

**PY 450: Psychology and Law**  
**Fall 2014: TR 9:25-10:40**  
**STB 402**

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Office Hours: Tuesday 11:00-12:00  
Wednesday 2:30-3:30  
Thursday 3:00-4:00  
Or by appointment

**Text:**

1. Greene, E., & Heilbrun, K. (2014). *Wrightsmen's Psychology and the Legal System* (8th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

**Course description** This course takes an in-depth look at many aspects of the criminal and civil systems of justice in the United States. The perspective is that of the psychologist, focusing on the individual's role and responses within those systems. Areas of focus include but are not limited to a study of the psychology and socialization of police officers; identification of criminal suspects; jury decision making; competency and insanity; and sentencing decisions.

**Teaching methods:**

Class periods will include lecture, class discussion, videos, guest speakers, and presentations. Students should come to class having completed the assigned reading and prepared to actively participate in a shared learning experience.

**Course objectives:** By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

1. Explain how the psychological study of the legal system differs from the sociological, anthropological, and philosophical approaches.
2. Describe the various roles that psychologists play in the legal system and evaluate the appropriateness of their involvement in each of those roles.
3. Discuss major Supreme Court decisions in light of social psychology research findings.
4. Evaluate the expectations that most people have for police officers, and discuss obstacles faced by police officers in living up to those expectations. Critique methods of interrogations used by police in light of false confessions research findings.
5. Using research findings from the cognitive perspective, assess the degree of accuracy of eyewitness memory. Discuss the role that psychologists have played in applying those research findings, and the courts' general level of acceptance of input from psychologists.
6. Discuss the competence of children within the legal system, both as victims and juvenile offenders.
7. Distinguish between the ways in which the legal system and the psychology profession use the terms "competence" and "insanity", and describe the consequences for defendants who are found either incompetent or insane.
8. Describe the ways in which attorneys' implicit personality theories guide their selection of juries and evaluate the effectiveness of those theories relative to scientific jury selection.
9. Name and evaluate common assumptions that the legal system makes about juries.
10. Discuss factors predicting death penalty sentences in the United States, and evaluate its continued use in light of empirical research findings.

**Evaluation:**

*Exams.* There will be a total of four exams in this course. Three exams will cover material from assigned chapters, additional readings, and all in-class material, and will be worth 100 points each. The final exam is comprehensive and is worth 150 points. All exams will be approximately 75% essay and 25% objective questions. If you know in advance that you will not be present on the day of an exam, you must schedule a time to take it before the rest of the class. If you are absent on the day of an exam, you must contact me *that day* to arrange for a make-up exam, which must be taken within three days of the original. The final exam must be taken at its scheduled time.

*Additional readings.* In addition to your text, there are two required readings. Questions based on the reading can be found on the course site on Blackboard. Download the questions and email your responses to me. All responses are due in my email account (**aposey@benedictine.edu**) prior to the start of class on the day they are due. Responses to the additional readings are worth a maximum of 25 points each. Points will be deducted for late assignments, and only one late assignment will be accepted.

*Exoneration case reports.* Go to the National Registry of Exonerations website: <http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/about.aspx>. Click on browse cases. From the dropdown menu under Contributing Factors, choose Mistaken Witness ID, False Confession, or Official Misconduct. Choose any case. Read it and provide a summary of the case facts, along with a discussion of the role played by the selected contributing factor. Make explicit reference to course information in your discussion. For example, if there was a false confession, what aspects of the interrogation likely led to that confession, according to research on that topic? Case reports are expected to be about two pages, and are worth 25 points.

*Pretrial publicity assignment.* For this assignment, you will work in small groups to assess the impact of pretrial publicity in an actual case. Details will be provided on Blackboard and in class. This assignment is worth 50 points.

**Policy on disability:** Benedictine College complies with federal law requiring reasonable accommodations for individuals with documented disabilities that may affect their performance in a class or otherwise affect the individual's ability to enjoy the programs and services offered by the College. If a student requests an accommodation from a faculty member, the faculty member should direct the student to contact Julie Romano, Coordinator of the Disability Services, in the Student Success Center located in Guadalupe Hall.

**Policy on attendance:** From the catalog: *It is presumed that students attend every session of courses in which they are registered, in order that mastery of subject matter may be assisted by the instructor's leadership, class discussion and/or class projects.* I reserve the right to withdraw from the class any student whose absences exceed four.

**Policy on academic misconduct:** The Benedictine College policy on academic misconduct is provided in the Benedictine College Catalog. Consistent with that policy, all instances of academic misconduct will be reported to the Associate Dean and the student's advisor. Penalties will be administered as described in the catalog. Be honest.

## Course Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic and Readings</u>
Aug. 28- Sept. 9 (no class Sept. 2: Mass & Convocation)	Introduction to the course; Ch. 1: Psychology and the Law: Choices and Roles (pp. 1-23)
Sept. 11	Ch. 4: Psychology of Police (pp. 69-91)
Sept. 16-23	Ch 5: Eyewitnesses to Crimes and Accidents (factors influencing the witness; recommended reforms) (pp. 93-117)
<b>Sept. 23</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> additional reading:</b> Brewer, N., Weber, N., Wootton, D., & Lindsay, D. S. (2012). Identifying the bad guy in a lineup using confidence judgments under deadline pressure. <i>Psychological Science</i> , 23, 1208-1214.
<b>Sept. 25</b>	<b>Exam 1: Chs. 1, 4, 5, additional reading</b>
Sept. 30- Oct. 7	Ch. 7: Evaluating Criminal Suspects (profiling, polygraphs, interrogations) (pp. 146-172)
<b>Oct. 7</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> additional reading:</b> Kassin, S. M., Bogart, D., & Kerner, J. (2012). Confessions that corrupt: Evidence from the DNA exoneration case files. <i>Psychological Science</i> , 23, 41-45.
Oct. 9-16	Ch. 10: Forensic Assessment in Criminal and Juvenile Cases (pp. 213-237)
<b>Oct. 16</b>	<b>Exoneration case reports due.</b>
<b>Oct. 21</b>	<b>Exam 2: Chs. 7 and 10, additional reading</b>
Oct. 23-24:	Fall Break
Oct. 28	Ch. 11: Forensic Assessment in Civil Cases (pp. 261-264 only)
Oct. 30- Nov. 6	Ch. 12: Preparing for Trials (pp. 266-292)
Nov. 11-18	Ch. 13: Jurors and Juries (pp. 294-317) Trial consultant Lisa Dahl on Nov. 13
<b>Nov. 20</b>	<b>Exam 3: Chs. 11-13</b>
<b>Nov. 25</b>	<b>Pretrial publicity assignment due</b>
Nov. 25- Dec. 9	Ch. 14: Punishment and Sentencing (pp. 319-344)
<b>Dec. 16, 10:00</b>	<b>Comprehensive final exam</b>

**Grading Scale:**

93-100% = A

90-92% = A-

87-89% = B+

83-86% = B

80-82% = B-

77-79% = C+

73-76% = C

70-72% = C-

60-69% = D

Below 60% = F