

CJUS 488: Forensic Science: The Crime Lab and Beyond

Online Version

Syllabus

Welcome to the online version of Forensic Science: The Crime Lab and Beyond. This class is a survey class, meaning that we will explore many topics shallowly. The intention is to give you an introduction to the broad spectrum of the forensic sciences that includes not only the traditional forensic sciences practiced at a crime lab but also those whose practitioners are found in hospitals, at universities, in private practice, and other locations. The emphasis will be on what each forensic science is and the common tasks of the people who practice it. Thus, there will be very little about how the analyses used in these forensic sciences are done.

Instructor

The instructor for this class will vary from semester to semester and from section to section. The instructor for this section will be posted on the course page on Moodle.

Expected Outcomes

In this class students will learn the following things:

- The fundamental theories and practices of forensic science;
- How conclusions are drawn from forensic evidence;
- The roles of forensic scientists, police officers, attorneys, and others in a criminal investigation;
- The types of questions and analyses addressed by a broad spectrum of forensic sciences;
- The existence and nature of new and emerging forensic sciences;
- The rigors of being an expert witness in a criminal trial;
- The application of forensic sciences to a variety of non-traditional questions, such as wildlife regulations enforcement, national security, and history.

How Does The Class Work?

This class has been designed to mimic as closely as possible the experience of actually sitting through a face to face version of the class. You can expect to spend about as much time on this class as you would spend on a traditional “in the classroom” class, which I estimate to be in the neighborhood of about 6 hours per week for most students. The schedule for lectures, assignments, etc. follows a normal semester schedule and recognizes academic holidays by requiring less work that week. It is modeled on Prof. Randall R. Skelton’s class held MWF, so most weeks will have 3

lectures about 50 minutes in length, with required reading for most lectures. Notes are provided for all lectures, so you only have to view the lecture once and can use the notes for studying.

It is especially important in an online class for students to be continuously engaged from the beginning to the end. In the online setting it is very tempting to put things off until later, and this all too often becomes too late. Therefore, there will be assignments due most weeks and deadlines for them will be rigorously enforced.

Lectures

The lectures will be in video format as recorded during in-class presentations. Thus, they are presented “warts and all” with occasional imperfections, interruptions, and questions asked by students. The lectures are accessible to enrolled students on the University of Montana’s Moodle learning management system.

Textbook

The text for the class is Skelton, RR. 2011. A Survey of the Forensic Sciences. www.Lulu.com. ISBN 978-1-4357-6762-1. You can purchase it from the bookstore, from www.lulu.com (search for “A Survey of the Forensic Sciences”, with quotes). This text is used for all section (face-to-face and online) of CJUS 125 and CJUS 488. Half of the proceeds from sale of this book go to support the physical anthropology laboratory.

Assignments

There will be an assignment due most weeks. There are 12 assignment in total. All assignments are due by the Sunday of that week at 11:55pm Mountain Time. The assignments are posted on Moodle and all require either something to be submitted via Moodle or a quiz administered on Moodle.

Exams

Exams will be administered through Moodle. Each exam will clearly state which lectures and assignments it covers. Expect 50 multiple choice questions for each exam unless told differently. You will be given an hour to take each exam.

Grading

Exams account for 75% of your grade. Four exams will be offered, three midterm exams and a cumulative final exam. Your grade will be based on your three best out of the four exams. This means that you can skip an exam and it will be dropped as your low score. This also means that taking the final is optional if you are content with your grade based on the three midterms. The remaining 25% of your grade will be based on the weekly assignments. The following scale will be used for assigning grades: A: 90-100%, B: 80-89%, C: 60-79%, D: 50-59%, F: under 50%. If appropriate, I may assign + and - modifiers to these grades in special cases. The grading mode is “open” meaning that you can take the class for a traditional grade or

CR/NCR. If you take a class CR/NCR you cannot count it toward specific major, option, or certificate requirements that require a minimum grade.

Graduate Increment

In addition to the other requirements of the class graduate students will produce a 10 to 16 page term paper on one of the forensic sciences, which describes the breadth of the forensic science, the type of court cases in which it is use (e.g. criminal or civil cases), and required qualifications and certifications for professionals. The paper must be in scientific paper format and include at least 15 sources. This paper will count for 10% of the grade for graduate students with the other grading criteria described above scaled appropriately. Moodle doesn't allow students to be treated differently in its Gradbook, so graduate students may find that the way their grades are reflected on Moodle to be a bit confusing. Rest assured, however, that your instructor is handling things in accordance with these guidelines.

Attendance and Progress Policy

No class meetings will be held in a classroom, so attendance is irrelevant. However, continuous progress in the class is required. In other words, you cannot put everything off until the last week and expect to finish the class successfully. If you have considered such a strategy, then online learning is probably not for you and I encourage you to take the traditional classroom-based version of this class instead of the online version.

Academic Integrity

Students will be held to the provisions of the Student Conduct Code, online at http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php with regards to cheating, plagiarism, abusive language, and other issues. Violations will not be tolerated.

Disabilities

Every effort has been made to make the online materials accessible to students with disabilities. If you have a problem accessing the materials, you should contact Disability Services for Students (DSS) at <http://www.umt.edu/dss>. DSS will provide any necessary accommodations.

Moodle and Moodle Support

Your instructor is not a Moodle technical support person or administrator, and can only be responsible for the content placed on Moodle – not with issues of Moodle Access or behavior. For content issues (e.g. what says lecture 6 is actually lecture 5)

contact your instructor. For technical issues and access issues contact the Moodle Help Desk at umonline-help@umontana.edu, 406) 243-4999.

How To Do Well In This Class

The “secret for success” in an online class is strategic time allocation along with continuous engagement. In simple terms, allocate time for the class on a regular basis each week. In a traditional “in the classroom” class you attend lectures 2 or 3 times each week, read the required readings, review, study for exams, and probably do some homework assignments. Online classes are more flexible, in that you don’t need to travel to the classroom at a scheduled time, but they are no less demanding of time or effort. Most authorities on online classes suggest that a student set aside regularly scheduled times each week to accomplish what the class requires that week. Estimating that this class will require about 6 hours of your time each week you may choose to schedule one hour each day Monday through Saturday; or 2 hours each day on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; or 3 hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays; etc. The plan is up to you, but what is important is that you develop some plan of this sort (strategic time allocation) and stick with it. In online classes it is especially unwise to wait until the last minute to turn in assignments or take online tests, because of the possibility of technology failure. For example, if you wait until one hour before the deadline for taking your online exam and find that Moodle is down, or the internet is slow that night, you may find that you are unable to complete the test. If this happens your instructor will try to help you, but the responsibility to plan ahead for problems of this sort is yours.

Schedule

The schedule of lectures, assignments, exams, etc. for this class is reflected in the organization of its Moodle homepage, so is not repeated here. It is unlikely, though possible, that the schedule will change over the course of a semester. In any case the most current possible schedule will always be reflected on Moodle.