

FSCI 5331
Advanced Topics in Forensic Science: Forensic Science and the Law
Summer 2014
3:00-5:00 Wednesdays

Instructors:

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Case Director

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Executive Director

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Dr. Kathy Sperry

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Course Description:

This program combines real-world experience with academic study by including a classroom component in which faculty members guide and encourage discussion on how the experiences relate to other aspects of a student's forensic education in a legal setting.

The Innocence Project of Texas is a nonprofit organization dedicated to investigating and litigating claims of innocence made by those convicted of serious crimes in Texas. Each student is in charge of multiple investigations to help determine if an inmate is innocent, how the project can prove the inmate's innocence, and how to obtain the prisoner's release.

Students earn three hours of credit for the course, which includes a two-hour classroom component taught by School of Law faculty and a final exam administered by Dr. Kathy Sperry.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, the student should have:

1. General knowledge of the Texas criminal justice system, with a focus on post-conviction remedies for wrongfully convicted individuals and the causes of wrongful convictions.
2. General understanding of the role forensic science plays in wrongful convictions and proving actual innocence.

Methods for Assessing Expected Learning Outcomes:

The expected learning outcomes for the course will be determined by the students' performance in topics relevant to the course by the following: (1) Assigned Readings, (2) Class Participation and Attendance, (3) Completion of a Case Memo and Trial Transcript Summary, and (4) Short Answer Exam.

Course Requirements:

Assigned Readings: Reading assignments will be designated for each class meeting. Students will be expected to complete these assignments and engage in class discussion on relevant topics.

Case Memo and Trial Transcript Summary: Each student or group will be expected to complete a case memo and trial transcript summary for their assigned case or cases. Templates for these are provided on the Case Materials disc.

Class Participation: All students are expected to actively participate in class discussion.

Class Attendance: Class attendance is expected. One (1) unexcused absence will be allowed. If a student is unable to be present for class, they should notify Professor Mirrl in advance. Each subsequent unexcused absence will result in the student's final class grade being reduce by one increment (A+ to A, A to A-, etc.)

Final Exam: Dr. Sperry will send out a "short answer exam" to the students at the end of the semester via email. This exam is usually sent the last week of class and will be due to Dr. Sperry via email by a designated date to be determined.

Student Responsibility /Likelihood of Success: If a student needs clarification on any course assignment, then it is his/her responsibility to request clarification from the instructor. To increase the likelihood of successful performance on any course assignment, the student is required to attend class, take notes, and read assigned material.

Academic Dishonesty Policy: Academic dishonesty (e.g., cheating on in-class activities or exams) will not be tolerated. The first occurrence of academic dishonesty will result in a 0 for the activity or exam and a report will be filed with Student Judicial Programs and the College of Arts and Sciences. A second occurrence of academic dishonesty will result in failing the course and filing an additional report. Guidelines for academic dishonesty and integrity are available at <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentjudicialprograms/academicinteg.php>

ADA Policy: Any student who requires special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact the instructor to make necessary arrangements for accommodations. A student should present appropriate verification from the Office of Student Disability Services, the disability support program at Texas Tech University.

Observation of a Religious Holy Day: Texas House Bill 256 requires institutions of higher education to excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day. The student shall also be excused for necessary time to travel. An institution may not penalize the student for the absence and must allow for the student to take an exam or complete an assignment from which the student is excused. No prior notification of the instructor is required.

Course Assignments:

1. Assigned Readings, Class Participation, Case Memo, and Trial Transcript Summary (90%)
2. Final Exam (10%)

Assignments and Readings: (Assignments subject to change)

Class 1: June 4

Case Review Procedures
Case Flow Chart
Sample memo and Transcript Summary

Class 2: June 11

The Texas Criminal Justice Process
In-class demonstration: Procedural History Searches

Class 3: June 18

Applications for Writ of Habeas Corpus
Innocence Writs

Class 4: June 25

Tim Cole Opinion Order
Post Conviction DNA and Actual Innocence
DUE: First drafts of all case documents completed (Procedural History, Memo, Transcript Summary)

July 2: No class

Class 5: July 9

Ex Parte Robbins
SB Bill 344

Class 6: July 16

Shaken Baby Syndrome (pg. 1- 56)
False confessions class discussion and video

Class 7: July 23

Shaken Baby Syndrome (pg. 57-106)
Progress in Fire Investigation
DUE: Second drafts of all case documents completed (Procedural History, Memo, Transcript Summary)

Class 8: July 30

Suppression of Exculpatory Evidence
Michael Morton Act

Class 9: August 6

Update on Legal Standards
DUE: FINAL drafts of all case review documents.