

**East Tennessee State University
Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology**

Introduction to Forensic Document Examination CJCR 5110

Course Syllabus

Contact Information

Instructor: Heidi H. Harralson, MA, BCDE, Dipl.
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The preferred contact method is via email. I have two email addresses and I prefer if you use spectrum008@aol.com as I read that email almost daily. I review my ETSU email account less frequently. If you need to arrange a telephonic call, please schedule a time and contact number via email first.

Format

This course is conducted 100% online. Materials will be posted to the Desire2Learn (D2L) forum. Weekly reading assignments and discussion questions will be provided in D2L.

Textbooks

Kelly, J.S. & Lindblom, B.S. (2006). *Scientific examination of questioned documents* (2nd Ed.). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Harralson, H. H. & Miller, L. S. (2018). *Huber and Headrick's handwriting examination: Facts and fundamentals* (2nd Ed.). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Learning Outcomes & Course Objectives

This course is intended to acquaint the student with the fundamentals of forensic document examination.

Goals include:

- Familiarize students with the fundamentals of document examination, including terminology, theoretical principles, historical background of the field, and notable cases.

- Students learn how to initiate a document examination investigation through proper collection, handling, storing, and identifying of document evidence.
- Familiarize students with current research, methods, and standards in document examination.
- Students understand the ethical issues, legal procedures, and case law pertaining to document examination.

Assessment

Your progress in this class will be assessed through a combination of practical exercises, assigned papers, reading and reaction discussions, a mid-term exam, and a document examination paper/project. There are 100 possible points in this course.

Practical Exercises	25%	25 points
Assigned Papers	15%	15 points
Mid-Term Exam	15%	15 points
Document Exam Paper/Project	20%	20 points
Participation	20%	20 points

The following grading scale is used in this course:

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	70-76
F	Below 70

Assignments

Practical Exercises: There are three practical document examination exercises in this course. Instructions regarding the practical exercises will be posted by the instructor in the News section. The exercises include the examination and comparison of documents including handwritten signatures. The first is a form discrimination test and the second exercise will be presented in two parts and involves the analysis of electronic signatures. The practical exercises are cumulatively worth 25 points.

Legal Ruling Paper: This short paper topic is on a major legal ruling that affected forensic document/handwriting examination. Find a case on the Internet or the ETSU Sherrod Library that resulted in a significant ruling in forensic handwriting examination (e.g., *Kumho Tire v.*

Carmichael, Pettus v. U.S., U.S. v. Starcezyzel, U.S. v. Prime, etc.). Cite and summarize the case, and then discuss why the ruling was significant to the forensic handwriting field. The APA formatted paper needs to be a minimum of 4 pages in length excluding cover page and references. Paper is worth 10 points.

Forensic Case Review: Select a famous case that involved questioned documents or handwriting (examples: 2001 anthrax notes, Jack the Ripper, The Zodiac, Mormon Forgery Murders, JonBenet Ramsey, etc.). You can find articles about these cases on the Internet and other published sources. Review the case from a forensic document examination perspective and discuss anything you can find about the case that relates to the type of documents that were questioned, how they were or should have been handled, comparison materials, limitations in the case, if the case was solved and how. Also discuss how you would approach or analyze the case and your review of how the case was helped or hindered by the media. Support your paper with citations from your textbook and/or scholarly papers (minimum three citations). The paper needs to be formatted in APA and 4-5 pages in length (excluding cover and reference pages). Paper is worth 10 points.

Exam: A mid-term exam will be assigned to test the student's knowledge of the material. The exam will be opened in the Content section in the week that it is due and the student will have one week to complete the open-book exam. The mid-term exam is worth 15 points.

Document Examination Paper/Project: The final paper is on a topic that the student is interested in relevant to forensic document or handwriting examination. The final paper needs to be a total of 10 pages in length formatted in APA (including a minimum of 7 pages of text, cover page, abstract, and references page). The paper should not exceed 15 pages. A minimum of five academic references are required which can include journal articles and textbooks. The paper can be a literature review of a relevant course topic, or, a document examination experiment (including literature review, methodology, results, discussion sections). If the paper is not relevant to the subject matter of this class, preapproval of the subject needs to be cleared with the instructor. A document examination project, onsite training, or attendance at a forensic document examination conference may be substituted for the final paper upon prior approval by the instructor. Details about alternate projects will be discussed during the semester. The final paper/project is worth 20 points.

Discussion Questions: Cumulatively, discussions are worth 20 points. Discussions are expected to be meaningful, well-developed paragraphs in response to the discussion topic(s) posted by the instructor. The student needs to submit a minimum of three well-developed posts each week in order to earn maximum points.

Assignments can be submitted to the instructor through the "Dropbox" on D2L. If there are technical issues, I will allow submission of assignments via email but this method needs to be kept to a minimum. You may use MS Word or PDF for assignments. A letter grade will be deducted for each week that an assignment is submitted late.

Course Policies

Attendance & Participation

Students are expected to actively and regularly participate in online discussions every week. Participation is worth 20% of the overall grade and the participation grade will be posted at the end of the course. Online participation will include reactions to assigned reading materials and discussion of topics introduced by the instructor.

Academic Writing, Research, and Format

All formal papers are expected to be written in a formal, objective, and scholarly manner. Citations must come from academic sources (peer reviewed journals and academic texts). Use the ETSU online Sherrod Library link to find research citations.

All formal papers and citations must use the style published in the *Publication Manual of American Psychological Association (6th ed.)*. Referred to as APA style, it is widely used in the social sciences. In addition to the manual, there are several resources on the Internet about use of APA including:

<http://www.bibme.org/citation-guide/apa/>

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html

All papers need to be formatted in 10 or 12 point using Times New Roman, Arial, or similar fonts. Papers should be double-spaced.

Academic Integrity & Plagiarism

Copying text without credit to the source is considered plagiarism. All formal papers including case reports are to cite material using APA style. While responses to discussion questions do not need to cite materials in as formal a format, plagiarism is not tolerated on the discussion forum. Summaries of reading material need to be written in the student's own words. If quoting material on the discussion forum, the source needs to be cited. Copying or paraphrasing the posts of other students is considered cheating and will not be tolerated on the discussion forum. Duplicate work used between classes (e.g., turning in the same or similar paper or post in more than one class) is not accepted.

If any student is caught cheating or plagiarizing on any part of the course requirements, that student may be given an F for that particular assignment or for the entire course, at the discretion of the instructor. Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing may also be reported to the Dean.

Schedule

The following schedule of weekly topics and/or assignments is tentative and subject to change.

Date	Topic
Week 1	Introduction to class
Week 2	Scope of Work and Standards; Forensic Bias
Week 3	Scope of Work and Standards
Week 4	Form Discrimination
Week 5	The Court System and Document Examination
Week 6	Standards, Terminology, & Technology
Week 7	Mid-Term Exam
Week 8	Fall Break
Week 9	The Scientific Method
Week 10	Handwriting Examination
Week 11	Forensic Case Review
Week 12	Forensic Signature Assignment
Week 13	Final Paper/Project
Week 14	Thanksgiving Break
Week 15	Final Paper/Project
Week 16	Final Grading