Sample Syllabus for CSI: Crime Scene Investigation

Course Text
TBA

Course Description: A competent search of a crime scene demands specialized training. This course covers certain basic considerations, guidelines, and procedures that help the crime scene technician avoid oversight, ensure thoroughness of the search, and comply with both the legal and scientific pertaining to the use of physical evidence. The procedures for recording the crime scene- i.e., note taking, sketching, and photography-as well as the basic steps that minimize the omissions or contamination of evidence are studied.

Course Objectives: This course focuses on the principles and practices of investigators and investigations in the American system of criminal justice. The function and role of various specialists within the field of crime scene investigations will be presented and examined. For the student, a particular emphasis will be placed on becoming aware of those skills and attributes that are vital to the successful conclusion of criminal investigations with an emphasis placed on making students aware of critical reasoning skills that will be beneficial to them, not only in the investigative realm, but also in their future academic pursuits. The course will require students to critically examine various scenarios and case studies, plan, prioritize decision-making, and cooperate with fellow students in a team setting to be successful. The course will also examine the promise and peril of the investigative process as it is depicted in the media and popular entertainment.

At the conclusion of the course, students will have been exposed to certain ideas, concepts, and principles involved in the investigative process including:

- Criminal investigations are both a process and a result depending upon one’s perspective
- Criminal investigations require careful analysis and decision making that often involves balancing conflicting personal, professional, and societal values and goals
- The criminal justice system attempts to make the investigative process as objective as possible; however, there still remain critical and subjective decisions to be made in every criminal investigation. An investigator’s experience and judgment must be balanced in these cases with the requirements of the law and established investigative techniques
- How expectations of the public regarding the results of criminal investigations have been influenced by the depiction of the investigative process in the news media and in popular entertainment

Course Methodology:
Course methodology is patterned to develop and practice those skills and qualities that
are necessary for a student to become aware of the importance of the procedures and methods used by successful and ethical criminal investigators. The choice for academic success, and the degree of that potential success, is completely and totally up to each individual student. Through lecture, class participation and discussion, small group exercises, critical analysis, films, guest lecturers and other means, students will be provided the data and introduced to the skills necessary to critically examine the challenges faced by today’s crime scene investigators. This course will not focus on providing answers or solutions to specific investigative scenarios, but will expose students to the importance of procedures and methods designed to ensure fair, equitable, objective, ethical, legal and correct conclusions in criminal investigations. For the class to be successful each student must possess the courage and commitment to honestly examine and attempt to understand the legal, ethical, procedural, and technical complexities associated with modern crime solving techniques.

**Expectations and Requirements:**

**Academic Honesty:** All students are expected to understand the meaning of academic honesty, and to conduct themselves in accordance with the University’s policies.

**Attendance:** Attendance will be taken during each class session. **TARDINESS WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.** One point will be deducted from the student’s final grade for each instance of tardiness.

**Behavior:** It is expected that students and instructor will be on time, prepared, act appropriately consistent with a college academic experience, and display respectful and ethical behavior toward each other. This includes speaking during the class session. The rule regarding speaking in class will be vigorously enforced. Other than during group/class exercises only one person will speak at a time. Failure to adhere to this requirement will result in deductions from your final grade. Students are expected to have all class material necessary for the session.

**College Credit:** Students enroll to expand their intellectual abilities and personal experience within an academic atmosphere. The promise and peril of such a program are many. As a result of your successful participation in this course you will receive future college credit. To make the awarding of these college credits a worthy endeavor, this course will be conducted according to the expectations required of college students regarding both academic achievement and personal behavior.

**Contribution:** To be successful, this class requires a substantial degree of student contribution you make to the class as a whole.

**Courtesy:** It is required that all instructors and students respect the rights and privileges of all with whom they interact.

**Electronic Equipment:** Electronic communications equipment is not allowed in the classroom.

**Exceptions:** Exceptions to the expectations and requirements of this course will only be granted due to the most extreme circumstances involving ongoing and lengthy hospitalization or other extenuating circumstances of the most severe nature.
Grading: Student work will be graded according to the quality of your submitted work. The ability to follow directions and to integrate ideas and concepts that we discuss into your work and not simply submit random and meaningless facts and figures will be critical to the degree of your success or failure. Attention to detail including spelling, neatness, organization and grammar will be considered in your grade. The attempt to answer why something did or did not happen and not simply what did or did not happen is what we are seeking to accomplish. Assignments will not be accepted except under the most extreme circumstances beyond the date on which they are due.

Notebook: Each student is required to maintain a class notebook that includes all handouts provided in class, session notes, information recorded from the class text and any other information considered important by the student. The use of class notebooks and the information contained within can be used for quizzes, exams and other assignments given during the semester.

Schedule: The course schedule is subject to change to accommodate necessary adjustments based on unforeseen circumstances.

Academic Requirements

A. Quizzes
Two quizzes will be given during the semester on week 2 and week 4. These quizzes will test your understanding of assigned reading from the text, information recorded from class and data disseminated during classroom sessions. Since one of the objectives of this course is to realistically recreate the procedures used by Crime Scene Investigators, all in class exams will be open notebook. Your effort in developing and maintaining thorough and accurate notes and distributed class material will be critical in ensuring your success. Each quiz is worth up to five points toward your final grade. 

Total possible points: 10

B. Crime Scene Response
The class will be randomly divided into two crime and each team will have the opportunity to respond to a mock crime scene and practice the skills and techniques used by real crime scene investigators and technicians. Specific details will be provided in class, but it will be the mission of each team to preserve, document, measure, photograph and collect evidence at the crime scene and then come to a reasonable and defensible conclusion based on your analysis and conclusions regarding your documentation and the evidence uncovered at the crime scene. Depending upon your assigned group your scenario response will occur on week 3. One comprehensive report from each team will be due not later than week 4.

Total possible points: 20

C. Quality of Contribution
Each student’s attitude, cooperation, quality of contribution, behavior, and other personal qualities that either contribute to or detract from the class will be considered in your final grade. Each student may be awarded up to ten points toward their final grade for contributing to the success of the class.

Total possible points: 10
D. Film Review
Based on your understanding of our discussions and the material presented in class, discuss your observations and opinions in a not more than two-page typed paper regarding either *Silence of the Lambs* or *Mystic River* and in what ways those films either accurately or erroneously depict the realities of modern criminal investigations. You may also compare and contrast in a not more than two-page typewritten paper the facts and fictions of CSI - Las Vegas when compared with The Case of the Missing College Student shown in class on week 2. In your opinion, what are the reality and myths regarding criminal investigations as illustrated by these stories? Each student may be awarded up to twenty points for successful completion of this requirement. **Due not later than week 3.**

*Total possible points: 20*

E. Group Exercise: Survival
A group exercise will be conducted in class on **week 2**. This exercise is designed to test your investigative thinking and critical reasoning skills. The class will be randomly divided into groups to participate in the exercise. Each group will submit one response to the scenario and each member of the group will receive the same grade based on your group’s response.

*Total possible points: 10*

F. Group Exercise: Who is that?
A class exercise will begin in class on **week 1**. Specific details regarding this exercise will be provided in class. Students will be required to produce a one-page typed paper to complete this assignment not later than **week 4** to receive credit.

*Total possible points: 10*

G. Group Exercise: Who Was That?
A class exercise regarding observation and description techniques will be conducted in class on **week 3** to provide you the opportunity to employ the skills and techniques that we have discussed in class. Specific details will be provided in class.

*Total possible points: 10*

H. Scavenger Hunt
The class will be randomly divided into teams and provided clues to various landmarks around the City of Boston. It will be the responsibility of each team to unravel these clues and in the company of a Summer Discovery Counselor to correctly identify, travel to and photograph as many of these landmarks as you can in one class session. This is an opportunity to put into practice some of the skills and concepts that we have developed during the term. Each team will submit one response to the scenario and each member of the group will receive the same grade based on your group’s response. This assignment is due not later than **week 4**.

*Total possible points: 10*
WARNING: FAILURE TO SUBMIT REQUIRED WORK ON TIME WILL RESULT IN ZERO POINTS FOR THAT ASSIGNMENT.

Week 1: Introductions

Introduction
- ATTENDANCE (Be on time)
- Course expectations and requirements
- Class introductions
- Mug Shots
- Biographical Information
- Crime Scene Overview (PPT)
- Alfred Hitchcock Presents (The Right Kind of House)
- Reading Period:
  - The Casebook of Forensic Detection
  - Time of Death (pp. 217-229)

Forensic Entomology
- ATTENDANCE (Be on time)
- Assigned reading review
- The Body Farm (PPT)
- Crime Scene Creatures
- Reading Period:
  - The Casebook of Forensic Detection
  - Psychological Profiling (pp. 156–165)

Review
- ATTENDANCE (Be on time)
- Reading Period:
  - The Casebook of Forensic Detection
  - Cause of Death (pp. 22–40)

Forensic Psychology
- ATTENDANCE (Be on time)
- Film: Silence of the Lambs

Week 2: The Investigative Method

Criminal Investigations: Art or Science?
- ATTENDANCE (Be on time)
- Class Exercise: Can You Read This?
- Class Exercise: Process and Procedure
- Film (Selected Scene – Austin Powers)
- CSI: Las Vegas
- CSI – Discussion
- Reading Period:
  - The Casebook of Forensic Detection
  - DNA Typing (pp. 55-69)
Northeastern University

*Investigative Decision Making and Problem Solving*
- **ATTENDANCE** (Be on time)
- Assigned reading review
- Apollo 13 *(Selected Scene)*
- The Princess Bride *(Selected Scene)*
- The Search for the Holy Grail *(Selected Scene)*
- Lottery Ticket
- Tom Mabe
- **Group Exercise: Survival** (10 points)
- The Case of the Missing College Student
- Discussion
- Reading Period:
  - The Casebook of Forensic Detection
  - Identification of Remains (Review pp. 166-196)

*Interviews and Interrogations*
- **ATTENDANCE** (Be on time)
- Assigned reading review
- **Quiz # 1** (5 points)
- Class Exercise: Story Line
- Anatomy of a Murder
- **Holder Case (PPT)**
- **Group Exercise: Who is that?** (10 points)
- Reading Period:
  - The Casebook of Forensic Detection
  - Fingerprinting (pp. 90-121)

*Homicide Investigations*
- **ATTENDANCE** (Be on time)
- Film: *Mystic River*

**Week 3: In the Field**

*Investigative Technology*
- **ATTENDANCE** (Be on time)
- Boston Police Department – Fingerprinting Techniques
- Exercise – Fingerprinting Typology
- Autopsies
- **Film (Dr. G: Medical Examiner)**
- Crime scene photography
- Reading Period:
  - The Casebook of Forensic Detection
  - Forensic Anthropology (pp. 122-141)

*Observation & Description*
- **ATTENDANCE** (Be on time)
- Assigned reading review
- **King Kong** *(Selected Scene)*
- **CSI vs. COPS** *(Selected Scenes)*
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• Class Exercise: What do you see? (PPT)
• Class Exercise: Who was that? (10 points)
• Reading Period:
  o The Casebook of Forensic Detection
  o Trace Evidence (pp. 249-269)

Crime Scene Response Group 1
• ATTENDANCE (Be on time)
• Scavenger Hunt Group 2
• Required Reading:
  • The Casebook of Forensic Detection
  • Trace Evidence (pp. 269-290)

Crime Scene Response Group 2
• ATTENDANCE (Be on time)
• Film review due (20 points)
• Scavenger Hunt Group 1

Week 4: Conclusion

Police Officers and Victims
• ATTENDANCE (Be on time)
• Quiz # 2 (5 points)
• Film: Gone Baby Gone
• Reading Period:
  o The Casebook of Forensic Detection
  o Ballistics (pp. 3-20)

Homicide Investigations
ATTENDANCE (Be on time)
• Captain Thomas Greene
• Massachusetts State Police
• Reading Period:
  o The Casebook of Forensic Detection Toxicology (pp. 230-246)

Crime Scene Response Review
• ATTENDANCE (Be on time)
• Crime scene response report due (20 points)
• Who is that? report due (10 points)
• Anatomy of a Murder
• Gillen Case (PPT)
• Reading Period:
  o The Casebook of Forensic Detection Serology (pp. 197-213)

Review and Conclusion
• ATTENDANCE (Be on time)
• Scavenger hunt scoring sheet due (10 points)
• Scavenger Hunt Scoring
• Class Exercise: Do You Have a Clue?
• A walk through the neighborhood