

Criminal Justice Seminar: *Wrongful Convictions*
01:202:388
Program in Criminal Justice
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Spring 2016 Syllabus

Monday and Wednesday, 5 pm to 6:20 pm

Location: B269 Lucy Stone Hall

Instructor: Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg

Email: elizabethwg@gmail.com

Office Hours: Monday's, 3:45-4:45 pm, location: A355 Lucy Stone Hall

Course Overview: This course will cover the causes of wrongful conviction, including eyewitness misidentifications, false confessions, racism, media bias, and faulty forensic science. Case studies will be used to illustrate these causes. The course will include both lectures and discussions so please come prepared to discuss assigned readings so you can help contribute to an informed and interesting discussion!

Grading: Your grade will be determined by:

20% Attendance (Students are asked to sign-in at every class; absences for illness or personal emergencies will not be counted against student's participation grade. If you are going to be absent, please email the instructor ahead of time.)

20% February 22 assignment

20% March assignment

20% Midterm paper

20% Final Exam

Accommodations: If you require [special accommodations](#), please let me know.

Student Services: Information on student services can be found at the end of the syllabus.

Classroom Environment: Imagine a time before cell phones, texting, Facebook, or even the Internet! During class, phones should be turned to silent and put away. If you are taking notes on a computer, please do not surf the Internet, chat, etc. Violations will result in being marked absent for the class. If your phone has to be on during class, please discuss with me prior to class beginning.

Schedule of Classes and Assignment Due Dates

January 20: Course Introduction

Unit 1: Eyewitness Misidentifications

Assigned Reading: January 25: *Picking Cotton* by Jennifer Thompson-Cannino, Ronald Cotton, Erin Torneo, Chapters 1-8

January 27: *Picking Cotton*, Part 3 and Afterword

February 1: No assigned reading

Unit 2: False Confessions and the Power of a Guilty Narrative

February 3: Assigned Reading: [The Interview](#)

Why Confessions Trump Innocence (Instructor has PDF to share electronically)

[Coerced to Confess: The Psychology of False Confessions](#)

Assigned Viewing: *The Confessions*

February 8, 10: Assigned Reading: *The Wrong Guys* by Tom Wells and Richard Leo, Chapters 1-6

February 15, 17: *The Wrong Guys*, Chapters 7-13

Assignment Due February 22: You're sitting at dinner and a family member or friend says, "I would never confess to something I didn't do." What do you say? Please answer in a 3-5 double spaced paper.

Unit 3: The Central Park Five Case

February 22, 24: Assigned Viewing: *The Central Park Five*

Assigned Reading: *The Central Park Five* by Sarah Burns, Preface and Chapters 1, 2 and 3

[My Son Has Been Suspended Five Times. He's 3.](#)

February 29: Assigned Reading: [Enabling False Confessions](#)

Assignment Due February 29: Bring in a media report of a crime. The report can cover arrest, trial or conviction. We will discuss the reports in class.

March 2: *During this class we will discuss the Midterm questions. If you are unable to attend, please let me know.*

Assignment Due March 2: Select current news reports on an arrest, trial and conviction (choose 3-5 stories total, it need not be on the same case.) Analyze this coverage: How much space is attributed to each party? Is evidence viewed critically? What impression is given to the reader - guilt, innocence, or neutral? How is this impression conveyed? What questions are not asked? How could the reporting be improved? Please answer in a 5 page double spaced paper.

March 7: Guest Speaker, Edwin Grimsley, Senior Case Analyst at the Innocence Project

Assigned Reading: [What Wrongful Convictions Teach Us About Racial Inequality](#)
[African American Wrongful Convictions Today](#)

[Lessons About Black Youth and Wrongful Convictions: Three Things You Should Know](#)

March 12-20: Spring Recess - Enjoy! :)

March 21: Midterm Paper Due

Midterm Assignment:

Choose one of the following questions to answer in a 5-10 page paper (double-spaced):

- Choose two of the defendants in the Norfolk Four and explain why they confessed to crimes they did not commit.
- View the movie, Inside Out. How does the movie portray memory? How does this portrayal conflict with the lessons learned from eyewitness misidentification cases? How could the movie have portrayed memory in a more accurate manner? (For assistance, check out [this piece](#) on the subject.)
- How did the confessions in the Norfolk Four impact the case and those tasked with investigating, and prosecuting or defending the defendants?
- Did race play a role in the media coverage of the Central Park Five? Please explain.

You are welcome to hand in the paper early if you like!

Unit 4: Forensic Science Unit

March 23: Assigned Reading: [The Forensic Confirmation Bias](#)

March 28 and 30: Assigned Reading: [Shaken Baby Syndrome Faces New Questions in Court](#)

[A Disputed Diagnosis Imprisons Parents](#) (Parts 1, 2 and 3)

Unit 5: Introduction to DNA Testing

March 30: Guest Speaker: Maggie Taylor, Senior Case Analyst at the Innocence Project (2005-2015)

April 4: Using DNA to Exonerate the Innocent

Unit 6: Incentivized Witnesses

April 6: Assigned Reading: [The Snitch System](#)

[Beyond Unreliable: How Snitches Contribute to Wrongful Convictions](#)

Unit 7: Cognitive Dissonance and Tunnel Vision

April 11 and 13: Assigned Reading: [A Grave Injustice in Arkansas](#)

Mistakes Were Made But Not By Me by Carol Tavris, Elliot Aronson, Chapters 1 and 5
[The Dark Dangers of Tunnel Vision](#)

Unit 8: How do we prevent wrongful convictions and free the innocent?

April 18: Guest Speaker (via Skype): Bridgette Jones, Belynda Goff's daughter

April 25: Assigned Reading: [Recent Rash of Exonerations Only the Surface by Exoneree Jeff Deskovic](#)

Unit 9: More Than Innocence: Innocence in the Context of the American Justice System

April 27: Assigned reading: [Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and the End of Innocence Bryan Stevenson: America's Mandela](#)

May 2: Final Exam Review

May 11: Final Exam

Enjoy your summer! :)

Student-Wellness Services:

Just In Case Web App

<http://codu.co/cee05e>

Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/ rhscaps.rutgers.edu/

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 / vpva.rutgers.edu/

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call **848-932-1181**.

Disability Services

(848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

The Office of Disability Services works with students with a documented disability to determine the eligibility of reasonable accommodations, facilitates and coordinates those accommodations when applicable, and lastly engages with the Rutgers community at large to provide and connect students to appropriate resources.

Scarlet Listeners

(732) 247-5555 / <http://www.scarletlisteners.com/>

Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space.