

PSY 472 - INTRO TO LEGAL PSYCHOLOGY

Spring 2026

Instructor: Giles H. Feinberg M.A.
Office Location: Burk Hall 24
Office Hours: Weds 5:45pm-6:45pm

Classroom Location: BH 1
Class Time: Wednesday 7-9:45pm
Email: ghfeinberg@gmail.com

Course Description:

This course is designed give you a magnified view of the criminal justice system and civil court process. We will begin with four basic choices in the study of law and psychology. This will be our acting framework for examining everyday occurrences in the system, like bail and “own recognizance motions,” to the rarer “pro per,” or Faretta Motion. The primary goal of this course is to give you an unfettered view of the criminal justice system in San Francisco. Whether you are considering direct service (like me), becoming a lawyer, going into law enforcement, or otherwise using your psychology degree when considering career options, my aim is to better inform you of the demands and the impact that people like victim advocates, prosecutors, judges, defense attorneys, and Police officers have in our community.

This course has been curated to delve deep into the realities of system and to hear directly from the people working in it. The keynote speakers made available to you in this course are unlike any you have encountered in your academic career. The ambition in bringing in these experts is to engage you, demonstrate what you can do with your degree, and to dispel myths (or not). My expectation is that you are not only present for these lectures and presentations but that you are active participants; linking your personal experience, or those of your community, with the material presented in class and in the textbook.

Believe it or not you are an integral part of the criminal justice system and the implementation of laws in your community. Serving as a juror and voting on laws, regulations, measures, and propositions give you direct access to outcomes in the system. We will explore these long-standing aspects of the system to better understand their value and imperfections.

I believe it is impossible to talk about these issues in America today without acknowledging the social context. All of the examples discussed in class will be pulled directly from current events, including issues on prejudice, discrimination, stereotypes, juror bias, and discretion, to name a few. Together we will create a safe space to discuss your views, to be respectfully challenged, to challenge me, and to hone your understanding of one of the oldest institutions in American history, the legal system.

At the conclusion of this semester, you will have a broader understanding of the adversarial system, its flaws as well as its success. Throughout the semester I urge you to stay informed through your favorite news or media and bring those ideas to further contextualize your introduction to law and psychology. Welcome.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS AND READINGS:

- **PDF Provided on Canvas!** Greene & Heilbrun (2024). *Wrightsmen's Psychology and the Legal System*. 10th Ed. United States: Wadsworth.
- In addition, relevant readings and handouts will be posted online on Canvas.

ASSIGNMENTS & EXTRA CREDIT:

Guest Speaker Questionnaire: Submit questions for each of the guest speakers we will be hosting this semester. This is a great opportunity to engage directly with law enforcement and other justice system professionals. This assignment actually helps our guests to frame some of the discussion, thoughtfulness will go a long way here. **Due February 4th.**

Guest Speaker Reflections: Each guest speaker comes with a unique and extraordinary background in the criminal justice system. For this ongoing assignment please write about your reaction to the guest speaker. This could include: things you learned, agreed/disagreed with, found interesting, connections you made to other course material or current event. *There will be a total of 9 reflection assignments (one is optional March 15th)* **due on Canvas by 7pm the Wednesday AFTER each guest lecture.**

Juror Bias Scale: Participate in a brief survey to see if you are more prosecution biased or defense biased. We will examine our scores as a class and compare the data across all students who have taken this survey in this course. **Due before class will remain open until April 1st.**

12 Angry Men Quiz: Take this brief quiz after viewing the film 12 Angry Men. We will be watching the movie together in-class on **November 1st.** **Due on or before Friday May 22nd**
I recommend taking the quiz shortly after watching the movie.

Reading & Writing Assignment:

Read both articles Psychology Today *The Real Reason People Like to Punish Others*, and *Why It's So Important to Feel All of Our Feelings* and then relate the substance of the reading to the course material, a guest speaker, or a broader context around criminal justice. 2-page minimum, single-spaced. **Due on or before March 4th.**

Extra Credit 1: Read and write an analysis on any article available throughout the semester that has been put on Canvas. Please relate the substance of the reading to the course material, a guest speaker, or a broader context around criminal justice. 1-page minimum, single-spaced. **Due on or before Friday May 22nd.**

Extra Credit 2: Attend, virtually or in-person, either 1) criminal courtroom proceedings at the San Francisco Hall of Justice, or your where you reside 2) a San Francisco Board of Supervisors meeting (they occur almost every Tuesday). Note your observations. Is there anything confusing, is it interesting? If so, why? Try to relate your experience of observation to the material we are covering in this course. Consider yourself an ethnographer. You can find live, past, and upcoming SF Board of Supervisor meetings here: <https://sfbos.org/meetings/full-board-meetings>. **Due on or before Friday May 22nd.**

Make-Up Assignments: There are several make-up assignments available on Canvas that you can complete if you miss any other assignment for this course, namely the guest speaker reflections. *Note these are make-ups, not extra credit.*

ATTENDANCE, PROMPTNESS, CLASS PARTICIPATION:

I strongly encourage you to attend lectures, for several reasons. To begin with, my lectures will nearly always cover material not included in the readings and there will be no good way for you to access this information without coming to lectures. Even more important, your individual perspectives and insights are what make a class like this interesting and dynamic—if you are not present, you will be depriving me (and your colleagues) of the opportunity to learn from your perspective and experiences.

In order to encourage attendance, after each guest speaker you are required to do a reflection on that guest. See above for the details. These guest speaker reflections and reading/writing assignments are intended to give you a chance to share your thoughts and opinions about the issues we are discussing and reflect on the guest speakers. While I will not score these responses for right or wrong answers, I will be reading each one and will use them to take attendance. Your responses will comprise the largest part of your class participation grade for the semester. It will not be possible to make up a guest speaker reflection if you are not present in class when they present. These assignments and your active class participation will be used to determine your participation grade. **Please note: participation is 10% of your final grade. This is significant. If you are not coming to class, your final grade will suffer. Don't think that you will do well in this class if you don't attend—you will not.**

I will begin class meetings promptly--please be on time.

Grading Criteria and Assignments:

- **Exams #1 and #2 and #3 (final): 30% each**

Exams may include multiple choice, true/false, and *possibly* short answer or short essay questions. They are not cumulative.

The final exam will include multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and *possibly* one essay question. The multiple choice, true/false, and short answer questions will not be cumulative.

However, the final essay question may ask you to integrate material from the entire semester.

The **FINAL EXAM** for this class is scheduled from **Wednesday May 13th on Canvas & closes at 11:59pm on Friday May 22nd.**

*Please note: You are required to take the examinations for this course during the time that they are scheduled. I will be leaving exams 1 & 2 open Wednesday to Sunday (closing at 11:59pm), Exam 3 (final) will remain open for 10 days. In the event of a legitimate emergency, it is your responsibility to contact me via email, telephone, before the scheduled examination. *Extraordinary circumstances require you to reach out to me directly should you be unable to do so prior to the exam.*

- **Class Participation- 10% (THIS IS A LOT!)**

As an active participant in this course, you are expected (1) to complete assigned readings, (2) to come to class prepared to engage in discussions, and (3) to think critically about the issues and material being addressed both in the readings and in lectures.

Grading Scale

93-100 = A	77-79.9 = C+
90-92.9 = A-	73-76.9 = C
87-89.9 = B+	70-72.9 = C-
83-86.9 = B	67-69.9 = D+
80-82.9 = B-	60-66.9 = D
	00-59.9 = F

Credit (CR) = .70 (C) or higher;

No Credit (NC) = 0-.69

Example of how grades are calculated:

The 3 exam scores combined make up 90% of your grade meaning each exam score is worth 30%. If your exam scores were 72%, 79%, & 85%, and your participation score was 85% (because you had 2 missing assignments), the math looks like this:

(Exam 1 score multiplied by 30%) + (Exam score 2 multiplied by 30%) + (Exam Score 3 multiplied by 30%) + (participation score multiplied by 10%). Converting the percentage into decimal for the actual calculation looks like this:

$(72 \times .3) + (79 \times .3) + (85 \times .3) + (85 \times .1)$ which looks like this in raw numbers

$21.6 + 23.7 + 25.5 + 8.5 = 79.2$ which converts easily to 79.2% Extra credit is calculated at .012

(which is hella generous) and would be a final of 83% if all 3 extra credit were completed, in this example.

Important University Dates and Deadlines:

January 26th: Adding Classes permission #'s NOT required

February 9th – 16th: Adding Classes permission #'s ARE required

February 16th: Audit Deadline

February 16th: Last Day to Drop without a “W” grade

February 17th: Last Day to Withdraw for serious/compelling reason (with “W” grade)

Friday May 8th: last day to request CR/NC

Saturday May 23rd-May 29th: Grading Period

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

I expect all students to demonstrate academic integrity in this course. You are expected to do your own work. Cheating and plagiarism are unacceptable: this means that assignments I consider to involve cheating or dishonesty will receive NO CREDIT. In addition, I maintain the right to seek additional penalties consistent with university policy. If you have questions or concerns about this, you should speak with me directly, or review the CSU Standards of Conduct.

ADA ACCOMMODATION:

Students who need accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email dprc@sfsu.edu



Overview of Topics and Assignments		
DATE	TOPIC	READING ASSIGNMENT
Week 1: January 28th	First Class/Overview Psychology & the Law	<i>Reading: Chapter 1</i>
Week 2: February 4th <i>SFPD Officer</i>	The Legal System	<i>Reading: Chapter 2</i>
Week 3: February 11th <i>Forensic Artist</i>	Psychology of Crime	<i>Reading: Chapter 3</i>
Week 4: February 18 th <i>CSI Fingerprints</i>	Psychology of Policing	<i>Reading: Chapter 4</i>
Week 5: February 25th	EXAM #1 NO CLASS	Canvas (no in-class meeting)
Week 6: March 4th	Traditional Prosecution	<i>Reading: Chapter 8</i>
Week 7: March 11th <i>Victim Advocate(s)</i>	Victims of Crime	<i>Reading: Chapter 5&6</i>
Week 8: March 18th <i>SVU Inspector (retired)</i>	Evaluating Criminal Suspects Optional Class	<i>Reading: Chapters 7</i>
Week 9: March 25th	NO CLASS	SPRING BREAK
Week 10: April 1 st Film: <i>12 Angry Men</i>	Jurors & Juries	<i>Reading: Chapter 13</i>
Week 11: April 8th	EXAM #2	Canvas (no in-class meeting)
Week 12: April 15 th <i>Public Defender</i>	Alternatives to Sentencing	Reading: Chapter 9
Week 13: April 22 nd <i>SFDA</i>	Preparing for Trials	<i>Reading: Chapter 12</i>
Week 14: April 29 th <i>SF Superior Court Judge</i>	Punishment & Sentencing	<i>Reading: Chapter 14</i>
Week 15: May 6 th <i>The Way Out, Executive Director</i>	Insanity & Competency	<i>Reading: Chapter 15</i>
Week 16: May 13 th	Insights & Takeaways <u>Final Exam Review</u>	Open forum Q&A
May 13th-22nd	EXAM #3 IS OPEN	

Please Note: I reserve the right to make any changes necessary to this schedule. Any changes will be announced in class at least a week in advance of the change whenever possible. If you are unable to attend a lecture, it is your responsibility to check on announcements made while you were absent.