

CCJ 4934 Wrongful Convictions

Spring 2024

9:35 – 10:25 Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays | Little Hall 0127

Course Description:

As of December 2023, the National Registry of Exonerations has documented over 3,400 cases where an innocent individual was convicted and exonerated of a crime they did not commit. Research has focused on causes of wrongful convictions and preventing future wrongful convictions. This course offers an introductory and interdisciplinary approach to understanding wrongful convictions. The purpose of this course is to educate students on factors contributing to wrongful convictions, societal and individual consequences of wrongful convictions, as well as examine potential policy and procedural safeguards to prevent further wrongful convictions.

Instructor:

Shelby Mikkelson
Pronouns:
she/her/hers

Email:

s.mikkelson@ufl.edu

Please include “CCJ 4934” in the subject line.
Or use the Canvas email system.

Email is the easiest and most effective way to reach me.
During the work week (Monday – Friday) you can expect a response from me within 48 hours. After 4 PM on Friday, this changes to 72 hours. This means you should plan ahead for questions that require a response by a certain day/time.

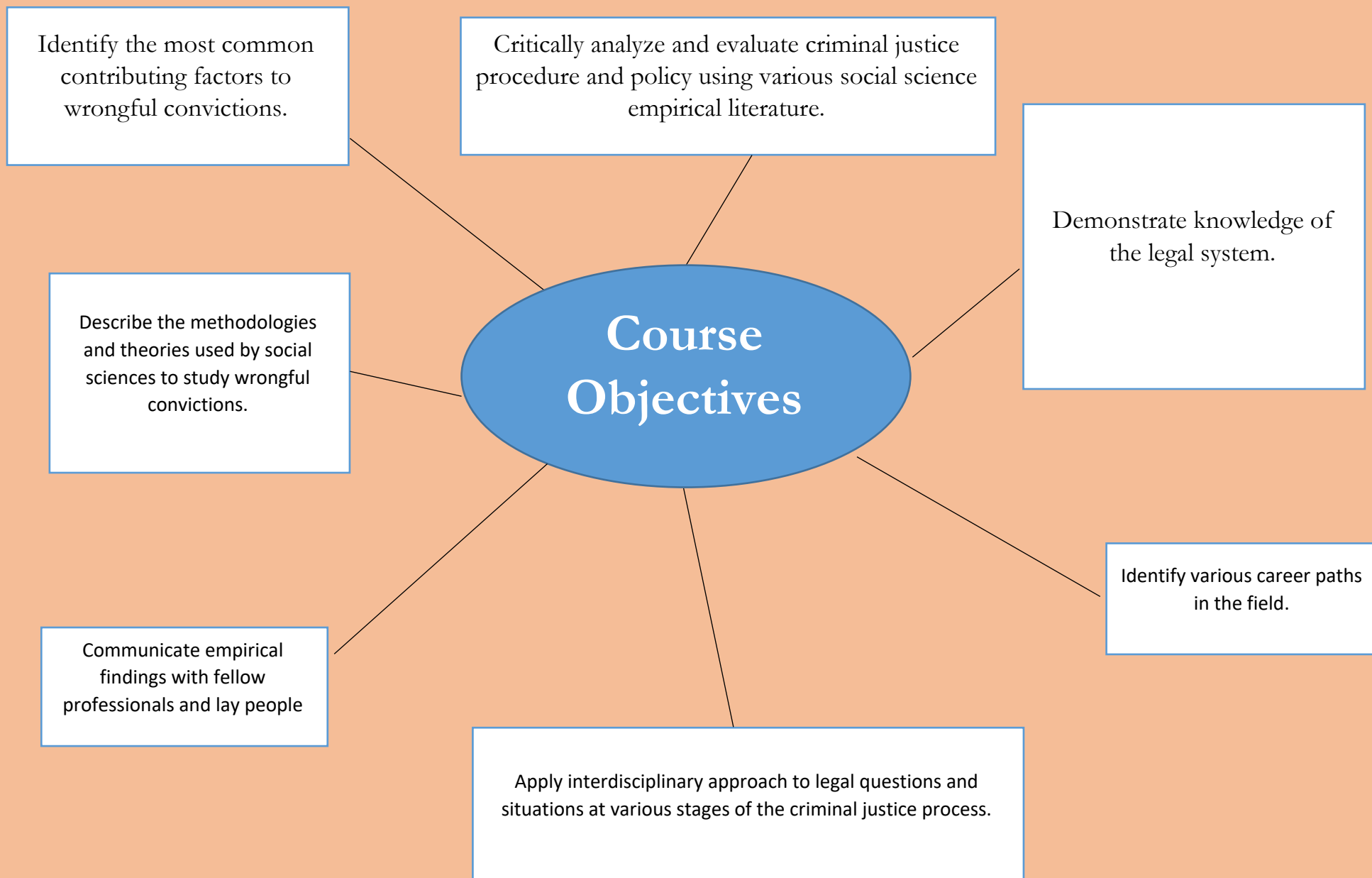
Student Hours:

Mondays
11:00 – 1:00 pm in
Turlington 3349

Textbook & Other Materials

When Justice Fails by Robert J. Norris, Catherine L. Bonventre & James R. Acker

While we have a **required** textbook, we will also be reading peer-reviewed articles, listening to various TED Talks, podcast episodes, and documentaries. Articles and links will be provided, podcasts and documentaries will be publicly available.



Assessments

Case Analysis - 35%

Criminology, psychology and law scholars investigate why wrongful conviction occurs and seek to create science-based policy and procedures to prevent future wrongful convictions. A practical application of research is to provide analysis of what occurred in individual cases, educating juries, attorneys, and judges about the factors can contribute to wrongful conviction.

For this assignment, you will choose an exoneration case with at least two causes of the wrongful conviction. You will need to: 1) provide a summary of the case, 2) use the social scientific literature to explain the most likely reasons the wrongful conviction occurred in the first place, and 3) make any policy changing recommendations that you believe would prevent similar wrongful convictions from occurring in the future.

You will present your case analysis to the class the last week of class. Be aware of the multiple deadlines listed on the syllabus, and the rubric is available on Canvas.

Discussion Facilitation – 10%

You will be assigned to groups at the beginning of the semester. The assigned group will be expected to use the posted weekly discussion questions to facilitate and lead the class in a large discussion focused on the readings and topic.

It is encouraged that the leading group focus on leading the discussion in a way that produces a respectful and scientific discussion on the given topic (the research, real world applications, etc.).

You will be graded separately based on participation in leading the class discussion. If you are absent when

Weekly Reflections – 15%

While I believe attendance and participation are highly important in a class such as this, I will not be grading students on just showing up to class. Instead, you will be assessing your own level of participation in class each week. You will write a short (1 to 2 page, single spaced) reflection paper on the week. The reflection paper should discuss different things the student has learned from the readings and/or materials and class discussions that week. There are 15 of these assigned, 13 are required (if more than 12 are completed, the lowest 1 or 2 won't be included in final grade).

*I reserve the right to agree/disagree with the student's self-assessment grade – this means I can grade differently by either adding or deducting points. Bottom line – you expect me in class everyday, I expect the same from you.

Reflections are due on Fridays.

Weekly Discussion Questions – 5%

To better prepare for a class wide discussion each week, you will be required to submit a discussion question every week. These are due on Mondays. You will be graded on the quality of the question. It is recommended that questions focus on the readings surrounding that week's topic.

Quality discussion questions should focus on the research in the reading, possible real world applications, potential policy implications, etc.

Questions are due on Mondays.

In Class Activities – 15%

Throughout the semester, there will be various in class activities or assignments. The purpose of these assignments is to further our discussion about various topics. You must be present in class, and participate in the activity/assignment in order to receive points. These cannot be made up at any time.

You can plan on at least one a week.

Monday "Check-In" – 5%

It is expected that you will read the readings before class on Mondays. In order to evaluate your preparation for class, a question will be presented on Mondays, at the beginning of class, and you will submit a response to the question.

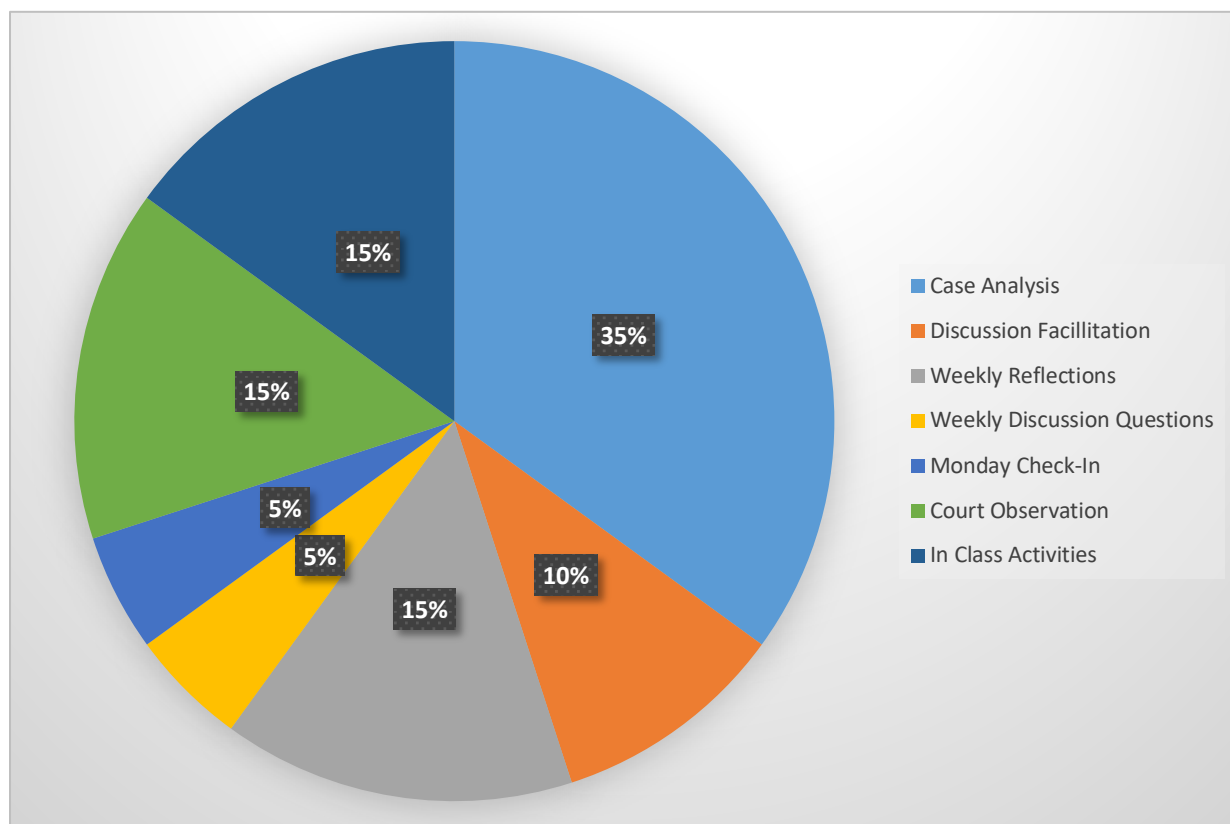
You must be present in class, and provide a thorough response, to demonstrate preparedness, to receive points. These cannot be made up at any time. Please note that these are completed in class.

Court Observation – 15%

One piece of understanding how wrongful convictions can occur is through understanding the criminal trial process. Many criminology courses provide the theoretical view to how the court works. The purpose of this assignment is for you to observe criminal court. You will be expected to observe a day in criminal court, and take notes. You will then write a 1-2 reflection paper on your observations, as well as provide the notes you took during your observation.

This assignment can be completed at any time during the semester, before the deadline, and in any jurisdiction. Alachua County Courthouse is allowing the public to observe trials. 😊

Grading



Percentage	Letter Grade
93% and up	A
90 – 92%	A-
87 – 89%	B+
83 – 86%	B
80 – 82%	B-
77 – 79%	C+
73 – 76%	C
70 – 72%	C-
67 – 69%	D+
63 – 66%	D
60 – 62%	D-
59% and below	E

Note: I do not round up or add points at the end of the semester, so please do not ask. However, you will be given extra credit opportunities this semester. I encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities! These opportunities are offered fairly to everyone, unlike arbitrarily asking me to award extra points on an individual basis at the end of the semester.

Course Policies

Disputing Grades

All grades are posted on Canvas throughout the semester. It is your responsibility to review your grades regularly. Should you have a grading question, please reach out to me. If you have questions about your grade on an assignment, you have **72 hours** after the grade is posted on Canvas in which to inquire about your grade (or, petition for point changes based on justifiable criteria). After that time period, the grade stands. I reserve the right to re-grade your entire assignment, in the situation you raise serious questions about how something was graded. This means your grade may go up or down. I do my best to provide extensive feedback when I am grading, but I am always open to listening to respectful discussion on your grades.

However, you can ask questions about class material at any point to increase your understanding of what you did.

Make-up Work

All make-up work is the student's responsibility. If you know you may miss a class, inform me as soon as possible. I understand that sometimes life just happens, and this can interfere with meeting deadlines. If you have a legitimate reason for missing a class or assignment (e.g., documented illness), and **can provide documentation**, you will be allowed to make up what you missed without a grade deduction IF you contact me immediately before/after the missed assignment. Religious holidays are excused without documentation but must be discussed with me in advance (just so that I can be aware and make note). All deadlines are on the syllabus, please plan accordingly for other life events (e.g., birthday parties, tailgating, job interviews, weddings, etc.). You are responsible for getting any notes and/or assignments from your fellow should you need to miss class. We are all adults here, please take the responsibility for learning the material covered in class. In class work cannot be made up for any reason.

Late assignments will be accepted within 48 hours of the due date and will have the grade lowered as a penalty. For each day the assignment is late, your grade will be reduced according to the assignment's rubric. Any work submitted after 48 hours will not be accepted unless you have a documentable reason for the late submission. If you submit a late assignment after an approved extension date, the same policy will be used.

Any requests for make-ups due to technical issues **MUST** be accompanied by the ticket number received from the UF IT Help Desk when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You **MUST** email me within 24 hours of the technical issue if you wish to request a make-up.

The important takeaway here is: please just **communicate** with me, I want you to succeed in my class.

Learning Environment and Preferred Name

It is important to the learning environment that you feel welcome and safe in this class; and that you are comfortable participating in class discussions and communicating with me on any issues related to the class. If your preferred name is not the name listed on the official UF roll, please let me know ASAP by e-mail or in person. I would like to acknowledge your preferred name, and pronouns that reflect your identity. Please let me know how you would like to be addressed in class (this includes a nickname). I prefer to be addressed as Shelby and my pronouns are she/her/hers. 😊

Course Policies (continued)

Academic Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by the Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The [Honor Code](#) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions.

ChatGPT & AI Software

The use of ChatGPT or other AI software to create responses to any assignment, quiz, or final project will not be allowed in this class. This software can be used as a **resource** but must be properly cited. Any student passing a response generated from one of these AI software as their own, will be cheating and in violation of the Honor Code. No points will be given for that response. Students may earn half points back by submitting a revised document, with track changes on, to improve the AI response with class material to create a better argument. Re-submission will be due **72 hours** after original grade was released.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with me and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Plagiarism

A part of academic learning is learning how to critically engage in material, use this material to support our arguments, and to properly give credit where credit is due. I take plagiarism **EXTREMELY** seriously, meaning I will not tolerate it. If I suspect or TurnItIn flags your assignment for plagiarism, I will immediately report it to the Student Conduct office. We will not meet about it, and I will not discuss the assignment with you, until after you have been contacted by the student conduct office. You will receive a zero on that assignment, and I will only change that grade once a meeting has been held between you and the student conduct office, and the student conduct office has deemed a change of grade necessary. If the assignment is your final project, I will submit your final grade with your final project as a zero. Again, I will make any necessary changes should the student conduct meeting deem otherwise. To avoid all of this drama and stress, do your own work and give credit to those who came before us.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at: <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals.

Campus Resources

- Part of learning about the topics in psychology and law involves examining some sensitive areas, such as racial disparities, gender discrimination, and victimization. If this becomes emotionally difficult, I highly encourage you to seek out campus resources for support. UF provides several different types of resources.
- **Due to the nature of the course and the sensitive topics, I will NOT tolerate disrespect of bullying in the classroom. If either of these behaviors occur, you will be asked to leave. If it occurs several times over the semester, I will involve the appropriate individuals to handle the matter.**

Health and Wellness

Your mental health is extremely important, college can be a difficult time in a young person's life, and you need to know that it is OKAY to not be okay. Here are some resources (all links are hyperlinked, just click on the resource name for their website) that UF offers our Gator community. Please reach out if you are experiencing and distress or mental unbalance.

Your mental health MATTERS.

[Counseling and Wellness Center](#) (352) 392 – 1575

[Student Health Care Center](#) (352) 392 – 1161

[UF Police Department Office of Victim Services](#)

[Dean of Students Office - Emergency Response Team](#)

[U Matter We Care](#) (352) 392 – 1575 umatter@ufl.edu

They can help students, staff or faculty in immediate distress. If you find yourself concerned about a fellow student, you can notify them, and they will reach out directly to the student. We are a community who looks out for each other, don't hesitate to reach out if you are worried about a fellow student, or staff member, or faculty member.

Academic Resources

Did you know that those pesky student fees also give you access to many academic resources here at UF? I highly recommend taking advantage of these resources. All links are hyperlinked, just click on the name.

[Career Connections Center](#) Career assistance and counseling services
Reitz Union Suite 1300, (352) 392 – 1601

[Library Support](#) Library assistance and Finding resources

[Teaching Center](#) General study skills and tutoring
Broward Hall (352) 392 – 2010

[Writing Studio](#) Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
2215 Turlington Hall

[Student Complaints](#)

helpdesk@ufl.edu For technical issues, contact the UF Help Desk

Course Schedule

The material for each week will be released prior to the start of the week. Pay attention to the ‘to do’ list on Canvas because materials or pace of course may change. All materials for the week will be posted on the ‘to do’ list on that week’s module on Canvas. Each week you will have a quiz, a reflection paper, and a self-assessment due.

The general flow of class will be as follows:

Mondays – lecture on general content for the week’s topic

Wednesdays – finish lecture, class discussion

Fridays – Continued discussion time, in class activity

Below is a proposed semester schedule, and any changes will be updated on Canvas and announced in class. I reserve the right to alter this schedule as necessary, this includes changing materials. You are responsible for learning the material contained in the syllabus and on our Canvas site as well as any modifications that are made during class. When you have questions, please contact me.

Week	Date	Topic	Materials To be read BEFORE class	Assignments Due *all deadlines are 11:59 PM
1	1/8	Syllabus	Syllabus	
	1/10	Introduction & Overview	Garrett, 2020 Infographics on Canvas	
	1/12			Reflection 1
2	1/15	*No Class – MLK Jr. Day		
	1/17	Eyewitness Identification	Wrongful Conviction podcast, Junk Science, Nov. 2023, episode #408 on eyewitness misidentification Chapter 3	Discussion Question 1
	1/19			Reflection 2
3	1/22	Eyewitness Identification	Wells et al., 2020	Discussion Question 2
	1/24			Group 1 Led Discussion

	1/26			Reflection 3
4	1/29	Interrogations & Confessions	Wrongful Conviction podcast, Junk Science, Nov. 2023, episode #404 on confessions Chapter 4	Discussion Question 3
	1/31			
	2/2			Reflection 4
5	2/5	Interrogations & Confessions	Scherr, Redlich & Kassir, 2020 Murder on Sunday Morning Documentary	Discussion Question 4
	2/7			
	2/9			Reflection 5
6	2/12	Guilty Pleas	Chapter 5 Harris County, TX Drug Exonerations Redlich et al., 2017	Discussion Question 5
	2/14			Group 2 Led Discussion
	2/16			Reflection 6 Identify Exonerated Case & Sources
7	2/19	Forensic Evidence	Chapter 6 Bonaventura, 2020	Discussion Question 6
	2/21			
	2/23			Reflection 7
8	2/26	Forensic Evidence	False Positive: When Forensic Science Fails Wrongful Conviction podcast, Junk Science, Oct.	Discussion Question 7

			2023, episode #402 on tool mark analysis	
	2/28			Group 3 Led Discussion
	3/1			Reflection 8
9	3/4	Informants & Snitches	Chapter 7 Snitching.org The Prosecutor & Snitch Ring	Discussion Question 8
	3/6			
	3/8			Reflection 9
10	3/11 – 3/ 15	*No Class – Spring Break		
				3/17 – Case Analysis Outline
11	3/18	Prosecutors	Chapter 8 The System – Prosecutorial Misconduct West Memphis Three: 30 Years Later Brady v Maryland (1963)	Discussion Question 9
	3/20			
	3/22	*No Class – APLS Conference		Reflection 10
12	3/25	Defense Attorneys	Chapter 9 Webster, 2022	Discussion Question 10
	3/27			Group 4 Led Discussion
	3/29			Reflection 11

13	4/1	No-Crime Cases	Chapter 10	Discussion Question 11
	4/3			Group 5 Led Discussion
	4/5			Reflection 12
14	4/8	Reintegration	Chapter 12 Kukucka, Horodyski & Dardis, 2022 Damien Echols	Discussion Question 12
	4/10			Group 6 Led Discussion
	4/12			Reflection 13
15	4/15	Class Activity		
	4/17	Class Activity		Case Analysis
	4/19	Class Presentations		Reflection 14
16	4/22	Class Presentations		
	4/24	Class Presentations		Reflection 15
	4/26	*No Class – Reading Day		Court Observation Reflection & Notes