



Maastricht University
Center for European Studies



CISAustralia
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FOR2001

Forensic Psychology

Course Manual

Summer



Chapter 1 Introduction

Opening

The aim of the course Forensic Psychology is to introduce students to the application of psychology to the legal system and to raise awareness about the problems that arise when psychology is applied to law in practice. This course is interesting and relevant for all psychology students, but also for students interested in the legal field.

The area of Forensic Psychology deals with all issues that lie at the intersection of human behaviour and the law. Such issues range from how reliable eyewitness identifications are to whether some criminals have a brain dysfunction making them permanently dangerous to society and not responsible for their actions, to the role of experts in court and procedures of police interrogations. The role of psychologists within these themes is to ask questions that have a direct relevance to the legal arena and to conduct research to address these questions.

Through working with cases, students will be familiarized with various issues in the field in this course, for example police procedures, legal backgrounds, psychological experiments, and the disputes that arise when psychology is applied to the law. Moreover, several small exercises in class will give students the opportunity to get a small taste of which tests and procedures are used by people working in the field.

Drawing from areas of social, cognitive, developmental, clinical, and neuropsychology, this course will deal with questions such as: How can police interrogations lead to false confessions? How can the reliability of eyewitness identifications be measured? How dangerous are sex offenders? What are the dangers of bias in expert testimonies? Etc.

Welcoming Message

Welcome to the course Forensic Psychology!

As the title implies, during this course, we try to fit as many forensically relevant topics as possible to give you a glimpse of the field. Our ultimate goal is to increase awareness of the most prominent issues in the field, challenge your worldview, and (hopefully) get you excited to follow a career in forensic psychology.

As you will come to see, many of the discussed topics are controversial and, at times, a clear yes or no answer is difficult to reach. As a student, you will do a great job if you can come up with evidence-based arguments to support your viewpoint. You can practice this skill during the tutorial but also on Canvas by engaging in discussions with your fellow classmates.

Step out of your comfort zone, challenge yourself and each other (in a respectful manner), and harvest the benefits of engaging in stimulating academic discussions with your peers.

Course structure

In the course of 3 weeks, students will take part in an intensive educational program that covers important topics in the field of Forensic Psychology. During the course, four main themes within the field of forensic psychology will be addressed: Relationship between Mental Illness and Crime, Cognitive Biases in the Legal Context, Police Interrogations, and Eyewitness Memory.

The first topic is about the association of mental illness and crime. Within this topic students will examine the insanity defence and the psychology of sex offenders. As a

second issue, cognitive biases in the legal context will be dealt with. Students will get acquainted with the interpretation and reliability of forensic evidence and the role of biases in experts' decisions. The third topic is about interviewing and interrogation. Within this topic, the students learn about police interrogation techniques, deception detection and (false) confessions. Lastly, as a fourth area, students will learn about eyewitness memory, which consists of eyewitness identification and witness reports. Students will learn about the reliability of eyewitness testimonies and identification procedures.

Different case studies, tools and experiments will be discussed in order to allow the students to get acquainted with the methods used in this discipline. In each tutorial, research articles and case material descriptions related to a theme will be studied and discussed.

Prerequisites

Students should have a basic background in psychology and an interest in the legal system.

Class hours and credits

The course consists of 36 class hours divided over 3 weeks. Students earn 7.5 ECTS credits when they obtain a passing grade.

Chapter 2 Objectives

By the end of the course, students will demonstrate knowledge about/the ability to:

Learning objectives

- identify current issues and controversies in the fields of Forensic and Legal Psychology;
- explain terminology in Forensic Psychology;
- describe methods and tools typically used in this field and experiments that have been conducted;
- list ethical dilemmas that occur when collecting data and running experiments with human participants;
- describe and analyse cases by applying various tools and methods; and
- provide reasons why raising awareness about the problems that arise when psychology is applied to law in practice is crucial.

Skills development

- presenting different viewpoints;
- writing academic paper; and
- debating using evidence based arguments.

Chapter 4 Assessment

The examination rules for this course are specified in the CES Academic Guide 2023-2024. It is the responsibility of the student to carefully read this document and comply with all rules and regulations.

Course specific assessment overview

For the attendance regulations see Chapter 5 "attendance rules".

| When | Type of assessment | % Final grade |
|---|--|---------------|
| Throughout course | Attendance | 0%* |
| Throughout the course – each tutorial | 4 small question-based tests (Quizzes) | 20% |
| End of the course – 22 July | Final group presentation | 40% |
| 4 weeks after end of course – 21 August | Final paper | 40% |

*** Fulfilled attendance is a condition for your final grade to be valid. For more information about the attendance, see Chapter 5 "attendance rules".**

Please note: Pass/fail elements related to assessments indicate that a "pass" for this part of the assessment is necessary in order for the grade to be valid. A "fail" indicates that that part of the assessment is incomplete.

When assessment is incomplete and no grade can be assigned (for example when students fail to do either the attendance, practical assignment or the course exam), 'No grade (NG)' will be awarded which automatically constitutes a "fail".

Chapter 5 Attendance rules

The attendance rules for this course are specified in the CES Student Handbook 2023-2024.

Course specific attendance rules

At CES, students are expected to attend all meetings. If circumstances prevent students from complying with this rule, **they are permitted to miss one meeting per course**. For a second missed meeting, or a missed double session or fieldtrip (4 hours), students need to complete a make-up assignment to comply with CES attendance requirements. **Students who miss more than 4 hours of class automatically fail the course.**

CES courses may include field trips. Field trips may contribute to the overall grade of a course and are always mandatory. Students can compensate for a missed field trip by completing a make-up assignment. Please note that often field trips count as two meetings (4 hours).

The professor/tutor notes attendance at the start of each meeting. In order to be registered as "present" students need to be on time and participate in an active manner. Students who are more than 15 minutes late or who leave before the meeting has officially ended will be registered as absent.

In case of absence due to illness or other personal circumstances, students are required to email the course coordinator and the education office **before the start of the meeting**. The written notification should include the students name and a brief description of the reason or cause and the expected duration of the absence.

In case of longer absence, the programme coordinator may require additional proof of the cause of the absence, for example a doctor's note. When the student returns, they must report to the programme coordinator on the first day of their return. CES cannot be held responsible if a student fails a course due to long-term absence, even if this absence is due to illness or other exceptional personal circumstances.

Make up assignment

Students who miss 4 hours of class or who have missed a field trip (4 hours) will not have met the attendance requirements of a CES course and can apply for a make-up assignment to comply with the CES attendance requirements. Students who miss more than 4 hours of class automatically fail the course.

The student is required to submit a written request to ces-educationoffice@maastrichtuniversity.nl within 3 days after the missed meeting. The CES Board of Examiners will decide upon the validity of the reasons given. The CES course coordinator determines the nature and volume of the assignment, which will be proportional to the number of missed meetings and the topics discussed. Make up assignments related to missed field trips may require students to do the excursion independently and at their own expense. The assignment must be completed and submitted to the CES course coordinator via email within 10 working days.

The responsible CES course coordinator will grade the make-up assignment with a pass or fail. Students who receive a pass for the make-up assignment will have met the attendance requirement. No final grade can be awarded for courses in which students have not met the attendance requirement. This will result in a "No Grade (NG)" on the transcript. An "NG" automatically constitutes a "fail" and no credit is awarded.

Field trip

The field trip is an intrinsic part of the course and attendance is therefore mandatory. ***Please note that individual travel plans that might clash with the excursion are not a valid reason for missing it!***

Electronic devices

Devices used to support your working in class such as laptops and tablets for reading notes are allowed in class. However, iPads, smartphones, and other electronic devices are **not allowed in class** as they distract from the group discussion. Students will be asked to leave the class if they don't follow this guideline.