

School of Criminal Justice & Criminology
Summer 2025
CJ 4331: Serial Murder – CRN: 51461

Instructor:	Josh Davis, M.A.
Class Time:	Asynchronous
Class Location:	Online via Canvas
Office Location:	Hines G10 (lowest level of Hines)
Office hours:	Via Zoom by Appointment. Please email the instructor to set up an appointment day/time.
Office Phone:	(512) 245-2174
E-mail:	jdavis@txstate.edu [preferred contact method]

How to use this syllabus: This syllabus provides you with information specific to this course, and it also provides information about important university policies. *This document should be viewed as a course overview; it is not a contract and is subject to change as the semester evolves.* Any changes will be communicated in class and through Canvas.

COURSE INFORMATION

Course Description

CJ 4331 Serial Murder (3). This course covers the phenomenon of serial murder and the police investigative response. Theories, concepts, and law enforcement analytic methods are covered in detail. Emphasis is placed on understanding the reality versus the myth of serial murder, serial killers, and criminal profiling.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

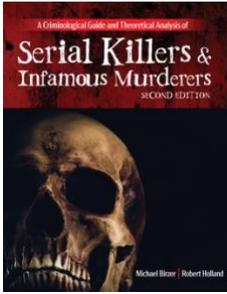
- Analyze & assess the different types of multiple murder (i.e., mass, spree, and serial murder);
- Differentiate the causes of serial murder using biochemical, psychological, and/or sociological theories;
- Compare & contrast the categories of serial murder;
- Evaluate the traits or vulnerabilities of victims of serial murder;
- Explain and critique the challenges that police face in the investigation of serial murder;
- Demonstrate the techniques utilized by law enforcement to aid in the identification of serial murderers;
- Critique the responses of the criminal justice and mental health systems to serial murderers.

Sensitive Topic Discussion



This class covers very sensitive and graphic material related to crimes of violence. At times, some of this material can be disturbing. **If you find material of this nature offensive or have personal or moral opposition to such material, please consider not taking this course.**

Required Texts/Reading



Textbook:

Birzer, M. L., & Holland, R. (2024). A criminological guide and theoretical analysis of serial killers & infamous murders (2nd ed.). Kendall Hunt. ISBN: 9798385116089

Other Readings:

Documents from the FBI's Behavior Analysis Unit and other sources will be used throughout the course. These documents, along with any additional readings, will be posted in Canvas to complement your learning.

Learning Management Platform - CANVAS

All additional readings (outside the textbook) and some PowerPoints will be posted in Canvas. All assignments must be submitted through Canvas. **Email submissions or paper copies will not be accepted.**

Other Equipment/Materials

Students are required to have complete access to a functioning computer device with internet capabilities. This device must have Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. If you do not have Microsoft Word or PowerPoint on your device, Texas State does provide free access to Microsoft Office 365 for students.

CLASSROOM POLICIES

Class Behavior

To allow for orderly learning and differing discourse, students are reminded to follow the rules of courtesy during classroom discussions. This is a college course, and student vocabulary and word choice should be appropriate for a college classroom. Students should stay on-topic and handle non-class-related matters outside of class. We will be covering topics that can be socially sensitive; therefore, we must remain respectful of each other's points of view during the course.

Class Protocol

This is an online class, and students are expected to participate by doing the assigned readings, watching the assigned lectures, and completing the assignments.

This course has 10 modules. Each week consists of a Module. Modules 1-9 will run from Monday at midnight to Sunday at 11:59 p.m. Due to the University calendar, Module 10 is shorter and will run from Monday at midnight to the end of the course on Friday, August 1st, at 11:59 p.m. All work must be submitted to Canvas by the deadline listed in the Syllabus. No late work is accepted after one week, and the course final project and module quizzes will not be accepted late.

Students should take responsibility for their learning. This also means submitting all assigned material, including but not limited to assignments, quizzes, exams, and canvas discussions, on time. Students are expected to participate in online activities. Students should seek clarification for any questions they do not understand.

Students are held responsible for all assigned materials. Module Quizzes will open on Monday, at midnight, of the week the quiz is assigned, and it will be due on Sunday at 11:59 pm. It is open for one week and must be taken by the due date. There will be no exceptions. Grades are not negotiable and will be determined by the final point total. All scores are final and will not be rounded up. Every student will have the same opportunities to earn points. Students will receive the grade they earned.

Grading Scale

At the end of the semester, your grade will be determined by the total number of points earned, not by the percentage. Also, no grades of Incomplete will be awarded.

Points (Percentage)	Letter Grade	Grade Points
403 - 450 (90% and above)	A	4.00
358 - 402 (80 - 89.9%)	B	3.00
313 - 357 (70 - 79.9%)	C	2.00
268 - 312 (60 - 69.9%)	D	1.00
0 - 267 (0 - 59.9%)	F	0.00

Contact Policy

Although you may attempt to reach me by phone, ***email communication is always preferred*** and has a faster response rate as I am not always in the office. Feel free to email me any questions or concerns following these guidelines:

- Always use the course number (CJ 4331) in the subject line of the email
- Remember to sign your name.
- **Always** email me from your Texas State email address. Email sent from personal email servers like Gmail, Yahoo, etc., tend to end up in my spam folder, and I never see them. You may also email me through Canvas via the Inbox.
- You should NOT contact me for tech support.

Response Times

To Email and Canvas Inbox:

Please include CJ 4331 and the topic in your email subject line, as this helps me prioritize a response to you. I will respond to you within 48 hours, generally within 24 hours. Weekends and official University breaks may delay this period. Students are always welcome to schedule an in-person meeting if they would like.

Feedback on Assignments:

Feedback on Assignments and Exams will occur within one week; however, based on the requirements of the courses I am taking, it may happen sooner or be slightly delayed. Students worried about feedback should email the instructor to set up a meeting.

In-Person Meetings:

While I am not always in the Criminal Justice Office, I will be more than happy to meet with you outside of class. To request an In-Person Meeting, please notify me via email with some dates and times you are available. Please put "CJ 4331- In-Person Meeting Request" in the subject line. I will respond within 24 hours to these requests, excluding weekends and official University breaks.

WHAT IS MY GRADE BASED ON?

Assignments

Syllabus Quiz	20 points
4 Module Quizzes (40 points each)	160 points
Project Proposal	60 points
Final Project	150 points
2 Writing Assignments (30 points each)	60 points
Total Points	450 Points

Syllabus Quiz

Students will be required to take and pass a ten-question quiz on the course syllabus. They will be allowed to retake the quiz until they receive a passing score. Students should aim to complete this as soon as possible, as the rest of the course will not open until a passing score is reached.

This quiz **will be worth a total of 20 points.**

Module Quizzes

There will be four (4) module quizzes throughout the semester. Each quiz will consist of 20 questions and cover the assigned material since the last quiz. While the questions are not intended to be cumulative, the material presented does build on previous material throughout the course. Students will have 50 minutes to complete each quiz. The questions will be multiple-choice, matching, and true/false. Each quiz will be worth approximately 40 points, for a **total of 160 points.**

Project Proposal

Students will write a short summary (the summary portion should be half a page to one page in length) stating which serial killer or mass murder event they will be researching for their final project. The proposal will be double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font with one-inch margins. APA format must be followed with in-text citations. The summary will provide the relevant facts of the case, including its outcome. It must also include a list of five (5) potential sources, listed in APA format, that you could use on your final project. The list of sources provides the instructor with evidence that you are using reputable sources in your information gathering. *Students should NOT use a case listed on the syllabus. Students who use a case that is*

on the Syllabus will receive a Zero. This assignment is **due to Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, June 29th**, and will be worth a total of 60 points.

Final Project

Students will create a final project presentation on a serial murder case/mass murder event as outlined in their project proposal. The presentation will cover the crime(s) and applicable facts of the case, disposition of the case, law enforcement response, and a critique of that response. It should go beyond the information presented in your proposal. Students will be able to pick the method of presentation they wish to use (ex. PowerPoint, Video, Podcast, Song, Art Project, etc.). A separate typed reference page in APA format listing all used sources must accompany the submission. It should include 5-7 sources. The presentation will be handed in via Canvas, and the submission portal will be available AFTER the Proposals **are due**. The final project will be **due to Canvas by 11:59 pm on Friday, July 25th**. *No late project will be accepted. This will be worth a total of 150 points.*

Writing Assignments

Students will complete two writing assignments during the semester, covering two sets of documentaries and the course readings. Each log consists of two to three assigned questions that must be answered in full. **Each writing assignment is worth 30 points, for a total of 60 points.**

Extra Credit

No extra credit will be given as a standard; however, if an opportunity presents itself during the semester, the entire class may receive an extra credit opportunity. On those occasions, a class announcement will be made on how extra points may be earned. No other extra credit opportunities will be given.

Late Assignments

The ***Final Project has a firm deadline and will NOT be accepted late*** due to the quick turnaround required for final grades to be submitted to the registrar's office. **Module Quizzes will also not be accepted late.** *For all other assignments, students should contact the instructor immediately. After one week (from the original due date), the assignment will NOT be accepted.*

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming an integral part of the world; however, we must use it responsibly. For this course, the use of AI should be limited to idea generation only for their final project, and the use of AI should be declared and cited by the student. Using AI on any other assignment will be considered Academic Dishonesty. See the Academic Dishonesty section for the consequences for its use.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Honesty Policy

Students at Texas State University are expected to uphold high academic standards. Texas State will not tolerate a lack of academic integrity. Submission of any work for a grade for which unauthorized help has been received is termed academic dishonesty and may be grounds for a failing grade in the course. "Unauthorized" is a term used here to designate stealing, copying

(with or without permission), or collaboration with other individuals. Furthermore, acts of cheating, collaboration and collusion, plagiarism, fabrication, and facilitating academic dishonesty as defined in UPPS No. 07.10.01 are also strictly prohibited (<https://policies.txst.edu/university-policies/07-10-01.html>). Students are strongly encouraged to refer to the Texas State's student handbook for policies related to academic dishonesty.

Engaging in Academic Dishonesty will not be tolerated! Students must work independently unless specified by the instructor. The first violation will result in an "F" for the assignment or exam. The second violation will result in an "F" in the class.

Honor Code

As members of a community dedicated to learning, inquiry, and creation, the students, faculty, and administration of our university live by the principles in this Honor Code. These principles require all members of this community to be conscientious, respectful, and honest.

WE ARE CONSCIENTIOUS. We complete our work on time and make every effort to do it right. We come to class and meetings prepared and are willing to demonstrate it. We hold ourselves to doing what is required, embrace rigor, and shun mediocrity, special requests, and excuses.

WE ARE RESPECTFUL. We act civilly toward one another, and we cooperate with each other. We will strive to create an environment in which people respect and listen to one another, speaking when appropriate, and permitting other people to participate and express their views.

WE ARE HONEST. We do our own work and are honest with one another in all matters. We understand how various acts of dishonesty, like plagiarizing, falsifying data, and giving or receiving assistance to which one is not entitled, conflict as much with academic achievement as with the values of honesty and integrity.

THE PLEDGE FOR STUDENTS. Students at our university recognize that, to ensure honest conduct, more is needed than an expectation of academic honesty, and we therefore adopt the practice of affixing the following pledge of honesty to the work we submit for evaluation:

I pledge to uphold the principles of honesty and responsibility at our university.

THE PLEDGE FOR FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION. Faculty at our university recognize that the students have rights when accused of academic dishonesty and will inform the accused of their rights of appeal laid out in the student handbook and inform them of the process that will take place:

I recognize students' rights and pledge to uphold the principles of honesty and responsibility at our university.

ADDRESSING ACTS OF DISHONESTY. Students accused of dishonest conduct may have their cases heard by the faculty member. The student may also appeal the faculty member's decision to the Honor Code Council. Students and faculty will have the option of having an advocate present to ensure their rights. Possible actions that may be taken range from exoneration to expulsion.

See (www.txstate.edu/effective/upps/upps-07-10-01.html) for more information.

Students with Disabilities

A student with a disability may require an accommodation(s) to participate in the course. They must contact the instructor within the first two weeks of the semester. They will be asked to provide documentation from the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at that time. Failure to contact the instructor in a timely manner will delay any accommodations they may be seeking. Ongoing care by a physician does not automatically qualify you as an ODS special needs student. Students are required to file paperwork for accommodations with ODS each semester. Accommodations granted one semester do not automatically carry forward to the next.

Tentative Schedule (Subject to Change)

<u>Week</u>	<u>Date(s)</u>	<u>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</u>
1	May 27 th to June 1 st	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Week 1</u></p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Syllabus</p> <p><u>Watch:</u> *Course Overview</p> <p><u>Assignments:</u> *Syllabus Quiz – Due by Sunday, June 1st by 11:59pm</p> 
2	June 2 nd to June 8 th	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Week 2</u></p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Textbook Chapter 1 *Death Investigations: A Guide for Scene Investigators [on Canvas] *Review PowerPoint Slides</p> <p><u>Watch:</u> *Lecture #1 – <i>Serial Killers: What is a Serial Killer anyway?</i> *Lecture #2 – <i>Homicide Investigations: An Overview; Clutter Murders</i></p> <p><u>Assignments:</u> *No Assignments Due</p>
3	June 9 th to June 15 th	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Week 3</u></p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Serial Murder (p. 2-12) [on Canvas] *Serial Murder for Pathway Investigations (p. 24-27) [on Canvas] *Review PowerPoint Slides</p> <p><u>Watch:</u> *Lecture #3 – <i>Mass & Spree Murder Incidents: 9/11 Attacks, Columbine High School Shooting</i> *Lecture #4 – <i>Serial Murder Investigations: The Basics, Myths & Typologies, Organized vs. Disorganized Killers</i></p> <p><u>Assignments:</u> *Module Quiz #1 – Due by Sunday, June 15th by 11:59pm</p>

<u>Week</u>	<u>Date(s)</u>	<u>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</u>
4	June 16 th to June 22 nd	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Week 4</u></p> <p>Read: None</p> <p>Watch: *Documentaries: (1) Jack the Ripper (2) The Zodiac Killer</p> <p>*Lecture #5 – <i>The Boys Next Door</i>: Ted Bundy & Jeffery Dahmer</p> <p>*Interviews with Serial Killers: (1) Ted Bundy (2) Jeffery Dahmer</p> <p>Assignments: *Writing Assignment #1 – Due by Sunday, June 22nd by 11:59pm</p>
5	June 23 rd to June 29 th	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Week 5</u></p> <p>Read: *Textbook Chapters 2 & 3</p> <p>Watch: *Lecture #6 – <i>Team Killers</i>: Lucas & O’Toole & Beltway Snipers</p> <p>Assignments: *Project Proposal – Due by Friday, June 27th by 11:59pm *Module Quiz #2 – Due by Sunday, June 29th by 11:59pm</p>
6	June 30 th to July 6 th	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Week 6</u></p> <p>Read: *Textbook Chapter 7 *Review PowerPoint Slides</p> <p>Watch: *Documentaries: (1) James DeAngelo, The Golden State Killer/EAR/ONS & (2) Richard Ramirez, The Night Stalker</p> <p>*Lecture #7 – Ritualistic Mass Murder/Serial Killings [Guest Lecturer: Gwen Kovaleski]</p> <p>Assignments: *Writing Assignment #2 – Due by Sunday, July 6th by 11:59pm</p>

<u>Week</u>	<u>Date(s)</u>	<u>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</u>
7	July 7 th to July 13 th	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Week 7</u></p> <p>Read: *BTK Affidavit [on Canvas] *Review PowerPoint Slides</p> <p>Watch: *Lecture #8 – BTK</p> <p>Assignments: *Module Quiz #3 – Due by Sunday, July 13th by 11:59pm</p>
8	July 14 th to July 20 th	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Week 8</u></p> <p>Read: *Textbook Chapter 4</p> <p>Watch: *Documentary: Female Serial Killer: Aileen Wuornos</p> <p>Assignments: *No Assignments Due</p>
9	July 21 st to July 27 th	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Week 9</u></p> <p>Read: *Textbook Chapters 5</p> <p>Watch: *Documentaries: (1) Ed Kemper, The CoEd Killer & (2) Rodney Acala, The Dating Game Killer</p> <p>Assignments: *Final Project – Due by Friday, July 25th by 11:59pm</p>
10	July 28 th to August 1 st	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Week 10</u></p> <p>Read: *Textbook Chapter 9 *Review PowerPoint Slides</p> <p>Watch: *Lecture #9 – The Future of Serial Murder Investigations</p> <p>Assignment: *Module Quiz #4 – Due by Friday, August 1st by 11:59pm</p>