Sociology 3571-090 Murder in America
Spring Semester 2020

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Class Overview
On average about 16,500 people are murdered each year in the United States. While murder continues to intrigue, horrify, and mystify most Americans, it is a subject that is plagued by misinformation, stereotypes, misunderstanding, and a lack of scientific rigor. The objective of this class is to review the literature on several different dimensions of murder so as to gain a better understanding of what constitutes murder, how it has been defined both historically and sociologically, and investigate its overall role and function to society and the criminal justice system.

Topics to be covered in the course include:
- Murder from a Historical Perspective
- General Typologies of Murder
- What Constitutes Murder? Degrees of Murder
- Defenses to Murder (The Insanity Defense)
- The Demographics of Murder
- Serial Murders
- Female Serial Murders
- Mass Murders
- Sociopaths, Psychopaths, and Murder
- Weapons Used to Murder Others
- The Innocence Project – Those Who Have Been Wrongly Convicted of Murder
- Street Level Murder vs. White Collar Murder (The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison)
- Trends in Violent Crime

Class Format
The class is based on an “online” learning style format. Course content includes assigned readings, online discussions, lectures, and assignments. As a course on “Murder in America” is a relatively new topic, there is no text for the class. Please check Canvas on a daily basis for announcements and updated course information. All class communication will be received via Canvas or by email. All of the quizzes for this class will be administered online. Please refer to the syllabus frequently for updates and changes.
The class has been designed to accommodate the demanding time schedules for students (e.g., work, family, campus activities). As such, there are no daily or weekly assignments. The material for each quiz will be provided and you can determine when you read the material or listen to lectures. However, be certain that you cover all of the material before each quiz. I designed the course this way based on feedback from students over several years of teaching online courses.

Course Objectives:
- Understand the role of murder in the United States from a historical perspective
- Understand how murder/homicide and its various subcategories are defined
- Understand what legal requirements must be satisfied to obtain a criminal conviction
- Understand what factors lead to false convictions in murder cases
- Understand the major defenses to criminal liability involving murder
- Understand the demographics of murder (when, where, and how people get killed)
- Comprehend how prevalent serial murder is, what motivates serial killers, and how they are captured
- Gain an understanding of the differences between female and male serial killers
- Learn what is being done to curb murder rates around the country
- Gain an understanding of the role that handguns play in murders

Grading
The final grade will be based on three multiple choice quizzes each worth 20 percent of the total grade, participation in 4 online class discussions worth 20 percent of the final grade, and a PowerPoint project worth 20 percent of the final grade. Grading Scale: A (100-93) A- (92-90) B+ (89-87) B (86-83) B- (82-80) C+ (79-77) C (76-73) C- (72-70) D+ (69-67) D (66-63) D- (62-60) E (>60)

PowerPoint Assignment (20%)
Students will be required to prepare a PowerPoint presentation on a topic related to murder. The details of the assignment will be posted towards the latter part of January. The assignment will be due on April 2nd. You can find the instructions for this assignment in the “Files” section of Canvas.

Readings and Assignments
The library is in the process of uploading the reserved readings. These should be available by the beginning of next week.

How to find readings on Ereserve:
- Go to U of U Library Page
- Click of “Course Reserves
- Search on “Bench”
• Select on the appropriate course

Getting Started:
• Review the syllabus
• Read the file entitled “Class Introduction”

**Discussions (20%)**
You are **required** to participate in each of the 4 discussion sessions. All discussions will be offered through Canvas. You are expected to make a meaningful and thoughtful response to the discussion question. Dialogue with other students is encouraged.

Please note that a “discussion” is not an “essay” or an “op-ed” piece. To ensure that you receive full credit in for a discussion, make sure that you answer item by item any questions posed by the discussion and that you participate in the discussion by reading the other posts and then engaging in the discussion. A “single” post does not meet the criteria for engaging in the discussion. It is not uncommon for some students to post six or seven posts in the course of a discussion. The discussion topics are designed to help you apply critical thinking skills to contemporary problems engender by the course. You are encouraged to express your position, defend it and/or modify it as you gain a fuller understanding of the perspectives surrounding the discussion topic.

**In order to gain full credit for the discussion you should follow and participate in the discussion on a daily basis while it is active. You should plan on reading the posts on a daily basis and making posts on a daily basis when the discussion is active.**

Discussion sessions will not be extended beyond the end date. **Makeup discussion sessions will not be offered.** If you miss a discussion session you should plan on participating in the next discussion. If you have trouble “posting” a discussion in Canvas, please get assistance through the Canvas help desk at (801) 585-6112 (option 2) and then notify me either by email or by phone. The discussions will last for 4 days. The dates of the discussions are as follows:

**Discussion Schedule**
Discussion 1 January 21 – January 24
Discussion 2 February 18 – February 21
Discussion 3 March 17 – March 20
Discussion 4 April 14 – April 17

**Online Quizzes (60%)**
There will be three online multiple-choice quizzes based on the texts and **any other material assigned by the instructor.** The quizzes will be available for you to take
during a designated weekend beginning Saturday morning at 8:00 A.M. and ending on Sunday evening at 11:30 P.M. You will have approximately 60 minutes to complete each quiz. Each quiz will count towards 20% of the overall class grade. Cumulatively, the quizzes account for 63% of the overall grade.

**Quiz 1 – February 15-16**  
(Saturday 8:00 A.M. through Sunday at 11:30 P.M.)

The following material will be covered on the multiple-choice quiz:

- Audio Lecture 1 (This can be found in Canvas in Media Gallery).
- Read the file entitled “Intro to the Criminal Justice System” (Canvas/Files Section).
- Read the file entitled “The Lure and the Law of Homicide (Chap 1, in The Will to Kill; Making Sense of Sense of Senseless Murder, Fox, Levin and Quinet, Allyn and Bacon 2nd Ed 2005) (Canvas/Files Section).
- Read the file entitled “Explaining Murder (Chap 2, in The Will to Kill; Making Sense of Sense of Senseless Murder, Fox, Levin and Quinet, Allyn and Bacon 2nd Ed 2005) (Canvas/Files Section).
- Watch the PBS Frontline Video “The Confessions.” You can access this video by pasting the following address into your browser: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/the-confessions/
  - You can access this video by pasting the following address into your browser. 

**Quiz 2- March 21-22**  
(Saturday 8:00 A.M. through Sunday at 11:30 P.M.)

- Audio Lectures 2 and 3 (These can be found in Canvas in Media Gallery).
- Watch the Frontline Video “Post Mortem” by pasting the following link into your browser: http://www.pbs.org/video/frontline-post-mortem/
• Watch the Frontline Video “The Real CSI by pasting the following link into your browser: http://www.pbs.org/video/frontline-the-real-csi/
• Review the PowerPoint Serial Murder (Canvas/Files Section).
• Read the article on Ereserve: Serial Murder and the Case of Aileen Wuornous: Attachment theory, psychopathy, and predatory aggression
• Read the article on Ereserve: Homicide Followed by Suicide: An Integrated Theoretical Perspective Dee Wood Harper and Lydia Voig. Homicide Studies 2007 11: 295
• Read the Article on Ereserve: Patterns of Multiple Family Homicide. Liem, Marieke; Reichelmann, Ashley. Homicide Studies; Feb2014, Vol. 18 Issue 1, p44-58

Quiz 3 – April 18-19 (Saturday 8:00 A.M. through Sunday at 11:30 P.M.)
• Audio Lecture 4 (This can be found in Canvas in Media Gallery).
• Read the article on Ereserve: Guns and Guns Violence (Garen J. Wintemute) in The Crime Drop in America Cambridge 2006. Alfred Blumstein and Joel Wallman (Ed).

Declarations

Provisions for Disabled Students
The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.

Academic Misconduct
Per University of Utah regulations (Policy # 6-400), “A student who engages in academic misconduct,” as defined in Part I.B. and including, but not limited to, cheating, falsification, or plagiarism, “may be subject to academic sanctions including but not limited to a grade reduction, failing grade, probation, suspension or dismissal from the program or the University, or revocation of the student's degree or certificate. Sanctions may also include community service, a written reprimand, and/or a written statement of misconduct that can be put into an appropriate record maintained for purposes of the profession or discipline for which the student is preparing.” Please refer to the Student Code for full elaboration of student academic and behavioral misconduct policies (http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.php).

Addressing Sexual Misconduct
Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran’s status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS).