

Wrongful Conviction: Causes, Consequences and Reform
Honors Seminar
010:096:20
Drs. Otto & Kim MacLin
Spring 2009
Baker 315

Class Sessions: We will meet Thursdays from 2-3:15 (except for the first week where we will meet on Tuesday). See course calendar for dates. We will go on 1 field trip, date/location TBA.

Contact Information:

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Course Description:

To date, 227 people have been found innocent and released from prison based on DNA evidence. These wrongly convicted individuals rarely have the resources to pursue their innocence in the courts. Groups like the Innocence Project, among others, act as legal clinics where students, attorneys, activists and scientists work together to free the innocent and study the causes of their wrongful conviction. This seminar combines sociology, political science, chemistry, psychology, law, biology and criminology for a truly interdisciplinary learning experience covering the causes and consequences of wrongful conviction, as well as potential reforms to prevent its occurrence. The seminar style, moderate reading, and project-based approach is designed to help you develop analytical skills, stimulate discussion, and encourage critical thinking in a timely, and widely appealing topic. This highly interactive seminar will introduce you to the basic factors that cause wrongful conviction (mistaken identification, defective science, police misconduct, among others) that necessarily draw from the scholarly areas mentioned above. You will read research existing Innocence Project centers, and review actual cases of the exonerated to further explore the causes and consequences of wrongful conviction. Much like law students working at legal clinics, you will have the opportunity to review materials, formulate and ask questions, draft responses and potential criticisms and evaluate the innocence claim itself. Not only will you learn the political, social, legal, and scientific bases for wrongful conviction and its remedies, but you will get to participate in the process of case review and analysis that is critical to the exoneration process.

Required Texts:

- Scheck, B., Neufeld, P., & Dwyer, J. (2004). *Actual innocence: When justice goes wrong and how to make it right*. NY: Signet. ISBN 1-4039-6430-0
- Doyle, J. (2005). *True Witness*, Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN 1-4039-6430-0

Format of student participation and evaluation:

Students will be evaluated based on their class participation and discussion of topics, a presentation, and a portfolio on a wrongful conviction case (with a short presentation of it during the final).