

## Psychology 303: Forensic Psychology

**Coordinator:** Professor Deborah Matheson

**Additional Instructors:** Professor Becky Earhart and Professor Lindsay McCunn

**Website:** VIULearn

### Course Description:

This course will provide students with an overview of core research and practice within the realm of forensic psychology. Forensic psychology refers broadly to the research and application of psychological knowledge to the legal system. As this is an introductory course to this area, students will be exposed to a breadth of topics including detecting deception, recovered memories, jury decision making, interrogations and confessions, criminal profiling, eyewitness identification and risk assessment.

**Course Text:** Pozzulo, J., Bennell, C., & Forth, A. (2022). Forensic psychology (6th ed.). Pearson. Text can be purchased directly from Pearson Canada: <https://www.pearson.com/en-ca/subject-catalog/p/forensic-psychology/P200000002510/9780137682973>

### Course Requirements (Tentative):

<b>Exam #1</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>Exam #2</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>Assignment # 1 Profile Assignment</b> (Submitted and presented to the class)	<b>7.5%</b>
<b>Assignment #2 Innocence Project Assignment</b> (Submitted and presented)	<b>7.5%</b>
<b>Assignment #3 Discussion Post (5%) and Response (5%)</b>	<b>10%</b>

### Final Grades:

A+	90-100%	B+	76-79%	C+	64-67%	D	50-54%
A	85-89%	B	72-75%	C	60-63%	F	Below 50%
A-	80-84%	B-	68-71%	C-	55-59%		

### Examinations:

Two examinations are scheduled for this course. Exams will consist of multiple choice, sentence answer and short answer (i.e., a paragraph or two) questions. Emphasis is on integration of the material from lectures (including information presented by guest speakers or from videos), readings and discussions. The exams are **not** cumulative.

**Course Assignments** (see below for assignment details):

Penalty for late submissions is 10% per day (20% per weekend). If any assignment is not received, a score of zero will be assigned.

**Tentative Course Timetable:**

Chs 0 and 1 Introduction and Profiling  
Ch 3 Profiling  
Ch 3 Interrogations and Confessions  
Ch 4 Deception  
Ch 5 Eyewitness Memory  
Ch 6 Evaluating the Memory of Children

**Exam 1**

Ch 7 Juries  
Ch 8 The Role of Mental Illness  
Ch 9 Sentencing and Parole in Canada  
Ch 10 Risk Assessment  
Ch 11 Psychopaths  
Ch 15 Homicidal Offenders  
Ch 13 Intimate Partner Violence  
Ch 14 Sexual Offenders

**Exam 2**

Note that the class is comprised of lectures, class discussions and presentations, guest instructors. To complement class material, a number of excursions are planned. Please note excursions are subject to change and are indicative only.

### Assignment #1: Profile Assignment

Pick a convicted serial killer (preferably one on whom there is a fair amount of information available). By searching the internet/library resources available answer the following questions. (You MUST provide a reference list in APA format showing where you found the information.) If you cannot find the answer to a question put “unknown.”

Please complete the assignment in the Question and Answer format provided here:

1. Subject's name:	/.25
2. Date-of-birth:	/.25
3. Briefly describe childhood home life (e.g., parents together? Siblings? Adopted? Etc.):	/1
4. Any known childhood problems/convictions?	/.5
5. First known victim?	/.25
6. When did the first known homicide occur?	/.25
7. What are the details surrounding this first case?	/1
8. Kill alone or in partnership?	/.25
9. Any similarities between victims (e.g., age, race, appearance)?	/.5
10. Describe the subject's method of obtaining the victims:	/.5
11. Describe the subject's method of killing the victims (MO):	/1.5
12. Did the subject have a signature? If so, what was it?	/1.5
13. Did the killings occur in one place (i.e., one particular city) or many?	/.25
14. How were the bodies disposed?	/1
15. Number of known victims before subject was caught?	/.25
16. Details around the subject's capture:	/1
17. Did the subject confess to the killings? If so, to how many?	/.25
18. Details of the subject's conviction (e.g., years sentenced, death penalty)	/.5
19. Would you classify the subject as Organized or Disorganized? (Give examples that would support your conclusion.)	/4
 Citation list in APA format	 /1
 Assignment total	 /16

Note: I encourage you to share an image of the convicted serial killer on your assignment which I hope to make available to the class.

## Assignment #2: Innocence Project

Go to the Innocence Project website: <https://www.innocenceproject.org/all-cases/#exonerated-by-dna> and pick a case (it can't be anyone we've covered in class). Based on the information provided for that case and your knowledge from this class, answer the following questions (using your own words, you will receive a zero if you copy and paste from the Innocence Project or other websites). You can use additional websites but MUST provide a citation list in APA format showing where you found the information.) Please use question and answer format.

1. Provide the name of the person you have chosen. Then, briefly summarize the case you chose. Be sure to include what charges were laid against the accused and what sentence was received (1/2 page or so). /2

2. What were the contributing causes of the conviction (innocence project lists these on the right hand side of the page)? /1

3. Given what you learned in class, describe in greater detail how these causes led to the wrongful conviction. (e.g., if there was an eyewitness misidentification go into detail about what likely led to that error given what you learned in class. If there was a false confession, what factors contributed to that confession, etc.) Note: I am not looking for you to just repeat what is on the innocence project website. I'm asking you to take the material you have learned in class and apply it to this case. This is the question where you show off what you have learned. /5

4. Based on this case, what recommendations would you make to police or lawyers to prevent this from happening again? /2

Assignment total /10

### **Assignment #3 Discussion Board(s)**

#### **Discussion Board Leader Questions**

As a leader, you are to ask a thoughtful and engaging question(s) that will generate discussion among your classmates. For example, one general question might be “what is the dominant psychological perspective depicted in the reading and/or show”? More than likely, you’ll have a more specific question to ask. You want the question to be one where a student might respond with an opinion that can be backed up by course content or other material whereby any “other” material would be referenced. (Note that “What do you think?” does not count as thoughtful or engaging.) It’s possible that the questions you generate might also be chosen as exam questions, especially if they are really good questions.

#### **Discussion Board Responses**

You are to thoughtfully respond to a post and the question(s) posed in at least one of your classmate’s discussion posts on one of the discussion boards.

Strong responses will fully address the question and advance the conversation in a meaningful way. Including an academic reference will strengthen a response.

The comments on the discussion boards will be discussed further in class.