-ring binder.

Grading:

Four exams, 50 points each

Two case papers, 25 points each

250 points total

I follow a straight scale (90% = A, 80% = B).

Course description: Forensic Psychology is the application of psychology to the *forum*, or the legal system. Unfortunately, forensic psychologists are usually depicted in the popular media as psychic detectives, able to determine who committed a crime merely by viewing a crime scene. In fact, the field is very broad, and psychologists play many different roles in the legal system. Their activities include basic research on legal issues, giving expert testimony at trials, consulting with attorneys about how to litigate, working with personnel in police departments, and evaluating the mental state of defendants, to name just a few. In this course, we will examine the cases, laws, research, and issues relevant to this important and popular field.

Course Calendar

Week	Date	Topic
1	Thurs., Jan. 17	Introduction
2	Tues., Jan. 22	Psychopathology
	Thurs., Jan. 24	Psychopathology
3	Tues., Jan. 29	Psychopathology
	Thurs., Jan. 31	Criminal behavior
4	Tues., Feb. 5	Criminal behavior
	Thurs., Feb. 7	Exam 1
5	Tues., Feb. 12	Juries and Trials
	Thurs., Feb. 14	Juries and Trials
6	Tues., Feb. 19	Forensic assessment
	Thurs., Feb. 21	Forensic assessment
7	Tues., Feb. 26	Forensic assessment
	Thurs., Feb. 28	Exam 2
Spring Break, March 3-7		
8	Tues., Mar. 11	Eyewitnesses
	Thurs., Mar. 13	Eyewitnesses
9	Tues., Mar. 18	Eyewitnesses
	Thurs., Mar. 20	No classes, mini break March 20-21
10	Tues., Mar. 25	Children
	Thurs., Mar. 27	Children
11	Tues., Apr. 1	Children
	Thurs., Apr. 3	Exam 3
12	Tues., Apr. 8	Interrogation/Confession
	Thurs., Apr. 10	Interrogation/Confession
13	Tues., Apr. 15	Interrogation/Confession
	Thurs., Apr. 17	Lie detection
14	Tues., Apr. 22	Lie detection
	Thurs., Apr. 24	Lie detection Papers due
Finals	8:00, Wed., Apr. 30	Exam 4

Other Policies

Late/make-up assignments and tests:

Make-up tests are generally not given. If you have a legitimate excuse, the makeup test will be different from the regularly scheduled exam. Late papers will lose one grade for every day late.

Test question appeals:

If you believe that a test question could legitimately be interpreted differently, you may write an appeal for your answer to a multiple-choice test question. Each appeal must contain 1) the question, 2) the correct answer, and why it is correct, and 3) your answer and how it may have been interpreted as correct. Each appeal is due within one week of the test day. If I judge the appeal reasonable, you will receive the credit for that question.

Cheating/plagiarism:

This will be dealt with according to University policy, and will be punished to the maximum extent of that policy. In short, don't do it!

Incomplete grades:

According to University policy, a grade of 'I' will only be given if the student has completed three-fourths of the course, but has been prevented from finishing the course due to circumstances beyond his or her control. The 'I' grade cannot be used to avoid a low grade, nor can it be used as a free means of retaking a course.

Students with disabilities:

Students with disabilities, whether physical, learning, or psychological, who believe that they may need accommodations in this class, are encouraged to contact Disability Support Services as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. Please meet with DSS staff to verify your eligibility for any classroom accommodations and for academic assistance related to your disability. DSS is located in the Academic Support Center and can be reached at 657-2283.

Readings

All readings are available on the library website.

Psychopathology

Required reading:

DSM-IV, selected sections

Criminal behavior

Raine: The biological basis of crime

Juries and Trials

Required readings:

Kassin & Wrightsman chapters from “The American Jury on Trial”

Assessment

Required reading:

Wrightsman chapter on Insanity and Competency

Eyewitness identification

Required reading:

Wells et al.: Eyewitness evidence: Improving its probative value

Children

Required reading:

Loftus: The reality of repressed memories

Interrogation and confession

Required readings:

Kassin et al.: The Psychology of Confessions: A Review of the Literature and Issues

Lie Detection

Required readings:

Wrightsman section from “Forensic Psychology” on the polygraph

Case Papers

You are required to complete two papers. They should each be approximately 3-5 pages double-spaced. You may do one more for 5 extra credit points. One good source for cases can be found at crimelibrary.com. If you are unsure about the suitability of a case, get approval first.

Required:

Forensic assessment

Provide a forensic psychological evaluation of a defendant. Include the following in your evaluation:

1. Case summary: Provide a brief summary of the case as an introduction.
2. Psychopathology: What psychopathologies are evident? Include even those that may not normally support a finding of legal insanity, such as personality disorders. Describe the evidence for your conclusions, citing DSM criteria.
3. Insanity: Discuss what the psychopathologies above imply for an insanity defense, under specific legal rules of insanity (e.g., Brawner, McNaughtan).
4. IST: Is there evidence of incompetence to stand trial, based on common legal rules?
5. Malingering: Is there any evidence of malingering?

And choose one:

Criminal behavior analysis

Apply to a specific case one or more of the psychological theories discussed in the *Criminal Behavior* section of the course. Discuss a theory or theories in some depth, and attempt to use them to explain the behavior of the individual. You may also focus on how the case is *inconsistent* with a particular theory or theories.

Wrongful conviction

Choose one case where an innocent person was convicted. Describe the case, focusing on what went wrong and why: Was it a faulty eyewitness, a false confession, etc.? What would you recommend to avoid similar wrongful convictions in the future? You may also write about a case that you believe to be a wrongful conviction, even if the conviction still stands.