CJ 3329: Introduction to Forensic Evidence

FACULTY CONTACT INFORMATION

Dr. David Spencer is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Criminal Justice at Texas State University-San Marcos. Dr. Spencer has a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Texas at Austin, a J.D. from the University of Texas School of Law, an M.A. in Psychology from the University of Texas at Austin, and a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Texas at Austin.

During his professional career, Dr. Spencer has been a prosecutor, a criminal defense lawyer, and a judge. He has been teaching at Texas State University-San Marcos since 1991.

You may contact Dr. Spencer by e-mail at ds15@txstate.edu.

COURSE DESCRIPTION & PREREQUISITES

- Forensic evidence.
- Investigator’s role in collecting, preparing, and presenting evidence in criminal trials.
- Special attention will be given to electronic evidence in addition to traditional physical evidence.
- Prerequisites: CJ 2350 and CJ 2360

COURSE GOALS

Upon completion of the course the student will be able to:

- secure a crime scene;
- document a crime scene;
- collect, preserve, package, inventory, and submit evidence to a crime lab;
- reconstruct the crime scene using physical evidence;
- describe how physical properties can be used to characterize evidence;
- describe the types of microscopes that can be used to examine fiber, hair, and paint evidence;
- describe optical physical properties, such as color and refractive index, and how these properties can be used to characterize glass evidence;
- classify pattern evidence such as fingerprints;
- identify various type of firearms;
- use the Integrated Ballistic Identification System;
- restore obliterated firearm serial numbers;
- analyze metals and gunshot residue;
collect, preserve, and analyze arson evidence;
• describe the postmortem analysis performed by a toxicologist;
• explain why postmortem toxicology information is difficult to interpret;
• discuss the effects of alcohol on the human body;
• describe the biological fluids collected, tested, and used as evidence;
• discuss forensic DNA typing;
• classify various explosives;
• identify explosive residue; and
• detect weapons of mass destruction.

COURSE MATERIALS

Your textbook for this course is:


ASSIGNMENTS AND QUIZZES

In Modules, you will find an assignment and a quiz for each lesson (14 in all).

Assignments instructions are included in each assignment and should be followed completely and carefully to get full credit. Each assignment is worth 10 points. Assignments will be graded and posted in the Gradebook within 10 business days after the submission date. Assignments with minor errors or omissions will receive partial credit. However, I reserve the right to give no credit if you have not made a good faith effort to comply with the instructions.

Be sure to also complete each quiz. Each quiz is worth 15 points. Quiz grades appear in the Gradebook immediately following your submission of the quiz.

• Please do not submit assignments or take quizzes out of order.
• You may submit up to 2 assignments and take 2 quizzes per week.
• You may not resubmit an assignment after it has been graded.

FINAL EXAM & COURSE EVALUATION

The final exam is a comprehensive exam covering the entire course. You will take the final after you have completed all readings, assignments, and quizzes. The final is worth 50 points toward your course grade.
You must make a 60 percent or better on the final exam in order to pass the course.

The anonymous **course evaluation** will help me to improve the course over time.

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**COURSE GRADE & WEIGHTS**

Your grade in the course will be based on the assessments and assignments described above. To summarize:

- **Quizzes** 210 points (15 points each)
- **Assignments** 140 points (10 points each)
- **Final Exam** 50 points
- **Total points** 400 points

Your grade will be based on 400 total points, on the following scale:

- **A** 90% (360 points or more)
- **B** 80% (320 to 359 points)
- **C** 70% (280 to 319 points)
- **D** 60% (240 to 279 points)
- **F** Less than 60% (less than 240 points).

There is no pass/fail grading option, and no pluses and minuses will be added to the final, reported grade for the course.

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**COMMUNICATION POLICY**

Email is the most reliable way to reach the instructor. The instructor will respond to email within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends. It is also the most reliable way for the instructor to reach you since all Texas State students have an email address provided by the university. Many people today prefer other forms of social media, but not all students have access to those systems, whereas everyone has access to email. It is your responsibility to check your email messages on a regular basis for information about the course.
If you have a question about course content or mechanics, you are encouraged to post it to the General Course Questions discussion forum (described below). Doing so gives students in the course an opportunity to interact with one another and allows everyone to benefit from answers to your questions. Of course, don’t hesitate to email the instructor directly if your concern is of a personal nature.

STUDENTS REQUIRING ACCOMMODATIONS

The Office of Distance and Extended Learning is committed to helping students with disabilities achieve their education goals. A disability is not a barrier to correspondence study, and we strive to provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations to individuals in coursework and test taking. Students who require special accommodations (e.g., testing accommodations, information in alternative format, sign language interpreting services) need to provide verification of their disability to the Office of Disability Services, Suite 5-5.1 LBJ Student Center, (512) 245-3451 (voice/TTY).

Students should then notify the Office of Distance and Extended Learning at corrstudy@txstate.edu of any disability-related accommodation needs as soon as possible to avoid a delay in accommodations.

ACADEMIC HONOR CODE

The Texas State Academic Honor Code applies to all Texas State students, including correspondence students. The Honor Code serves as an affirmation that the University demands the highest standard of integrity in all actions related to the academic community. As stated in the Texas State Student Handbook, Violation of the Honor Code includes, but is not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work, plagiarism, collusion, and the abuse of resource materials.