

## PSYC4559: CRIMINAL MINDS: THE SCIENCE OF FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

Fall Semester 2015

### **WHO, WHEN, WHERE**

**Instructor:** Lucy Guarnera, MA

**Time:** 3:30-6:00 PM

**Office Hours:** TBD and by appointment

**Instructor Office:** Gilmer 300D

**Location:** Dell 2, Room 102

**Email:** [lag8e@virginia.edu](mailto:lag8e@virginia.edu)

**Last day to add a class:** Tuesday, September 8, 2015

**Last day to drop a class:** Wednesday, September 9, 2015. *This class has a long waitlist. So as a courtesy to other students, if you do decide to drop this class (although I hope none of you do!), please do so through SIS as early as possible in order to open up space for someone else.*

### **WHERE ARE WE GOING IN THIS CLASS?**

*Psychopaths. The insanity defense. Sexually violent predators. Criminal profiling.* Such forensic psychology topics feature prominently in the public imagination, and it's easy to see why! Forensic psychology is an attempt to use scientific inquiry to answer complex legal questions about the mental states and behavior of individual human beings, questions like...

- Are individuals who commit heinous, incomprehensible crimes “mad” or “bad”—or both, or neither?
- How do we decide when, if ever, mental problems excuse violence and other criminal behavior?
- Are some people “born bad” and fated to commit crimes?

Perhaps even more importantly for students of psychology, forensic psychology also makes us ask difficult questions about psychological science itself: *What is it? What isn't it? What do we wish it could be?* Forensic psychology began almost 200 years ago as an intuitive, impressionistic art more than a science, with predictably invalid results. Yet the media continues to push this image of the rogue forensic psychologist with uncanny, almost supernatural insight into the criminal mind (e.g., *Criminal Minds*, *Dexter*, *Law and Order: SVU*, *Sherlock*, *Hannibal*, *The Mentalist*, etc. etc. etc.). Modern forensic psychology has become less mystical and more accurate as it has embraced rigorous scientific techniques. However, these continuing scientific advances make us question the limits of empirical inquiry when it comes making legal decisions predicated on *knowing an individual's mental state or predicting an individual's future behavior.*

So to sum it up, your Big Question for this course—the one we'll come back to over and over again, look at from every angle, and try to piece together some sort of understanding—is ***“What can and can't psychological science actually tell us when it comes to the 'criminal mind'?”***

## WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

If you participate inside and outside class, read the assigned material, and work hard on your assignments, by the end of the course you will be a forensic practitioner-in-training able to....

1. Describe the psychological procedures and legal bases underlying common forensic evaluations
2. Integrate *legal requirements* and *psychological evidence* to produce sophisticated forensic writing designed to guide legal decision-makers' understanding of forensic issues
3. Evaluate the benefits and limits of empirical research to inform forensic decision-making in individual cases, particularly when there may be no "ground truth" to be discovered
4. Critically reflect on the ethical dilemmas inherent in forensic psychology, how the field has tried to resolve these dilemmas, and how *you* might try to resolve these dilemmas for yourself as a practitioner-in-training
5. Cultivate an empathetic perspective toward individuals who are the subjects of forensic evaluation, and considering this human dimension when making decision about complex forensic issues
6. Analyze media portrayals of forensic psychology by contrasting the public imagination of forensic psychology with the current state of the field, and communicate your thinking effectively to others

## HOW ARE YOU GOING TO LEARN THESE THINGS?

In all sorts of ways! This is a small, interactive seminar where you will learn to think like a forensic psychologist and do the sorts of the things that forensic psychologists do. In order to learn how to do these things, you can looking forward to....

- Reading important scholarly works in the field and analyzing them with your peers on online discussion boards
- Interactive lectures, including guest lectures by experts in various domains of forensic psychology
- Teaching and learning from your peers through in-class presentations
- Observing a real forensic evaluation and real forensic psychologists at work through collaboration with UVA's Institute of Law, Psychiatry, and Public Policy (<http://cacsprd.web.virginia.edu/ILPPP>)
- In-class discussions, debates, and other learning activities grounded in the research literature to prepare you for...
- Tackling complex assignments that approximate real forensic work, including writing a forensic report and participating in a mock trial
- Communicating with me via email, office hours, or individually-scheduled meetings to discuss your learning—the best forensic psychologist routinely consult with colleagues to get feedback and suggestions for improvements, so start now as a practitioner-in-training!

## HOW WILL WE KNOW THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED ALL THIS?

<i>Learning Assessments</i>	<i>Percentage of Final Grade</i>	<i>Due Date</i>
1. Weekly reading discussion board posts (2 per week)	25%	
2. Leading a discussion (in pairs): Current event (1-2 pages)	5%	
3. In-class debate and write-up (2-3 pages)	10%	
4. Forensic report and self-reflection (6.5-8 pages)	25%	
5. In-class mock trial and write-up (2-4 pages)	25%	
6. Brief presentation (in pairs): Media analysis (1-2 pages)	10%	

- 1. WEEKLY READING DISCUSSION BOARD (25%):** Most weeks you will have assigned readings (posted on Collab by week) so that you learn foundational knowledge necessary for the more advanced analysis and application we'll do in class and on your other assignments. I've purposely selected a limited number of readings that are critically important to your learning, so you can feel confident that you can actually complete *all* the reading *every* week. Since people learn best when they critically engage with the same material from multiple angles, you will participate on an online discussion board with your peers (moderated by me). Prompted by guiding questions on the reading I will post each week, you will post an opening statement and then comment on at least one other person's post. A more detailed rubric is forthcoming.
- 2. LEADING A DISCUSSION (IN PAIRS): CURRENT EVENT (5%):** To help you learn critically analyze the forensic psychology issues you will come into contact with throughout your life, with a partner you will locate a relatively current news media article and lead the class in a 10-12 minute discussion about the forensic issues at play. Your discussion should help your peers think about the legal/ethical/practical problems at play, possible outcomes for the defendant, and how research might guide the decision-maker in the article. To help you think critically in advance so that you can succeed at leading this discussion, you will be required to post a 1-2 page document (detailed rubric forthcoming) prior to your presentation. A sign-up sheet for presentation days will be distributed in the first week of class; one pair will present each class period.
- 3. IN-CLASS DEBATE AND WRITE-UP (10%):** To help you critically reflect on the legal/ethical/practical dilemmas that arise around forensic issues, we will have an in-class debate surrounding the following position statement: "*Sexually Violent Predator (SVP) laws strike a good balance between protecting the public from sexual violence and protecting the rights of individuals convicted of sexual offenses.*" You will be assigned into debate teams in advance and given time to prepare your arguments, particularly researching the empirical evidence that may inform your thinking. To help you reflect on your own resolution (or lack of one) to this ethical dilemma, you will be required to post a 2-3 page self-reflection (detailed rubric forthcoming) following the debate.
- 4. FORENSIC REPORT AND SELF-REFLECTION (25%):** We'll be working all semester on integrating *legal requirements* and *psychological evidence* to produce sophisticated forensic writing designed to guide legal decision-makers' understanding of forensic issues. This forensic report is your chance to

show all you've learned. As a forensic practitioner-in-training, you'll view portions of a real videotaped forensic interview, review collateral data on the defendant, and then write a forensic report (5-6 pages) crafting a convincing, empirically sound argument for why the defendant does or does not meet the legal standard (rubric forthcoming). To help you reflect on the real-world significance of the problem your forensic report is trying to solve and cultivate an empathetic perspective toward individuals who are the subjects of forensic evaluations, you'll also write a brief (1.5-2 page) self-reflection about your personal wrestling with the defendant and your forensic opinion. Detailed rubric for both parts of this assignment is forthcoming.

5. **IN-CLASS MOCK TRIAL AND WRITE-UP (25%)**: We'll build upon all the work you did on the forensic report through an in-class mock trial involving a "battle of the experts" who disagree about the ultimate opinion. You will be given significant in-class time to prepare with your classmates and determine roles in the mock trial (expert witnesses, prosecuting attorneys, defense attorneys). To help you organize and synthesize your thoughts about the case, you will post a brief (1-2 page document) on Collab before the mock trial, which will be videotaped. To help you wrestle with your role in the adversarial process, in particular issues of bias and objectivity, you will review the videotape of the mock trial and post a brief (1-2 page) self-reflection. Detailed rubric for both parts of this assignment is forthcoming. The more you get into the mock trial, the more successful (and fun!) it will be—costumes, props, etc. are highly encouraged.
6. **BRIEF CLASS PRESENTATION (IN PAIRS): MEDIA ANALYSIS (10%)**: To help you learn to compare the public imagination of forensic psychology with what you have learned about the current state of the field, in pairs you will locate an entertainment media (TV, movie, comic book, etc.) example of forensic psychology and give a 7-10 minute class presentation on the example you've chosen. In your presentation, you will discuss the accuracies and inaccuracies of the media portrayal based on what we've learned in class and your own research, as well as considering what your media example says about what society *wishes* forensic psychology could be. Detailed rubric forthcoming. To help you think critically in advance so that you can succeed at this presentation, you will be required to post a 1-2 page document (rubric forthcoming) on Collab prior to the day you present.

### ***WHERE CAN YOU LOOK FOR IMPORTANT INFORMATION?***

There is no required textbook for this class. Required weekly readings (mostly academic journal articles) are posted online, as well as supplemental readings if you need or want more information. And since real forensic psychologists use all kinds of resources to help them in their work (peer-reviewed articles, handbooks, textbooks, online resources, legal statutes and commentaries, published instrument guides, popular press articles, etc.), you are free to look far and wide to get the information you need to learn. Therefore, make sure to bring a web-powered device (smartphone, iPad, laptop, etc.) to class with you every day to help you learn—some days we'll use it, some days we won't, but I want you to have it available. We'll talk a lot more about use of devices in class when we first meet together.

And of course, never hesitate to ask me or your classmates for help if you don't know where to look to get what you need.

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### Weekly Class Schedule

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Class	Date	Topics	To do BEFORE today's class to begin learning / show what you've learned	Some things we'll watch & do in class to help you learn
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**Theme: Do we even need forensic psychology?**

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|---|---------|--|---|---|
| 1 | Aug. 27 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ What is forensic psychology, anyway?</li><li>▪ Introduction to forensic assessment</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ [Readings + discussion board posts]</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ "Mad Love," <i>Batman: The Animated Series</i> (TV clip)</li><li>▪ <i>Primal Fear</i> (film clip)</li><li>▪ Group discussion (modeling current event assessment)<br/>– Pannetti &amp; competency to be executed</li><li>▪ Sign-up sheet for current event discussions distributed</li></ul> |
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| 5 | Sept. 24 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sexually Violent Predator (SVP) laws</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ [Readings + discussion board posts]</li> <li>▪ Watch your forensic interview with your team outside-of-class</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Class presentation: Current event (3/9)</li> <li>▪ In-class prep time for debate</li> <li>▪ In-class debate: SVP laws</li> </ul> |
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**Can psychologists and lawyers ever get along?**

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| 6 | Oct. 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Competency to stand trial</li> <li>▪ The insanity defense</li> <li>▪ Introduction to structured assessment instruments</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ [Readings + discussion board posts]</li> <li>▪ Post debate self-reflection on Collab by 9 AM</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Class presentation: Current event (4/9)</li> <li>▪ In-class practice: Making a forensic argument</li> <li>▪ Prep for forensic report: Check your bias by completing “evidence for” and “evidence against” sheet</li> </ul> |
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**Theme: Do some people just have “bad brains”?**

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| 7 | Oct. 8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Neuroscience in the courtroom</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ [Readings + discussion board posts]</li> <li>▪ Bring a draft of your work-in-progress forensic report to class (minimum: 4 pages)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Class presentation: Current event (5/9)</li> <li>▪ Prep for forensic report: Writing workshop for forensic reports</li> </ul> |
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**Can forensic psychologists help catch “bad guys”?**

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| 8 | Oct. 15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Forensic psychology at the FBI</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ [Readings + discussion board posts]</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Field trip to Institute of Law, Psychiatry, &amp; Public Policy!</li> <li>▪ Case conference at ILPPP</li> <li>▪ Guest lecture on forensic psychology at the FBI by Janet Warren, DSW, at ILPPP</li> </ul>                      |
| 9 | Oct. 22 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Criminal profiling</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ [Readings + discussion board posts]</li> <li>▪ Post your final forensic report by 9 AM on Collab</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Class presentation: Current event (6/9)</li> <li>▪ In-class demonstration: Cold reading</li> <li>▪ Mini-lecture: Criminal profiling</li> <li>▪ <i>Sherlock</i> (TV clip)</li> <li>▪ <i>Criminal Minds</i> (TV clip)</li> </ul> |

**Can forensic psychologists be objective in the courtroom?**

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| 10 | Oct. 29 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bias &amp; objectivity in forensic psychology</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ [Readings + discussion board posts]</li> <li>▪ Post your forensic self-reflection on Collab by 9 AM</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Class presentation: Current event (7/9)</li> <li>▪ Guest lecture on bias &amp; objectivity by Daniel Murrie, PhD</li> <li>▪ Mock trial introduced; group prep time for mock trial</li> </ul> |
| 11 | Nov. 5  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expert testimony</li> </ul>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ [Readings + discussion board posts]</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Class presentation: Current event (8/9)</li> <li>▪ Guest lecture on expert testimony by Dewey Cornell, PhD</li> <li>▪ Group prep time for mock trial</li> </ul>                              |



- 12 Nov. 12
- Mock trial
- Post your mock trial script by 9 AM
- Mock trials on Collab

**What do we do when treading lightly with a vulnerable defendant might put innocent people in danger?**

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| 13 | Nov. 19 | ▪ Forensic psychology roundup | ▪ [Readings + discussion board posts]<br>▪ Watch the video of yourself in the mock trial<br>▪ Post your (2) self-reflection on Collab by 9 AM | ▪ Class presentation: Current event (9/9)<br>▪ Jigsaw peer teaching activity: (1) Mental health courts and other novel approaches, (2) civil commitment, (3) interrogation of high-value detainees, including “enhanced interrogation,” (4) competency to confess, including among juveniles<br>▪ Partner prep time for media analysis presentation |
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**November 26 – THANKSGIVING DAY**

**What does the public imagine forensic psychology to be—and why?**

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| 15 | Dec. 3 | ▪ The public imagination of forensic psychology | ▪ [Readings + discussion board posts]<br>▪ Post your media analysis write-up by 9 AM on Collab | ▪ Class presentations: Media analysis (10 x 10 minutes)<br>▪ Concept mapping – the big ideas of the class<br>▪ |
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