



Introduction to the Psychology of Criminal Behavior provides an overview of the intersection of psychology and the criminal justice system. The biopsychosocial factors that may influence criminal behavior are examined such as aggression, psychopathy, mental health disorders, and brain dysfunction. Finally, appropriate psychological interventions are evaluated to determine the best course of action for predicting and treating criminal behavior in both juveniles and adults.

This course provides students with foundational knowledge regarding the psychological and sociological characteristics associated with criminal behavior. The textbook and other course sources examine the complex nature of criminal behaviors through a variety of theories, methodologies, and perspectives. Case studies and real-life examples are also included. Through discussions, journal activities, written assignments, and a Comprehensive Case Study Report Final Paper, students will utilize course content as well as additional scholarly research to critically consider concepts that focus on the evolution of criminal and delinquent behavior.

Throughout the course, you will notice Twitter feeds have been added after each weekly Introduction. These feeds are from major criminal justice organizations and other sources that are relevant to this course; the feeds are recommended only and not required. Twitter is as useful as the links it provides;

some are more useful than others, so keep an eye out for any of these credible source materials for support in your discussions and written assignments.

Week 1 kicks off the course by examining mental disorders that are most frequently correlated with criminal behavior. You will learn that, contrary to stereotype, individuals who suffer from mental disorders do not commit a high percentage of crimes. You will also learn about psychopathy, its characteristics, and its relationship to criminal behavior.

Learning Outcomes

This week students will

1. Examine the various types of offender profiling.
2. Analyze ethical considerations in offender profiling.
3. Differentiate features of various types of murders.
4. Assess the impact that biological, developmental, and situational factors have on the development of criminal behavior.

Discussions

1. **Post Your Introduction—Careers in Criminal Psychology [WLO: 1] [CLO: 1].** *1st Post Due by Day 1.* Prior to beginning work on this discussion, access the Society for Police and Criminal Psychology's [Frequently Asked Questions About Forensic Psychology](#) support page for students. Please read through the organization's web page on educational requirements, skills required, and how to go about pursuing a graduate degree in criminal psychology.

After reviewing the web page, please provide an introduction about yourself, including:

- Where you are from and your career plans.
- What did the Society for Police and Criminal Psychology web page recommend for an undergraduate to do in order to gain experience in the field?
- One area of criminal psychology that interests many individuals is criminal profiling. What is the likelihood of a career in criminal profiling?
- Was the website helpful in providing more information about your career plans? If so, in what way?

Guided Response: Review several of your classmates' posts, and respond to at least two of your peers. Be sure to discuss your experiences and how they might be similar to or different from the experience your classmates shared. You are encouraged to post your required replies earlier in the week to promote more meaningful and interactive discourse in this discussion forum. Continue to monitor the discussion forum until 5:00 p.m. (Mountain Time) on Day 7, and respond with robust dialogue to anyone who replies to your initial post.

2. **Choose Your Client [WLOs: 3, 4] [CLOs: 2, 3, 4].** *1st Post Due by Day 3.* Prior to beginning work on this discussion, read the article, "Sentencing Advocates Enhance Reasoned Court Decisions," then read the list of infamous murderers whose high profile crimes dominated headlines for many years. Choose one of these individuals to become your client for the remainder of the course. That is, this individual and case will be the topic of your final assignment in the course:

In your online classroom, select the link "Killer Bios" for a list of these infamous murderers. In that link, you will find several Ashford University Library sources on each murderer. In

addition, there are some starter links listed below under each name. Client cases to choose from:

- Aileen Wuornos (Florida Serial killer)
 - Biography's [Aileen Wuornos Biography](#)
 - Murderpedia's [Aileen Carol Wuornos](#)
- Susan Smith (South Carolina murderer)
 - Biography's [Susan Smith Biography](#)
 - Murderpedia's [Susan Smith](#)
- Santae Kimes (Murderer)
 - Biography's [Sante Kimes Biography](#)
 - Murderpedia's [Sante Kimes](#)
- Jared Lee Loughner (Congresswoman Giffords' shooter/mass murderer)
 - Biography's [Jared Lee Loughner Biography](#)
 - Murderpedia's [Jared Lee Loughner](#)
- Timothy McVeigh (Oklahoma City Bombing)
 - Biography's Timothy McVeigh Biography
 - Murderpedia's [Timothy James McVeigh](#)
- Ted Bundy (National/Florida Serial killer)
 - Biography's [Ted Bundy Biography](#) and
 - Murderpedia's [Theodore Robert Bundy](#)

Imagine that you have been retained by the client's defense attorney as a death penalty mitigation expert. Your role in this capacity is to work as a sentencing advocate on behalf of your client (the defendant). In Week 5, you will prepare a comprehensive case study report. This report will contain an analysis of the psychological factors that may have contributed to the commission of the crimes in the chosen case study and how these psychological factors should be considered as a basis for a prison sentence less than the death penalty. For the purpose of this discussion, we are proceeding as if the client is still alive and has not yet been sentenced (though all of these cases have already been resolved). In your initial post of 300 words, please examine the following and address the questions below:

- Tell us which client you chose and why. That is, what was it about the case that interested you?
- Based upon your preliminary research on this case/client and your assigned textbook readings, what mental disorders might your client be suffering from that may have contributed to the crime?
- Describe the disorder including its signs and symptoms. Connect those that you believe apply to your client's behavior.
- What does your textbook say about the likelihood that your client's mental states contributed to the crime?
- Discuss whether psychopathy, insanity, or competence to stand trial are potential issues in your client's case based upon your preliminary research of the case and your assigned textbook readings.
- Support your claims with examples from the required materials, other scholarly and/or credible sources, and properly cite any references.

Guided Response: Review several of your peers' initial posts and, in a minimum of 100 words each, respond to at least two of your classmates' posts by Day 7. As you read through your peers' posts, please respond to at least two of your classmates who chose a different "client" than you chose. Be sure to provide constructive feedback, and ask follow-up questions to your peers regarding their client and case. That is, focus on what your classmates write about their clients' biopsychosocial histories. Is this similar to your client's history? Suggest at least one additional source to your classmates that may be helpful to them in investigating the relationship between the client's history and the crime. Respond in a substantive manner with specific examples to extend their thinking. Support your claims with examples from the required materials and/or other scholarly or credible sources, and properly cite any references. You are encouraged to post your required replies earlier in the week to promote more meaningful and interactive discourse in this discussion forum. Continue to monitor the discussion forum until 5:00 p.m. (Mountain Time) on Day 7, and respond with robust dialogue to anyone who replies to your initial post.

Journal

1. **Diagnosing Criminal Defendants [WLOs: 3, 4] [CLOs: 1, 2, 3].** *Due by Day 7.* Prior to beginning this journal, read the article, "Are Forensic Experts Biased by the Side that Retained Them?," and examine the subjective nature of forensic psychology concerning the evaluation of criminal defendants. In a one- to two-page journal entry:

- Evaluate the influences that can contribute to differential diagnoses depending upon which side hires the psychologist to evaluate a criminal defendant.
 - Determine how to minimize cognitive bias.

As you reflect on the article for your journal, analyze the ethical considerations of

- Diagnosing a defendant.
- Diagnosing the legal implications of a negative diagnosis.

Based on your assigned readings, including this article, do you believe that such assessments as the PCL-R Checklist can provide accurate predictions of an individual's behavior? Cite examples from your readings that support your analysis.

Just as helpful tip: remember to read all the directions and requirements for each discussion question, so that you do not miss any components of the discussion question. For some additional assistance with your journal and final project I will be posting some articles that I have used while teaching this class on-ground that students have found very useful.

I know that this sounds like a lot, but I know that each of you can do this and will do well. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me via email, I will do whatever I can to assist you with your problem or concern.

This is one of my favorite classes to teach as we can apply a lot of what we learn to ourselves and how we deal with issues in our lives. As I told my students on-ground – attempt to put yourself in the criminal shoes and see things through their eyes, sometimes it can tell us a lot. Let's get ready to have some fun over the next 5 weeks.