

Psychology and Law (PSY 335)

Fall 2004

Professor: Thomas J. Guilmette, Ph.D., ABPP-CN
Office: AM 118
Telephone: 865-2295
E-mail: tguilmet@providence.edu
Office hours: Mon 1:30-2:20; Thurs 9:30-10:20; Fri 11:30-12:20; Please call for an appointment if these times are not convenient for you.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course surveys the scientific knowledge of psychological concepts, methods, and results as they pertain to law and legal matters. Legal topics to which psychological knowledge has made significant contributions include jury selection and decision making, competence, assessment of insanity, civil commitment, psychological damages in civil proceedings, eye witness testimony, family law, and the use of polygraph and hypnosis as evidence. The differences between popular myth or assumptions and scientific knowledge in these domains will be explored. Last, the roles (and challenges) of the psychologist in psycho-legal matters will be discussed.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will learn the basic vocabulary and concepts of our legal system.
2. Students will receive an overview of how psychological methods, principles, and results can be applied to legal concepts.
3. Students will appreciate some of the controversies and conflicting “truths” within the psycho-legal area.
4. Students will learn to separate knowledge that is scientifically supported from popular assumption and will become aware of how their own prejudices and backgrounds influence their views of legal matters.
5. Students will learn how psychologists are employed in and interact with the legal system.
6. Students will have fun (and learn a bunch of cool stuff).

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK:

Wrightsman, L.S., Greene, E., Nietzel, M.T., & Fortune, W.H. (2002). *Psychology and the legal system* (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group.

OTHER REQUIRED READINGS:

1. Lykken, D.T. (2001). Parental licensure. *American Psychologist*, 56, 885-894.
2. U.S. Constitution (The Bill of Rights)

LEARNING METHODS:

Readings – The textbook that I’ve chosen is well written and contains a fine overview of psycho-legal principles with an emphasis on the *science* of psychology. It will need to be read carefully in order to understand the new concepts that you’re being exposed to. The required

readings **must** be done before class in order to benefit from the class discussions and to do well on the weekly quizzes.

Lectures – I will present material in class that is intended to highlight or complement issues raised by the readings. I will also present case vignettes (some from my own practice and experience), pertinent scientific studies or articles, and issues/cases that are being discussed in the popular press but that are not part of the required readings. Thus, I will present information in class that cannot be found in the readings but for which you will be held accountable (and tested on). So, if you don't show, you won't know (this should not be confused with, "if it doesn't fit, you must acquit," which was said by whom and in what case?).

Class discussions – Psychology and law is a fascinating area that lends itself to critical thinking (hopefully) and lively discussion (inevitable). Discussions, role playing, and debates can be exciting learning tools. In order to make this whole thing work, your classmates and I need you to be at class and on time, mentally prepared to think about what you have read, and to **participate**. Naturally, we are all respectful of each other's views during class discussions but if you (or I) propose a point of view or endorse an opinion, then as an educated person you (or I) will need to defend it.

The evolution of a murder case & psycho-legal issues – During the semester I will present information about a triple murder case that occurred in Rhode Island (State of Rhode Island v. Christopher Hightower). The case presents conflicting views (and testimony) of the insanity defense, which will be discussed.

Weekly quizzes – There will be a weekly quiz each Friday at the beginning of class. The quizzes will be worth 10 points each, and there will be 12 of them. The quizzes will cover the main points from the readings assigned for that week (**and that day**) as well as the material that was covered in class since the last quiz. If you have questions about the readings that are due on a Friday, then if you email me by 10 PM on Thursday, I will answer your question in time for Friday's quiz. You can earn up to 120 points from all 12 quizzes but I will calculate your final grade with the presumption that you could only earn 100 points from taking 10 quizzes. Thus, if you take all 12 quizzes and get 10 points per quiz, the extra 20 points will count as extra credit. There will not be any make-up quizzes except under the direst of circumstances (illnesses, athletic events, etc. don't count) but you can miss two quizzes and it will not affect your grade. Obviously, if you're not in class on Friday then you will miss the quiz and if you miss any classes during the week, you may miss material that will be on the quiz for that week. **The quizzes will be passed out promptly at the beginning of class. If you are not in the classroom when the quiz is passed out, then you will not be allowed to take it, even if you are late by only a few minutes.**

Examinations – There will be one hour long mid-term plus the final. The exams will be composed of multiple choice, true/false, matching, and short answer questions. Questions and issues on the exams will come from the readings and what is presented in class. As indicated above, I will present many concepts and facts in class that will not be found in the readings but will appear on the exams. The semester exam is worth 100 points each and the final, **which is cumulative**, is worth 150 points. **The correct answers to the exam will be posted for two**

weeks outside Sowa 155 after the last person in class has taken the exam. This will be your only opportunity to find out the correct answers to the questions that you got wrong. Some of the items from these exams may find their way on to the final. After the two weeks are up, you will **not** have the opportunity to review the exam again.

You are expected to take the exam on the date it is scheduled unless there is a serious and verifiable reason for you not to. Plane reservations, illness the night before the exam (you should have studied well before then), and other “obligations” are not legitimate reasons for missing an exam. If you do miss an exam due to a *serious* illness, then I will need to have this confirmed in writing by a physician. In addition you **must** call my office within three days (calendar days, not school days) and tell me why you missed the exam. If you do not notify me within the three days, then you will forfeit the opportunity for a make-up exam. Make-up exams are scheduled at my convenience and may be more difficult than the regularly scheduled exam because you will have had more time to prepare than your classmates. Please refer to the college handbook/catalogue for further information.

GRADING:

Mid-term exam	100 points
Quizzes	100 points
Final exam	150 points
TOTAL:	350 points

A=93-100%; A-=90-92.5%; B+=87-89.9%; B=83-86.9%; B-=80-82.9%; C+=77-79.9%; C=73-76.9%; C-=70-72.9%; D+=67-69.9%; D=63-66.9%; D-=60-62.9%; F= <60%

PROCEDURAL MATTERS:

Class attendance: I will not be taking attendance at each class. However, I expect you to be here (and prepared). If you make meaningful contributions to class, then it **may** improve your final grade although this judgment will be left up to me depending on other factors such as overall performance. Remember that there will be many questions on the quizzes and the exams that will only be covered in class. If you miss a class you will need to contact a classmate to copy his/her notes. Last, I will be in class on time so I expect you to be on time too.

Required readings – the readings are listed in the syllabus. It is your responsibility to have read the material before class and to have thought critically about it so that we can expand on the issues it raises. Material from the readings will be found on the weekly quizzes too.

Becoming involved – You are going to have the opportunity to learn how psychological knowledge can be applied to issues and circumstances that you may read about in the paper everyday (and for which everyone has an opinion). The material will be demanding and you will need to work hard but I hope it is as fascinating for you as it is for me. I guarantee that if you become involved in class discussions, read the material, think about the issues, and ask questions if you don't understand something that you will do well. I am available to help you if you get

stuck or if you want more information on a topic. However, I cannot help you if I don't know you need it. Let's have fun and learn – it's a great combination.

Academic honesty – I know that you are all capable of good quality work or else you would not be at PC (and you would not be taking a psychology course). I also know that there may be some who are tempted to take the easy way out and plagiarize the work of others. This is unacceptable and will be treated in a very serious manner (you may receive the grade of “F” for the course and will be reported to the Dean of Students).

Psychology and Law Class Schedule (tentative) Fall 2004

Class	Topic	Reading(s)
9/7	Course introduction	
9/8	Introduction to the legal system I	Chapter 1
9/10	Introduction to the legal system II	
9/14	Role of the psychologist in law	Chapter 2
9/15	Expert testimony	
9/17 Q-1	Psychological testimony/controversies	
9/21	“Mind of a Killer” video	
9/22	Criminal behavior/crime stats I	Chpt 5, Lykken
9/24 Q-2	Criminal behavior/crime stats II	
9/28	Serial killers	
9/30	Serial killers, profiling	
10/1 Q-3	“Mind of a Serial Killer” video	
10/5	Violence prediction I	
10/6	Violence prediction II	
10/8 Q-4	Trial process	Chapters 10 & 13
10/13	Trial process; eyewitness testimony	
10/15 Q-5	Eyewitness testimony	Chapter 7
10/19	Eyewitness testimony	
10/20	Lie detection; polygraph	
10/22 Q-6	Polygraph	212-221
10/26	Mid-term exam (100 points – answers posted outside Sowa 155)	
10/27	False confessions	221-235
10/29 Q-7	Children as witnesses & repressed/recovered memories	189-204
11/2	Corrections	
11/3	Competence/insanity	Chapter 11
11/5 Q-8	Competence/insanity	
11/9	Competence/insanity	
11/10	Insanity-murder case	
11/12 Q-9	Insanity-murder case	
11/16	Insanity-murder case	
11/17	Insanity-murder case	
11/19 Q-10	Insanity-murder case	
11/23	Jury selection-mock selection	Chapter 14
11/30	Jury selection/decision making	Chapter 15
12/1	Family law & victim psychology	451-473
12/3 Q-11	Civil commitment/rights of mentally ill	
12/7	Civil commitment/rights of mentally ill	
12/8	Civil commitment/rights of mentally ill	
12/10 Q-12	Catch up and review	
12/21	Final Exam (150 points): Tuesday 1-3	

I reserve the right to alter the class schedule during the semester. Q=quiz.