

Department of Anthropology

ANTHRO 2242B-650 - Forensic Anthropology in Fact and Fiction

PROVISIONAL COURSE OUTLINE

Winter 2025

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Instructor and course information

Instructor: Dr. Andrea Waters-Rist

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Mode of delivery: Online and asynchronous

Credit Value: 0.5

Antirequisites: None

Prerequisites: None

Course Description

There are many TV shows, films, books, and other popular culture mediums that depict forensic science. Have you ever wondered if the depictions are accurate? Would you like to know more about what is and is not possible in a real forensic case? If so, this course is for you. We will focus on forensic anthropology, the study of human skeletal remains in medico-legal contexts. Think of the books by Kathy Reichs that led to the TV show "Bones". We will explore fact and fiction in the popular culture of forensic anthropology with the aim of understanding (a) core scientific principles, (b) common narrative devices, and (c) the effects of fictional forensic portrayals on public perception, technological standards, and ethical paradigms.

Course Format

This course will consist of 12 weekly online lessons. Lessons include video lectures, assigned readings, videos and other multimedia content. Once posted, video lectures will remain available until the time/date of the final exam. The assigned readings for each week will be specified within the corresponding Lessons folder. Reading content will be briefly covered in the video lecture, but the full amount of information will not be explained; rather, it is up to the student to familiarize themselves with the full amount of information in each reading. The material covered in the lectures and in the assigned readings can and will differ. Not every concept covered in one will be covered in the other. The two sources should be approached as complementary – two parts of a whole – rather than redundant. For the weekly quizzes and final exam, you are responsible for all material from the assigned readings and all content from lectures.

There are no labs or tutorials in this course. A full course schedule including a week-by-week breakdown of topics and assigned readings will be available on the course's OWL Brightspace site before the first day of class.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Summarize and critically evaluate literature from academic and popular sources.
- Detect similarities and differences between the presentation of forensic anthropology in popular culture and actual practice.
- Analyze contemporary issues by delineating scientific, narrative, and belief-based conceptual frameworks.
- Identify and reflect on personal and societal perceptions of death, dead bodies, and forensic science.
- Explain the effects of exaggerated forensic portrayals on public perception, technological standards, and ethical paradigms.

Course Materials

1. Journal articles, book chapters and academic websites and videos via the course's on-line OWL Brightspace site.

You are not required to purchase any books, supplies, or other items for this course.

Use of OWL Brightspace

I will use Western's online course management program (OWL Brightspace) to provide the final course outline and weekly schedule (Syllabus page); provide, submit, and return assignments (Assignments page); communicate with the class (Announcements and Messages tools); and provide PDF copies of weekly readings and links to course materials (Lessons and Resources pages). PowerPoint presentations of the lectures will be made available on the OWL Brightspace Lesson pages after each class. You may make use of the OWL Wiki tool for group collaborations. All grades will be posted in the OWL Brightspace Gradebook.

All course material will be posted to OWL Brightspace: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>. If students need assistance with OWL Brightspace, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the [Western Technology Services Helpdesk](#) online or by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800 for technical support. Current versions of all popular browsers (e.g., Safari, Chrome, Edge, Firefox) are supported with OWL Brightspace; what is most important is that you update your browser frequently to ensure it is current. All JavaScript and cookies should be enabled.

Evaluation

Your course grade will be based on 6 items. For items 3, 4, and 5 listed below, there is a 2-day grace period for the assignment deadline. This means no late marks will be deducted if the assignment is submitted within 48 hours after the deadline specified below. Note, assignment deadline extensions beyond the already offered 2-day grace period will only be offered with the approval of the Academic Counselling Office. There will be no exception to this.

Evaluation Items:

1. 11 short 'open-book' multiple-choice quizzes: 1% each, with the lowest grade dropped. Worth 10% of final mark. Quizzes are available by Monday at 8:00am and due by Friday at 11:55pm for weeks 2 to 12. There are no extensions for the quizzes as you have all week to write them.
2. At least 6 weeks of active participation in weekly discussion topics (there are 11 total) in the Discussion Forum. Worth 5% of final mark.
3. Research a Career Assignment. Due: January 31st. Worth 15% of final grade.
4. Laboratory Assignment. Due: February 14th. Worth 10% of final grade.
5. Multimedia Project. Worth 25% of final grade. This 25% is broken down into 3 components (proposal, research, final product) as follows:
 - o Multimedia Project Proposal (worth 5%) Due March 7th
 - o Multimedia Project Research (worth 5%) Due March 14th
 - o Multimedia Project Final Product (worth 15%) Due April 4th
6. Final Exam. Worth 35% of final grade. Date and time to be determined by the Registrar's Office.

Evaluation Item Descriptions:

1. Quizzes

The weekly quizzes consist of 10 multiple choice or true-false questions. Students have 30 minutes in which to complete the quiz. They may use the lectures, readings, and any other educational information provided that week while writing the quiz.

2. Participation

To receive full participation marks students must actively engage in discussion of at least 6 of 11 weekly discussion topics. Active participation means a post that expresses your thoughts on the topic and at least one post that responds to or builds upon the post of a classmate or TA/Instructor. Note, posted comments are not graded; rather they are simply noted as present or absent.

3. Research a Career Assignment

The Research a Career Assignment involves exploring any of a number of forensic professions as they are currently practiced in Canada. Students are provided with a document that summarizes the usual practices of the occupation after which they are required to find three additional scholarly/professional sources that further describe some aspect of the job. With this information several questions are to be answered in a brief written report (500-800 words).

4. Laboratory Assignment

The Laboratory Assignment involves answering several questions about decomposition and death investigations based on theoretical scenarios. The student will have to use material presented over several weeks to answer specific questions from fictional cases.

5. Multimedia Project

The Multimedia Project asks students to be creative in designing a public-facing informational instrument that corrects a commonly encountered error or myth in popular culture depictions of forensic science. The medium to be used can be video (e.g., YouTube short, interview, animation, song, etc.), audio (e.g., podcast), website (e.g., blog), or graphic design (e.g., infographics, graphic novel). Students have the option to work individually or in small groups of no more than 4 students. The expectations for content will be scaled to the group size (e.g., video or podcast length and depth; amount of illustrative output). Students working in groups will be required to evaluate the performance of their group members (as well as themselves) and this feedback will be used in assigning grades. Students will work closely with one of the TAs to ensure they are producing appropriate content with the project being scaffolded to first include a proposal (worth 5%), then a research summary (worth 5%), before finally submitting the final product (worth 15%).

All assignments may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system.

6. Final Exam

The final exam is worth 35% of the course grade. It will take place during the designated exam period for this course at a time determined by the Registrar's Office. It is an online exam that you may write from anywhere. It is a 2-hour exam in which 70-80 multiple choice questions are to be answered. The final exam will be based upon course content from weeks 1 through 12 and thus is cumulative.

Course Policies

Grades:

Grades will not be adjusted on the basis of need. Claims by students of an excellent academic history, good attendance record, need to obtain or maintain a scholarship, desire

to be admitted to a competitive program or graduate school, or other personal issues, cannot be used to justify a higher grade in the course or a reweighting of course components. There is no extra work or assignments available for extra credit or to “make up” for a course component that was missed or performed poorly. It is important to monitor your performance in the course. Remember: You are responsible for your grades in this course.

Content Warning:

In this class you will read about and see images and videos of dead bodies, in various states of decay. This will only be done for learning purposes. If the idea of seeing images and videos of dead bodies upsets you, this may not be the right course for you. If at any time an image or video is shown that disturbs or upsets you, feel free to look away from the screen, pause the video, and occupy yourself with something else until you feel well enough to reengage with the lecture. In all cases it is sufficient to only listen to or read the information being presented; thus, you do not have to view images or videos that you don't want to.

Online Forum Discussion Etiquette:

Discussion in the online forum must be respectful and professional. Some of the discussion topics involve potentially sensitive and difficult subject matter so it is extra important to be mindful of the effect a comment may have on a classmate. Students are only required to engage in 6 of 11 weekly discussion forums and should feel free to avoid topics that they find too personal or upsetting. Tips for engaging in constructive and respectful online discussion will be posted on the main page of the Discussion Forum folder.

Potential violations to appropriate online behavior should be brought to the TA or Instructors attention.

Copyright Notice:

Video lectures are protected by copyright. You may view and take notes on these lectures for your own educational use. You may not re-record or reproduce any portion of my video lectures, nor post or distribute them in any form, for any audience, or via any medium.

Academic Integrity - Statement on Plagiarism:

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing. *This includes the use of generative AI to complete any portion of an assignment.* It is also a scholastic offence to submit the same work for credit in more than one course. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously, and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a [Scholastic Offence](#). Penalties range from a failing grade for the assignment or the course to suspension or even expulsion from the University. I will provide you with the tools to properly reference and acknowledge other's work in class. Never hesitate to ask if you have a question about academic honesty.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI tools may not be used to generate any part of an assignment. They may be used for research, copyediting, and translation purposes as needed. However, you must check and cite all sources and provide a description of how AI was used in the assignment.

Academic Considerations:

University policy on academic considerations are described [here](#) and [here](#). This policy requires that all requests for academic consideration must be accompanied by a self-attestation. Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor, in consultation with the academic advisors/counselors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline.

Please see your academic counsellor immediately if you will be seeking consideration based on medical or compassionate grounds. No academic considerations will be granted retroactively more than 5 days after an assignment's due date. For privacy reasons, students should note that course Instructors should not receive documentation in support of medical or compassionate consideration requests directly from a student. All such documentation must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.

It is important to communicate with me as soon as you know you will need academic consideration (beyond course policies) to complete assignments, including exams. It is your responsibility to keep me informed about requests for consideration. All missed work must be made up by the end of the exam period in the applicable term.

Accessible Education

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. Please see [Accessible Education](#) for information.

Academic Rights and Responsibilities

All students should familiarize themselves with Western's current [Academic Policies in the Academic Calendar](#) which include, but is not limited to, academic consideration for medical illness, accommodation for religious holidays, academic appeals, academic accommodation for students with disabilities, as well as scholastic discipline.

Gender Based Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts [here](#).

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Mental Health Support

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to [Mental Health@Western](#) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

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