

**Psychology 417: "Psychology and Law"**  
**Fall 2006, 2:00 - 4:45 Wednesdays, BSB Room 1076**  
**University of Illinois at Chicago**

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**Office hours:** 4:00 – 5:00 Tuesdays and by appointment

**Course prerequisites:** PSCH 100 (Intro to Psychology), PSCH 242 (Research in Psych), & PSCH 312 (Social Psychology). PSCH 343 (Statistics in Psychology) is recommended. Or, graduate standing with consent of the instructor.

**GENERAL COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:**

As the study of human behavior, Psychology must include the study of law, which is a primary instrument used by society to control human behavior. Psychology and Law is a vibrant area of research interest within the discipline of Psychology. It has grown tremendously over the past 35 years or so. Psychology and Law's scholarly output is found in specialty journals (e.g., *Law and Human Behavior*, *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, *Psychology, Public Policy, and the Law*); in textbooks for introductory psychology, social psychology, and psychology and law courses; and in entries in the *Annual Review of Psychology*. Many of its researchers find their professional homes in the American Psychological Association's Division 41: "The American Psychology/Law Society" and other divisions such as Division 37, "Child, Youth, and Family Services."

This seminar is a survey of the major topics represented in the field of Psychology and Law. Throughout the class, we will focus on how psychological research (across subdisciplines such as clinical, social, cognitive, and community psychology) can contribute to a better understanding of issues related to law or legal process, how the legal system can be informed by the results of psychological research, and how psychological research can be more reactive to legal issues. Some of the topics we will address include, for example, the reliability of adult and child eyewitness testimony; factors that affect jury decision making; interrogation and confessions; the clinical determination of insanity, competence, and future dangerousness; myths associated with "psychological profiling"; the sexual victimization of women and children; race and the law, and juvenile justice. The work of the field is applicable to persons of all ages, both children and adults. (Note that the field of Psychology and Law has very little to do with "forensic investigation topics portrayed in TV shows like *Profiler* or *CSI*.)

Thus, the field of Psychology and Law is multifaceted, and its research covers many sub-disciplines of psychology. Even so, the field is widely conceptualized as divided into two broad topics: (a) clinical/"forensic," and (b) non-clinical/experimental, both of which will be covered in this class. The use of the term "experimental" to refer to all things non-clinical is misleading, because clinical researchers also do experiments. Anyway, the distinction also reflects a split between practitioners (who do not necessarily conduct research, but who use research findings in their work, such as evaluations of people awaiting trial or of families involved in custody disputes) and researchers (who do basic research that informs forensic practice).

**READINGS:**

Greene, E., Heilbrun, K., Fortune, W. H., & Nietzal, M. T., & (2006). *Wrightsmen's psychology and the legal system*. (6th Ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

In addition, the text is supplemented by empirical, theoretical, and review articles and chapters from a variety of journals and books. A list of readings will be provided separately, and the readings will be available for you to download via the BlackBoard system. There will also be readings for student reports (see below); your professor will supply those as well.

## FORMAT AND GRADING:

Although there will be some lecture, the course will be conducted mainly as a seminar, not a lecture course. As a 400-level class, the course is a graduate-level class, and as such, great emphasis will be placed on the preparation and active participation of **all** seminar members during **each** class. The success of the course will depend, in large part, on student participation at a level appropriate for graduate and upper-division undergraduate students. Class preparation includes completing all readings prior to class and making notes that will prepare you to discuss the main points, theories, methods, and/or empirical findings from all readings. You should also be prepared to discuss the implications of readings for law, policy, and future psychological research.

**Grades will be assigned on the basis of in-class participation (10%), class preparation essays (20%), two in-class oral reports (14%), and two exams (56%).**

### % Grade

### Assignment

10% 1. **In-Class Participation:** Participation means self-motivated, regular, and thoughtful in-class verbal contributions that illustrate your mastery of the readings (scientific observations and thoughts, not just unfounded opinions). This includes reporting the contents of your class participation essay for that week. Participation reflects in-class comments and questions, not simply class attendance or coming to class on time, which are assumed. (More than two unexcused absences will result in the loss of most, if not all, participation points.) Although it may seem at first glance like this is a small percentage of your grade, please realize that it's an entire letter grade (in fact, it is a letter grade that many students in this class lose unnecessarily because they do not heed this information).

20% 2. **Class Preparation Essays:** These are formally written, but brief essays (exactly 1- to 2-double-spaced typed pages), **due by 10am on the day of class via email** (send to bottoms@uic.edu). Participating in class would be difficult if you hadn't read and thought about the main points in the articles, and if you hadn't prepared some comments to make in class. These papers are designed to help you do that, and to help you anticipate and prepare for the exams. (Bring a copy to class to guide your comments throughout the class.)

You are required to complete 8 of 13 possible papers; thus, each is worth 2.5%. They will be graded A - F (A = 95%, A- = 92%, B+ = 88%, B = 85%, etc.). If you write 9 papers, I will drop your lowest grade (but a 10<sup>th</sup> paper won't be counted).

Importantly, **these papers are not summaries of the readings**, although they should reflect the fact that you did all of the readings. Instead, these essays are an opportunity for you to go beyond the readings in creative and thoughtful ways. In each paper, you will develop one or two ideas related to the issues in that week's readings. If your idea is detailed, one idea is probably sufficient. Otherwise, you'll want to discuss two or three ideas. Ideas can relate to your own research. A hint: make notes in the margins of your readings as you read -- notes about even your most trivial reactions. When you're done reading, you'll have plenty of thoughts for your paper. Your paper could take either of the following forms, but from experience, the first one is the best one, and I highly, highly recommend it for most of your papers:

(a) an idea for future research, even very simple research: State the research question and a testable hypothesis (your prediction), the theory that drives the hypothesis (given the readings, why did you make that prediction? Why should that result be expected?), describe why it is important and how it flows from what you read (i.e., from psychological research or theory, or from issues that arose in a legal case), and briefly sketch a rudimentary methodological design to test the hypothesis;

(b) a new theory (or novel application of an existing theory) to explain or tie together existing research findings;

(c) a specific social policy or law that could be changed or newly created based on the research findings in your readings (describe the policy or law, give its psychological justification, describe how it would be useful);

(d) a careful and novel analysis or comparison and contrasting of key points from the readings (readings from past weeks may always be discussed in light of new readings);

(e) a specific discussion of how the textbook chapter on a certain topic might be re-written or amended based on the new information you have gained from the additional readings, in-class reports, and in-class discussions.

Your papers can, of course, include criticism of anything you read; however, be very careful: Criticisms must be well justified. For example, it is a common mistake for budding scholars to write something like, "This mock jury study is no good because they conducted it with college students." Well, so what? **Why** would the study have turned out any differently if older community members had participated instead? Sometimes there is a theoretically sound reason to think it might make a difference, sometimes there is not.

Finally, even though these are very brief papers, your writing should be clear, grammatical, concise, elegant, and in APA style. Grammar and punctuation must be correct and will affect your grade. On Blackboard, you will find a Writing Tips document – read it carefully, and do not make the mistakes discussed in that paper. I also recommend that every student buy a copy of the *Elements of Style* by Strunk and White and review it. (It's short and cheap.) Writing beautifully is a skill that will transcend most other things you learn -- its importance cannot be overstated. I hope you'll use these papers as a way to learn to write important things in concise ways.

56% 3. **Examinations:** There will be a mid-term and a final exam. Each is worth 28% of your grade. The mid-term will cover all material through the day before the exam; the final will cover all material after the mid-term exam. That is, the final exam will not be cumulative. Exams will be composed mainly of essay questions, and they will cover information from readings, class discussion, and class reports.

14% 4. **Oral Reports:** (Two oral reports worth 7% each.) To reduce the number of readings assigned to the entire class, there will be two or three student oral reports during each class. Reports will focus on readings that the professor assigns that are related to the day's common readings. The formal, prepared part of the report should last no more than 10-12 minutes (you must practice beforehand so that you do not go over 12 minutes), although the class discussion you generate can last longer. In fact, the best presentations will encourage and involve class discussion.

The importance of expressing ideas orally is often overlooked, but it is essential for success. I am reminded of this each time the Psychology Department conducts searches for new faculty and there are inevitably some very bad job talks. Here are some guidelines for preparing an "A" report: First, do not go over the allotted time – this is the most common mistake. Second, focus on the main points and describe them in detail, assuming the audience knows absolutely nothing about the topic. Describe how the article is relevant to that day's common readings. If the article describes an empirical study, be sure to summarize the most important predictions, methodology, main findings, and conclusions. If the article is a theoretical piece, state the main premise and basic argument, as well as evidence used to support the thesis. For any article, present a critical analysis of the work (that is, add your own thoughts about the work and how you think it is relevant to the class). If you don't understand something about your article, see me before class (meaning see me at least one week before--not the day before--your report). An important tip: Do not assume any prior knowledge on the part of your classmates (beyond the common readings). One of the most common mistakes made by unskilled speakers is to assume people understand things you haven't explicitly stated. Give the report as if you were giving it to an 8<sup>th</sup> grader who has never studied anything about psychology. I'm totally serious.

Third, give your report from notes rather than the article. Do not read from a "highlighted" version of the article (a sure way to bore us all and get a low grade). All students must use PowerPoint slides during the presentation and also give out 1- or 2-page handouts (which may duplicated the overheads). Do not overuse slides! You will probably need no more than 5. Overheads and handouts should consist of only a scaffolding or outline of key points, not a lot of prose, and they should be in BIG font. Handouts are important because they will help your classmates take notes on your presentation -- remember, the exams will include information you present, so you must be an effective teacher.

Finally, don't be nervous. Give your report in a relaxed, but professional manner. Nervousness usually stems from being ill-prepared. There is nothing more tedious and even

embarrassing than being forced to sit through an ill-prepared presentation. Think about all the bad presentations you've attended. Make a list of the things that made the presentation horrible, and avoid them all! Make sure your reports are concise, accurate, and well-prepared--even over prepared. It is a good idea to prepare for your report by writing out every word you plan to say, then practice your talk to yourself several times, making sure it is the appropriate length. You'll find that the report almost comes out automatically, without the need for worry.

#### **MISCELLANEOUS:**

1. If you have any problems or concerns throughout the class, your professor is here to help you. Each of you should feel free to e-mail me with questions throughout the semester and/or to come see me.
2. Attending all classes is very important. Students who miss classes are still responsible for all notes, announcements, and handouts for that class. If you miss a class, you should get the notes from another student. The professor reserves the right to give unannounced extra credit for in-class assignments or unannounced quizzes. There are no makeups for missing these opportunities or for missing class demonstrations, projects, etc. that occur during class time.
3. To be fair to all students, there are no exceptions to any policies except as noted in this syllabus, so read this syllabus and all assignments and readings carefully. Importantly, no late work will be accepted – not at all, not even for partial credit. The only exception is if you unfortunately experience a documented personal emergency (e.g., serious personal illness or family death). If you do, e-mail or phone Professor Bottoms immediately. She will work with you to help you complete your assignments. Otherwise, no "incompletes" will be given, and late work (e.g., papers) will not be accepted. Papers will be accepted early.
4. In fairness to the vast majority of students who take their college career seriously, no form of cheating will be tolerated. If you cheat on any assignment in this class you will fail the entire class and judicial charges will be filed (see UIC Student Disciplinary Handbook for details). Cheating includes, but is not limited to, any form of plagiarism, which includes taking others' ideas and claiming them as your own, copying the words or ideas of a fellow student or any other author in your papers, copying even short phrases from written work that you are using as a reference (even if you cite it properly), handing in work you have handed in for another class, handing in papers you've gotten from the internet or other students, etc. It also includes cheating on an exam by using any form of unauthorized written notes or articles or by using information from another student.
5. I'm happy to accommodate disabilities. In keeping with university policy, students who need accommodations for access and participation in this course must register with the Office of Disability Services: 312-413-2103 (voice) or 312-413-0123 (TTY). See the professor right away to discuss.
6. Asking questions and participating by talking with classmates and the professor during class discussions is required. But talking out of turn is not. Although it may seem absurd to have to say this for a university course, talking to other students during lecture disrupts the classroom, bothers other students, and distracts the professor. Other disruptive behaviors include coming to class late, leaving class early, eating or drinking in class (there will be a 10 minute break for a snack), using your cell phone in any way such as checking it constantly for messages (turn it completely off), etc. So, please be respectful, and understand that anyone who disrupts the classroom in these or other ways will be asked to leave the classroom and dropped from the course.

**Psychology and Law (PSCH 417)**  
***Tentative Course Schedule***

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- Week 1 8/30 -- Course requirements, introduction to the field & the professor  
-- Careers in psychology & law  
-- Psychologists in the legal system and legal professionals: Understanding the disciplines, their methods, and their values  
-- Understanding the court system from investigation to trial (self study)
- Week 2 9/6 -- Sociological, biological, & psychological theories of crime  
-- Understanding and catching killers with psychology: The myths & realities of profiling:  
*Guest Speaker: Jenn Veilleux*  
-- Introduction to forensic psychology
- Week 3 9/13 Forensic psychology: Assessing legally relevant competence, the insanity defense.
- Week 4 9/20 Forensic psychology: Forensic assessment in civil cases, predicting dangerousness, civil commitment
- Week 5 9/27 Adult eyewitness testimony: Lineups, hypnotically refreshed testimony, expert testimony on eyewitness evidence
- Week 6 10/4 Adult eyewitness testimony: Lie detection, interrogations and false confessions  
*Guest Speaker: Scott Keenan, Chicago Children's Advocacy Center, former Chicago Police Department Detective*
- Week 7 10/11 Juror and jury decision making: overview, jury nullification, voir dire and "scientific" jury selection, Pretrial publicity, concerns about jury competence & jury reform
- Week 8 10/18 Juror and jury decision making: Juror verdicts and the death penalty, comprehension of jury instructions.
- Week 9 10/25 \*\*\*\* *MID-TERM EXAM* \*\*\*\*
- Week 10 11/1 The Role of Emotion in Law: Capital Sentencing Decisions: *Guest speaker Susan Bandes, Distinguished Research Professor, DePaul University College of Law*
- Week 11 11/8 Race and the legal system: system bias, segregation, affirmative action, juror bias
- Week 12 11/15 Children as victims: The science, values, law, & policy of child maltreatment
- Week 13 11/22 [Meet earlier in the week because of the holiday?]  
Children & the law: Children's eyewitness testimony, expert evidence about children's testimony
- Week 14 11/29 Children & the law: Jurors' perceptions of child witnesses
- Week 15 12/6 Repressed and recovered memory in legal contexts
- Week 16 12/? \*\*\*\* *FINAL EXAM* \*\*\*\* *TBA (Same day and time as class if that works for people.)*