

**Spring 2008 Syllabus: Psychology 383 (Psychology and Law, 3 hours)  
Tuesday-Thursday 11:00 – 12:20, AB-4 Room 301**

**Professor:** Dr. Marc Boccaccini  
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**Office Hours:** Monday: 9:00-11:00. Thursday: 9:00-11:00

**Required Readings**

1. Constanzo, M. (2004). Psychology applied to law. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
2. Assigned readings available through Blackboard class website.

**Course Description**

This lecture-based course is designed to examine the application of scientific and professional principles of psychology in the legal system, the use of social science methods to study the legal system, and the impact of law on the practice of psychology. Content areas include legal competencies, the insanity defense, jury consultation, psychologists and the death penalty, the accuracy of eyewitness testimony, false confessions, and prediction of violence. Prerequisites: 6 hours of PSY.

**Goals of this Course**

1. Students will gain an understanding of the roles that psychologists play in the legal system, ranging from clinical psychologists evaluating the mental state of criminal defendants to experimental psychologists serving as consultants to trial attorneys.
2. Students will learn how psychologists study the legal process and how their findings influence the legal system.
3. Students will become familiar with how the courts and legal system influence the practice of forensic psychology, including how case law influences the focus of psychological evaluations.

**Religious Holidays.** Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911(a)(2) defines religious holy days as: "a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code . . . ." A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a will notify the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

**Academic honesty:** Don't cheat. Really, it will make me mad. All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

**Attendance.** Your attendance in class is expected. My tests are heavily weighted toward information covered during lectures. Missing class will put you at a disadvantage for performing well in this class.

**Instructor Evaluations:**

You will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form (IDEA) toward the end of the semester.

**Required Supplies:**

Scantron forms and pencils for tests.

**Classroom rules of conduct:**

Please see the Code of Student Conduct and discipline: [www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html](http://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html)  
Cell phones and other electronic devices may not be used in class, without the instructor's permission

**Americans with Disabilities Act.** It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired. SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the you register with the Counseling Center.

### **Assignments, Exams, and Grades:**

Your course grade will be determined by your performance on a series of assignments and exams. I use the traditional grading system for all assignments, exams, and final course grades (i.e., 100-90% = A, 89-80% = B, 79-70% = C, 69-60% = D, 59-0% = F). There are 100 points possible in this course. Below is a description of how you will earn points in this class.

### **Evaluation**

80% **Examinations:** Four examinations will be given during the semester. Each will be weighted equally in the calculation of your final grade. In other words, each will be worth 20% of your final grade in the class. Examinations will include both multiple choice and short-answer questions (1-2 paragraphs). Examination dates are listed on the course schedule. Tests are heavily weighted toward information and case examples that are covered in lecture.

20% **Current Event Papers:** You will be required to write two 3-page current event papers throughout the semester. Each paper will receive 1-10 points as a grade. So, each current event paper will be worth 10% of your final course grade. In other words, each point on the current event paper is equivalent to 1% of your FINAL course grade. Due dates for the current event papers are listed on the course schedule.

Current event papers are a mechanism for you to link what you have learned in the course to real-world events. Events can include news items, current legal events, personal experiences, something you see on Court TV, or other "real-world" happenings. Perhaps the best source for topics is the Law page at CNN.com. You can even use an incident from a TV show or Movie with approval from the instructor. If you are not sure whether an event is appropriate, ask me in class or through e-mail. **Current event papers must be at least 3 pages, double spaced, using 12 point font with 1-inch page margins.** You should use the first paragraph to describe the event (no more than 1/2 of a page). The remaining portion of the paper should show me how you have thought critically about the event/issue. You can show this in several ways. You can use class material to explain the event (what happened) or to identify important additional issues related to the event. If you hear a news item that is biased or incorrect, explain why this is so using course material. If an issue has people taking sides, take one side of the issue yourself and back it up with psychological knowledge (from this class, not just your rambling opinion). Another option is to identify an issue or event that needs further study. What could psychology tell us about the issue? What type of research is needed about the topic? How could you design a research study to examine the issue? You will lose points if you just give me your opinion about a topic, without linking it any way to psychological research or information we have covered in class.

You can earn **2 extra credit points** on each current paper by finding a published research study relating to your event and using the findings from the study to inform your reaction. And, this doesn't mean that you can just include once sentence in your paper about the study. I want you to "integrate" the findings from they study with your opinion/position THROUGHOUT the paper. Publications must come from scientific journals, not popular magazines or internet publications. The study must report scientific data collected by the authors (i.e., it must report numbers, statistical analysis), not just someone's review of existing research or his/her opinion about a topic. I strongly encourage you to have me approve the scientific article that you are going to use.

How to calculate your Grade:

#### **How to do it:**

- 1) multiple your exam 1 grade by .20
- 2) multiple your exam 2 grade by .20
- 3) multiple your exam 3 grade by .20
- 4) multiple your exam 4 grade by .20
- 5) Add up the four numbers you calculated in steps 1-4.
- 6) Take the number you calculate for 5) and add  
The points from paper 1 and paper 2.

#### **Example**

- 1) 80% x .20 = 16.0
- 2) 92% x .20 = 18.4
- 3) 75% x .20 = 15.0
- 4) 98% x .20 = 19.6
- 5) 16.0 + 18.4 + 15.0 + 19.6 = 69
- 6) 69 + 10 + 9 = **88% (FINAL GRADE)**

## Schedule

The outline below is tentative, however, and may be changed by the instructor. An updated syllabus will be provided if significant changes occur.

<u>Class Week:</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings</u>
1/17		
1/22 - 1/24	Intro/History	1) Costanzo Chapter 1. 2) Careers in Psychology and Law Website: <a href="http://www.unl.edu/ap-ls/student/careers.html">http://www.unl.edu/ap-ls/student/careers.html</a>
1/29 – 1/31	Confessions	1) Costanzo Chapter 2
2/5 – 2/7	Eyewitnesses	1) Costanzo Chapter 6 2) Wells, G.L., Malpass, R.S., et al. (2000). From the lab to the police station: A successful application of eyewitness research. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 55, 581-598.
2/12 – 2/14	Competence	<b><u>Note: Tuesday 2/12 is Exam 1</u></b> 1) Costanzo Chapter 4
2/19 – 2/21	Competence cont	1) Costanzo Chapter 4
2/26 – 2/28	Insanity	1) Costanzo Chapter 4 2) Borum, R., & Fulero, S. (1999). Empirical research on the insanity defense and attempted reforms: Evidence towards informed policy. <i>Law and Human Behavior</i> , 23, 375-394.
3/4 – 3/6	Insanity cont	<b><u>Note: Exam 2 is Tuesday 3/4</u></b>
3/11 – 3/13	Spring Break	No class
3/18 – 3/20	Malingering	1) No reading
3/25 – 3/27	Risk Assessment	1) Costanzo Chapter 7 Thursday 3/27 <b><u>Paper 1 is due</u></b>
4/1 – 4/3	Risk Assessment	2) Costanzo, Chapter 7
4/8 – 4/10	Sex offender risk	3) Miller, H. A., et. al., Sexually violent predator evaluations. <i>Law and Human Behavior</i> , 29, 29-54.
4/15 – 4/17	Death Penalty	<b><u>Note: Exam 3 is Tuesday 4/15</u></b> 1) Costanzo, Chapter 9
4/22 – 4/24	Death penalty	
4/29 – 5/1	Open (your choice)	
5/6 – 5/8	Open (your choice)	Thursday 5/8 <b><u>Paper 2 is due</u></b>
5/15 (Thurs)		<b><u>Final Exam (Exam 4) 11:00 – 1:00</u></b>