

Psychology and Law (LAW402)
Fall, 2004
Tom Lyon, J.D., Ph.D.

101 von KleinSmid Center (VKC)
Wednesdays, 2-4:50

Office: Law 468. Mail code: 0071
Phone: (213) 740-0142
e-mail: tlyon@law.usc.edu

Office hours: Wednesdays, 9-12, in Room 468 of the Law School. Feel free to contact me for an appointment.

Course description and goals:

This course will explore the contrasting ways in which psychology and the law address issues of credibility and responsibility. In discussing credibility, we will examine how the law assesses witnesses' honesty and accuracy. In discussing responsibility, we will focus on distinctions that the law makes between intentional and unintentional behavior. In both areas, we will discover that legal intuitions are challenged by psychological findings regarding the influence of other people, unconscious biases, and traumatic events on our beliefs and desires. In the credibility portion of the course we will cover repressed memory, child witnesses, rape, false confessions, and predicting dangerousness. In the responsibility portion of the course we will discuss the insanity defense, involuntary confessions, war crimes, and battered persons.

The course has two major goals: (1) to give students in-depth exposure to psychological theories and research that have implications for legal decisionmaking; and (2) to enhance students' understanding of the legal process and how it reacts to psychological research.

Course requirements:

Readings:

Readings will be available through the assignments page of Blackboard.

Lecture notes:

Copies of the Powerpoint slides will be available through the course documents page of Blackboard.

Grades:

Grades will be based on three things:

1. There will be a Midterm exam (consisting of ½ multiple choice and ½ short answers) on October 13. It will be worth 30% of your final grade.

2. A 5-page paper will be due on the last day of class, December 1. It will be worth 20% of your grade. I will assign a topic (or give you a choice among topics), and you will not conduct any research for the paper, but will need to have read your course materials.

3. The final exam will take place on Friday, December 10 from 11-1. It will consist of ½ multiple choice and ½ short answers. It will be worth 50% of your grade.

Exam policies:

Exams must be taken on the scheduled day, at the scheduled time. Exceptions will be made only in cases of family hardship or verifiable medical problems and then only at the professor's discretion.

Students with disabilities:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Academic honesty:

Cheating on an exam (e.g. copying another's answers, using crib sheets) or plagiarism on written assignments (e.g. quoting material from readings without citation, copying another student's work) constitutes grounds for a grade of zero on that assignment, and potentially for failure of the entire course. If you have any questions about what practices are acceptable, ask the professor BEFORE an assignment is due.

Syllabus

1. August 25

Part I: Credibility

2. September 1 Repressed Memory (1)

3. September 8 Repressed Memory (2)

4. September 15 Child Witnesses

5. September 22 Rape: Rape trauma syndrome and Rape shield statutes

6. September 29 Confessions: Reliability

7. October 6 Predicting dangerousness and clinical biases

8. October 13 MIDTERM (I will be out of town)

Part II: Responsibility

9. October 20 Insanity Defense

10. October 27 Confessions: Voluntariness

11. November 3 War Crimes

12. November 10 Battered Persons (1)

13. November 17 Battered Persons (2)

14. November 24 Overview

15. December 1 Field Trip