



**School of Criminal Justice & Criminology**  
**Spring 2026**  
**CJ 4331: Serial Murder – CRN: 41461**

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**Instructor:** Josh Davis, M.A.  
**Class Time:** Monday & Wednesday 11:00 am – 12:20 pm  
**Class Location:** Hines 206  
**Office Location:** Hines G08 (lowest level of Hines)  
**Office Hours:** Monday – Thursday 10:00 – 11:00 am or by Appointment  
**Office Phone:** (512) 245-2174  
**E-mail:** [jdavis@txstate.edu](mailto:jdavis@txstate.edu) [preferred contact method]

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**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.

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## **COURSE INFORMATION**

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### **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:

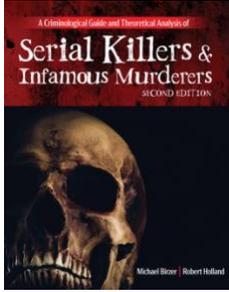
- Analyze & assess the different types of multiple murder (i.e., mass, spree, and serial murder);
- Differentiate the causes of serial murder using biochemical, psychological, and/or sociological theories;
- Compare & contrast the categories of serial murder;
- Evaluate the traits or vulnerabilities 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 and 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.

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## **CLASSROOM POLICIES**

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### **Class Behavior**

To ensure orderly learning and respectful discourse, students are reminded to follow the rules of courtesy during classroom discussions. This is a college course, and students' 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 cover topics that can be socially sensitive; therefore, we must remain respectful of each other's points of view throughout the course.

### **Class Protocol**

While attendance is not mandatory, a portion of the grade is based solely on participation. In-class activities and discussions constitute part of the class. In order to have an effective learning experience and master the material, students should make every effort to attend all class sessions. If a student misses class, it is the student's responsibility to understand what they missed and to get the notes/information from another student. It is not the instructor's responsibility to re-teach any portion of the class.

Students are expected to participate in classroom discussions and activities. Asking questions, providing varying perspectives, and discussing the topics at hand make the class much more enjoyable and exciting for everyone.

Students will be held responsible for all assigned materials. Examinations must be taken on the date indicated unless a documented excuse is provided, as stated below. 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.

Please make sure all cell phones are either off or put on silent. If a student needs to take a call, please exit quietly to avoid disrupting the class discussion or distracting students who are trying to pay attention.

Furthermore, it is expected that students will:

- Prepare for class, read assigned materials before class, satisfactorily participate in class discussions, and turn in required coursework on time.
- Take responsibility for their learning. The instructor is not responsible for your learning. This requires your effort.
- Submit all assigned material, including but not limited to assignments, quizzes, exams, and Canvas discussions, on time.

### **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.*

<b>Points (Percentage)</b>	<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Grade Points</b>
630 - 700 (90% and above)	A	4.00
560 - 629 (80 - 89.9%)	B	3.00
490 - 559 (70 - 79.9%)	C	2.00
420 - 489 (60 - 69.9%)	D	1.00
0 - 419 (0 - 59.9%)	F	0.00

### **Contact Policy**

Although you may attempt to reach me by phone, ***email communication is always preferred*** and offers a faster response, 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. Emails sent from personal email servers like Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo, etc., tend to end up in my spam folder, and I never see them.
- You should NOT contact me for tech support.
- Please **DO NOT** use the **Canvas Inbox to contact me**. I tend to miss those messages.

## **Response Times**

### **To Email:**

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

### **Feedback on Assignments:**

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

### **In-Person Meetings:**

Although 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 email me with a few dates and times you are available. Please include "CJ 4331- In-Person Meeting Request" in the subject line. I will respond to these requests within 24 hours, excluding weekends and official University breaks.

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## **WHAT IS MY GRADE BASED ON?**

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### **Assignments**

<b>Syllabus Quiz</b>	10 points
<b>4 Exams</b>	400 points
<b>Final Project Proposal</b>	50 points
<b>Final Project</b>	150 points
<b>2 Writing Assignments</b>	40 points
<b>Participation</b>	50 points
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>700 Points</b>

### **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 they reach a passing score. This quiz **will be worth 10 points in total.**

## Exams

Exams will be given during class time and consist of multiple-choice, matching, and true/false questions. There will be four exams. Each exam will have approximately 35-50 questions and be worth approximately 100 points, for a total of 400 points.

## Project Proposal

Students will write a short summary (one page, double-spaced, with only their name in the header) 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 a brief, relevant set of facts about 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 from the Syllabus will receive a Zero.*** This assignment is **due to Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>**, and will be worth a total of 50 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 written paper will not be allowed. A **separate typed APA-formatted reference page** listing all sources used must accompany the submission. It should **include 5-7 sources**. ***Students should NOT use a case listed on the syllabus. Students who use a case from the Syllabus will receive a zero.*** 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 on Canvas by 12:00 pm (NOON) on Monday, May 11<sup>th</sup>**. ***No late projects will be accepted.*** This will be worth 150 points in total.

## Writing Assignments

Students will complete two writing assignments during the semester, covering four documentaries. Each log consists of two to three assigned questions that must be answered in full. **All assignments must be handed in as a .doc or .docx file. PDF files will not be accepted and will result in an automatic zero. The USE OF AI ON THIS ASSIGNMENT WILL RESULT IN A FAILING GRADE.** *Writing Assignments are due prior to class on the due date* and are worth approximately 20 points each, for a total of 40 points.

## Participation/Discussion

While attendance is not required, participation is required. **A total of 50 points of the student's grade will be devoted to participation**, awarded at the end of the semester. This will be based on total attendance and participation during class. It is hard to participate if you are not in class.

## Extra Credit

No extra credit will be given as a standard; however, if an opportunity arises during the semester, the entire class may receive an extra-credit opportunity. On those occasions, a class announcement

will be made explaining how extra points may be earned. No other extra-credit opportunities will be given.

### **Late Assignments and Missed Exams**

The Final Project has a firm deadline and will not be accepted late. Exams may be made up with appropriate documentation; see below.

***All other assignments may be handed in ONE WEEK LATE without penalty. After this point, the assignment will NOT be accepted.***

A missed exam will only be allowed to be made up with documentation in the event of an extreme emergency (i.e., emergency medical condition, verifiable accident, death of an immediate family member, etc.) Notifying the instructor of such an event must occur as soon as possible (preferably within 48 hours). Documentation must also be presented to the instructor before an alternative exam is scheduled at the instructor's availability. Please know exams will not be allowed to be made up for lack of planning (i.e., forgetting, a missed due date, poor or no internet connection, etc.).

### **Use of Artificial Intelligence**

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

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## **UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

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### **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 insure their rights. Possible actions that may be taken range from exoneration to expulsion.

See ([www.txstate.edu/effective/upps/upps-07-10-01.html](http://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 for one semester do not automatically carry forward to the next.

**Tentative Schedule (Subject to Change)**

Week	Day	Date	Topic/Reading	Assignment	Important Dates
1	W	1.21	Syllabus Day & Course Introduction	Read the Syllabus	
2	M	1.26	<i>Serial Killers: What is a Serial Killer anyway?;</i> <b>The Boston Strangler</b>	Read Chapter 1	
	W	1.28	<i>Homicide Investigations: An Overview;</i> <b>Clutter Murders</b>	Read <b>Death Investigations: A Guide for Scene Investigators</b>  Syllabus Quiz due by <b>11:59 pm Sunday, Feb. 1<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>1.28</b> - Last Day to Add the Course
3	M	2.2	<i>Mass &amp; Spree Murder Incidents:</i> <b>9/11 Attacks, Columbine High School Shooting</b>		
	W	2.4	<i>Serial Murder Investigations: The Basics, Myths &amp; Typologies, Organized vs. Disorganized Killers</i>	Read <b>Serial Murder (p. 2-12) &amp; Investigations (p. 24-27)</b>	<b>2.4</b> - Last Day to Drop with the Class not on your record
4	M	2.9	Juvenile Killer: <b>Charles Starkweather</b>		
	W	2.11	<b>EXAM #1</b>		
5	M	2.16	The Unknown Killers: <b>Jack the Ripper</b>		
	W	2.18	The Unknown Killers: <b>The Zodiac Killer</b>		

6	M	2.23	The Boys Next Door: Ted Bundy & Jeffery Dahmer	<b>Writing Assignment #1 Due Monday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> by 11 am</b>  <b>Read Chapter 2</b>	
	W	2.25	Team Killers: Lucas & O'Toole & Beltway Snipers	<b>Read Chapter 3</b>	
7	M	3.2	<b>**NO CLASS, Academy of Criminal Justice Science Conference – See Canvas for Documentaries to Watch**</b>		
	W	3.4	<i>The California Night Stalkers:</i> - James DeAngelo, The Golden State Killer/EAR/ONS - Richard Ramirez, The Night Stalker		
8	M	3.9	The Deadly Cousin Duo: The Hillside Strangler	<b>Writing Assignment #2 Due Monday, March 9<sup>th</sup> by 11 am</b>	
	W	3.11	<b>EXAM #2</b>		
--	M W	3.16 3.18	<b>Spring Break Enjoy your time Off</b>		
9	M	3.23	Gary Ridgway, The Green River Killer	<b>Project Proposal Due Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> by 11:59 pm</b>	
	W	3.25	<i>Bind, Tourte, Kill</i> (Part I): Otero to Williams (1974–1979)	<b>Read BTK Affidavit on Canvas (p. 1-20)</b>	
10	M	3.30	<i>Bind, Tourte, Kill</i> (Part II): Hedge to Capture (1980–2005)	<b>Read BTK Affidavit on Canvas (p. 21-44)</b>	<b>3.31 - Last Day to drop with a “W”</b>
	W	4.1	<i>Bind, Tourte, Kill</i> (Part III): The Investigation (2005–Now)	<b>Read BTK Affidavit on Canvas (p. 45-92)</b>  <b>Read Chapter 10</b>	

11	M	4.6	Female Serial Killers: <b>Aileen Wuornos</b>	<b>Read Chapter 4</b>	
	W	4.8	<b>EXAM #3</b>		
12	M	4.13	Cult & Ritualistic Mass Murder/Serial Killings <b>Guest Speaker:</b> Gwen Kovaleski*	<b>Read Chapter 7</b>	
	W	4.15	<b>Edmund Kemper,</b> The CoEd Killer	<b>Read Chapter 5</b>	
13	M	4.20	<b>Rodney Alcala,</b> Dating Game Killer		
	W	4.22	America's Most Prolific Serial Killer: <b>Samuel Little</b>	<b>Read Chapter 6</b>	<b>4.23</b> - Last Day to Withdraw from the University
14	M	4.27	<b>Rex Heuermann,</b> The Long Island (Gilgo Beach) Serial Killer		
	W	4.29	The Future of Serial Murder Investigations	<b>Read Chapter 9</b>	
15	M	5.4	<b>EXAM #4</b>		
FINAL	M	5.11	<b>Final Exam Time</b> <b>8:00 am to 10:30 am</b>	<b><u>FINAL PROJECT</u></b> <b>DUE BY 12pm (NOON)</b> <b>ON MONDAY, MAY 11<sup>TH</sup></b>	

*\*Our Guest Speakers may need to reschedule their visits based on their work demands. If this happens, a new date will be communicated as soon as possible in class and via Canvas.*