

## Special Problems 4900.751

### Instructor Information

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### Course Description, Structure, and Objectives

This course consists of guided studies of real criminal cases where the misinterpretation and/or misapplication of forensic science resulted in miscarriages of justice. Through this study, future forensic scientists will be more aware of not only the application of forensic science in criminal investigations but how their work may be misused and result in wrongful convictions, as well as correctly used to overturn the same wrongful convictions.

Students should have successfully completed introductory forensic classes. It is strongly recommended that students have completed BIOL 4590 Forensic Molecular Biology or at least BIOL 4570 BIOL 4570 - Biochemistry and Molecular Biology of the Gene.

Students are required to sign a non-disclosure agreement with the Innocence Project of Texas. Breach of this agreement will result in academic penalties and potential legal action.

#### Subject matter warning

***By the nature of its intersection with the criminal justice system, the material covered in this course will necessitate the use of graphic imagery and discussion of difficult subject matter such as, but not limited to, homicide, sexual assault, and violent crimes against persons, children, and/or animals. Students are forewarned that frank discussion of the details of such incidents is paramount in discovering potential biological evidence for forensic testing and is an integral part of a career in forensic science. Students are encouraged to support each other, be mindful of their classmates, and bring any concerns they have to the instructor immediately. The instructor is available by email, during office hours, or by appointment.***

### Required/Recommended\* Materials

None required.

Students that do not have the prerequisites in forensic molecular biology or human genetics should refer to John Butler's books on Forensic DNA Analysis.

Technology requirements for courses with digital materials:

This course has digital components. To fully participate in this class, students will need internet access to reference content on the Canvas Learning Management System. Students will need access to webcam and microphone for optional remote delivery of material if in-person classes are not possible due to inclement weather, etc. Exams/Assignments may require the use of computer/device during class time. If circumstances change, you will be informed of other technical needs to access course content. Information on how to be successful in a digital learning environment can be found at [Learn Anywhere](https://online.unt.edu/learn) (<https://online.unt.edu/learn>).

## How to Succeed in this Course

### Attendance

If a student has a legitimate reason for an absence, this should be communicated with the instructor prior to the absence whenever possible. ***Students are responsible for material covered in the lectures whether or not they attend class. Opportunities to earn extra points may be available during class.***

Research has shown that students who attend class are more likely to be successful. You should attend every class unless you have a university excused absence such as active military service, a religious holy day, or an official university function as stated in the Student Attendance and Authorized Absences Policy (PDF)([https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.039\\_StudAttnandAuthAbsence.Pub2\\_.19.pdf](https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.039_StudAttnandAuthAbsence.Pub2_.19.pdf)).

***Absence for Religious Holidays:*** (<http://www.unt.edu/catalog/undergrad/enrollment.htm>): A student absent due to the observance of a religious holiday may take examinations/complete assignments scheduled for the day(s) missed within a reasonable time after the absence. Class participants must notify the instructor, in writing, of planned absences for religious holidays by the 12th day of the beginning of the class.

***Participation in University Sponsored Activities:*** such as athletics, debate, musical organizations, AFROTC, class field trips, etc., must be authorized by the student's academic dean. Within three days after the absence, students must obtain authorized absence cards from the Dean of Students for presentation to their instructors.

***Absence for Military Service:*** In accordance with section 51.9111 of the Texas Education Code, a student is excused from attending classes or engaging in other required activities, including exams, if he or she is called to active military service of a reasonably brief duration. The maximum time for which the student may be excused has been defined by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board as “no more than 25 percent of the total number of class meetings or the contact hour equivalent (not including the final examination period) for the specific course or courses in which the student is currently enrolled at the beginning of the period of active military service.” The student will be allowed a reasonable time after the absence to complete assignments and take exams. Policies affecting students who withdraw from the University for Military Service is given in the Withdrawal section.

***COVID-19 Impact on Attendance:*** Students are expected to attend class meetings regularly and to abide by the attendance policy established for the course. It is important that you communicate with the professor and the instructional team prior to being absent, so you, the professor, and the instructional team can discuss and mitigate the impact of the absence on your attainment of course learning goals. Please inform the professor and instructional team if you are unable to attend class meetings because you are ill, in mindfulness of the health and safety of everyone in our community.

If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>) please seek medical attention from the Student Health and Wellness Center (940-565-2333 or [askSHWC@unt.edu](mailto:askSHWC@unt.edu)) or your health care provider PRIOR to coming to campus. UNT also requires you to contact the UNT COVID Team at [COVID@unt.edu](mailto:COVID@unt.edu) for guidance on actions to take due to symptoms, pending or positive test results, or potential exposure.

It is important for all of us to be mindful of the health and safety of everyone in our community, especially given concerns about COVID-19. Please contact me if you are unable to attend class because you are ill, or unable to attend class due to a related issue regarding COVID-19.

### ADA accommodation

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodation at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members can ask students to discuss such letters during their office hours to protect the student's privacy. For additional information, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](http://www.unt.edu/oda) website (<http://www.unt.edu/oda>). You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323. A student needing accommodation can connect with the [Office of Disability Access](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access) to begin the registering process (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>).

### Communication

Active discussion in the classroom and on Canvas is encouraged. Interactions with your fellow students and the instructors enrich the learning experience. Opportunities will be available throughout the course for extensive interaction. Active participation is essential to success.

Students may also connect with the instructor through email and/or by attending office hours. During busy times, email becomes full, so if a response is not forthcoming within two business days, please send a follow up email. A gentle nudge is always appreciated. Office hours offer an opportunity to ask for clarification or find support with understanding class material. Additional office hours, in person and virtually, will be offered as the semester concludes. Your success is our goal.

*Communication through Canvas messaging is preferred over direct email for any communication related to the course.*

## Successful Learning Environment

The value of the diversity of perspectives students bring to our campus is integral to a successful learning environment. The classroom culture relies on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion of all perspectives. All discussions should be respectful and civil. Although disagreements and debates are encouraged, personal attacks are unacceptable.

Every student in this class should have the right to learn and engage within an environment of respect and courtesy from others. Please review UNT's student code of conduct so that we can all start with the same baseline civility understanding (Code of Student Conduct) (<https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>).

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004) The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic

protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities.

The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate. Acceptable Student Behavior Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. Visit UNT's Code of Student Conduct (Links to an external site.) (<https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>) to learn more. Student Evaluation Administration Dates Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course.

## Course Requirements/Schedule and Assessment

This course meets weekly in-person. Each session will consist of guided discussion as students review criminal case materials. Student performance is assessed based on participation and contribution to the discussion (oral) and a final (individual) written "defense" report.

### Grading

A = 90%

B = 80%

C = 70%

D = 60%

F = 50%

### Academic Integrity

There is a **ZERO-TOLERANCE** policy in this course for violations of the Academic Integrity Policy. The nature of forensic science is such that any violation signifies an egregious ethical breach that is unacceptable in the field and it would be unconscionable to allow such a person to practice forensic science.

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

Unless otherwise indicated, work independently at all times; do not look at or copy the work of another student, former or current. Do not allow another student, current or future, to look at or copy your work. You are responsible for ensuring computer files related to coursework are password protected. Do not submit written work that is identical or highly similar to websites or published works. Do not submit written work without citing the source of all information. Do not submit written work generated by artificial intelligence (e.g., Chat GPT).

## Other Policies and Information

The **student evaluation of instruction** is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13, 14 and 15 of the long semesters to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem

Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey, they will receive a confirmation email. For additional information, please visit the SPOT website (Links to an external site.) (<http://spot.unt.edu/>) or email [spot@unt.edu](mailto:spot@unt.edu).

### Sexual Assault Prevention

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. UNT's Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim's compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at [SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu](mailto:SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu) or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565- 2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at [oeo@unt.edu](mailto:oeo@unt.edu) or at (940) 565 2759.