

San José State University
CHHS/Department of Justice Studies
FS 160-06 Forensic Science Special Topics:
Death Investigations, CRN 49905 Fall 2020

Instructor	Rosa A. Vega
Office Location	Health Building 207
Instructor Email	Rosa.Vega@sjsu.edu
Canvas Website	https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1373400
Office Hours	Before and After Class, Via Email
Class Days, Times, & Location	Thursdays 1800-2045 ONLINE
Prerequisites	UPPER DIVISION STANDING JS MAJOR OR MINOR: JS 10; FS MAJOR OR MINOR: FS 11
JS & FS Library Liaison	Nyle Monday nyle.monday@sjsu.edu
FS LibGuide	http://libguides.sjsu.edu/c.php?g=230074&p=1526987

Course Catalogue Description

Fundamental theories of medicolegal death investigations practically applied to case work. Techniques and principles used in the determination of cause and manner of death. Topics include Coroner/Medical Examiner Laws of California, recording a death scene, recognizing manifestations of cause and manner of death, collecting evidence, working with law enforcement and other government entities, maintaining chain of custody, and preparing written reports.

Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

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

- CLO1 Distinguish Coroner and Medical Examiner systems, and discuss the roles of each system.
- CLO2 Analyze legal mandates and medicolegal terminology.
- CLO3 Identify and differentiate common wounds, signs of death, decompositional changes, and basic injury patterns.
- CLO4 Utilize best practices for processing death scenes, writing reports, collecting evidence, and preserving and maintaining chain of custody.
- CLO5 Demonstrate understanding of the working relationships of medicolegal death investigators, law enforcement, and other government entities.

Texts/Readings

- Links to additional readings will be posted on the Canvas class website. It is the student's responsibility to check the website frequently for new postings and download and print documents as needed in class.
- *Academic Forensic Pathology Journal*
- *Forensic Magazine*
- DiMaio, D. & DiMaio, V. J. (2001). *Forensic Pathology, Second Edition*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Bucholtz, A. (2015). *Death Investigation: An Introduction to Forensic Pathology for the Nonscientist*. Waltham, MA: Elsevier/Anderson Publishing.

Assignments

1. Death Scene Exercises (30%): Practical lab exercises in recognizing signs of death, decompositional changes, wound patterns, identification methods, report writing and evidence collection. (CLO 3 & 4)
2. Exams (40%): Two midterms, one final exam. Format may include multiple choice, fill-in, short answer, short essay, and diagrams. (all CLO)
3. Reading Notes/Group Presentation (20%):
4. Final Mock Death Scene Exercise (10%)

Grading Scale for All Assignments

A plus	97-100
A	94-96.9
A minus	90-93.9
B plus	87-89.9
B	84-86.9
B minus	80-83.9
C plus	77-79.9
C	74-76.9
C minus	70-73.9
D plus	67-69.9
D	64-66.9
D minus	60-63.9
F	<60

All assignments are graded based on adherence to accuracy, directions, thoroughness, thoughtfulness, clarity, and logic.

Extra Credit

Extra credit opportunities may be available throughout the semester and will be used to augment the final grade up to 5%.

1. Interview a professional in a field of interest related to death investigations regarding the pros and cons of their job and write a 3-page, typed, double-spaced synopsis of their experiences and whether you're still interested (why/why not?).

Class Policies

- No cell phones in class: Turn them off and put them away.
- No photography of case work presented-Failure to abide shall result in disciplinary action.
- Plagiarized work will result in severe disciplinary action.
- Late work may be submitted for half credit within one week of due date.
- Make-ups for exams will generally not be possible unless extraordinary, documented circumstances exist.
- Handle personal business before you begin an exam. A student who leaves the classroom *for any reason* during an exam will be presumed finished with the exam.

Zoom Classroom Etiquette

- **Mute Your Microphone:** To help keep background noise to a minimum, make sure you mute your microphone when you are not speaking.
- **Be Mindful of Background Noise and Distractions:** Find a quiet place to “attend” class, to the greatest extent possible.

-Avoid video setups where people may be walking behind you, people talking/making noise, etc.

-Avoid activities that could create additional noise, such as shuffling papers, listening to music in the background, etc.

- **Position Your Camera Properly:** Be sure your webcam is in a stable position and focused at eye level.
- **Limit Your Distractions/Avoid Multitasking:** You can make it easier to focus on the meeting by turning off notifications, closing or minimizing running apps, and putting your smartphone away (unless you are using it to access Zoom).
- **Use Appropriate Virtual Backgrounds:** If using a virtual background, it should be appropriate and professional and should NOT suggest or include content that is objectively offensive or demeaning.

Technology Requirements

- Students are required to have an electronic device (laptop, desktop or tablet) with a camera and built-in microphone. SJSU has a free [equipment loan](#) program available for students.
- Students are responsible for ensuring that they have access to reliable Wi-Fi during class and tests. If students are unable to have reliable Wi-Fi, they must inform the instructor, as soon as possible or at the latest one week before the test date to determine an alternative. See [Learn Anywhere](#) website for current Wi-Fi options on campus.

Test Format

- TBD

Academic Dishonesty

Students who are suspected of cheating during an exam will be referred to the Student Conduct and Ethical Development office and depending on the severity of the conduct, will receive a zero on the assignment or a grade of F in the course. Grade Forgiveness does not apply to courses for which the original grade was the result of a finding of academic dishonesty.

Student Info and Resources

See your major advisor for major advice. See a GE advisor for GE advice.
Follow your major's graduation roadmap.

Consult the [Canvas Student Guide](#) for answers to common questions about Canvas.

Computer labs for student use are available in the Academic Success Center located on the 1st floor of Clark Hall and on the 2nd floor of the Student Union. Additional computer labs may be available in your department/college. Computers are also available in the Martin Luther King Library. A wide variety of audio-visual equipment is available for student checkout from Media Services located in IRC 112. These items include digital and VHS camcorders, VHS and Beta video players, 16 mm, slide, overhead, DVD, CD, and audiotape players, sound systems, wireless microphones, projection screens and monitors.

University Help Desk is the first point of contact for service and support to help you with password resets, login issues, email support and account requests. University Help Desk is located in Clark Hall, Room 102. Phone: 408.924.2377 Email: help@help.sjsu.edu Hours: Mon – Thur 8am - 9:45pm, Fri 8:00am – 4:45pm.

A.S. Computer Services Center has a computer lab with 100 computers that provided most major operating systems available from recently released versions of Microsoft Windows, to Linux, and Macintosh. Located in the Student Union on the 3rd floor. Phone: 408.924.6976 Hours: Mon - Thurs 8:00am – 10:00pm; Fri 9:00am - 5:00pm

CHHS Student Success Center

The Student Success Center in the College of Health and Human Sciences (CHHS) provides advising for undergraduate students majoring or wanting to major in programs offered in CHHS Departments and Schools. All CHHS students and students who would like to be in CGGS are invited to stop by the Center for general education advising, help with changing majors, academic policy related questions, meeting with peer advisors, and/or attending various regularly scheduled presentations and workshops. If you are looking for academic advice or even tips about how to navigate your way around SJSU, check out the CHHS Student Success Center. Location: MacQuarrie Hall (MQH) 533. Contact information: [408.924.2910](tel:408.924.2910) The CHHS Student Success Center also provides study space and laptops for checkout.

Peer Connections is located in Room 600 in the Student Services Center and assists students in the development of their full academic potential and motivates them to become self-directed learners. The center provides support services, such as skill assessment, individual or group tutorials, subject advising, learning assistance, summer academic preparation and basic skills development.

SJSU Writing Center is located in Room 126 in Clark Hall and offers a variety of resources to help students become better writers, including one-on-one tutoring sessions and numerous writing workshops. All services are free for SJSU students.

Forensic Science Student Group (FSS) is a campus group open to all students interested in forensic science. The group meets biweekly during the fall and spring semesters and offers friendship, forensic science-related activities, networking opportunities, and mentorship. Members of the FSS participate and assist at conferences, CSI camps, guest speaking events, and other extra-curricular activities. FSS Peer Mentors assist forensic science students in navigating the major, understanding requirements and prerequisites, and making wise choices in their college careers. Mentors may also offer limited tutoring, and facilitate educational and professional opportunities. Contact sjsu.fss@gmail.com for more information, or to get an application for membership.

University Policies

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' Syllabus Information web page.

Important Dates This Semester

8/31/2020: Last Day to Drop Without a W

9/8/2020: Last Day to Add a Course, Last Day to Request CR/NC

11/13/2020: Last Day to Submit Late Drop/Withdrawal Request <http://www.sjsu.edu/aars/forms/>

12/7/2020: Last day of Instruction

Please Verify Dates with Registrar Office

Justice Studies Reading and Writing Philosophy

The Department of Justice Studies is committed to scholarly excellence. Therefore, the Department promotes academic, critical, and creative engagement with language (i.e., reading and writing) throughout its curriculum. A sustained and intensive exploration of language prepares students to think critically and to act meaningfully in interrelated areas of their lives—personal, professional, economic, social, political, ethical, and cultural. Graduates of the Department of Justice Studies leave San José State University prepared to enter a range of careers and for advanced study in a variety of fields; they are prepared to more effectively identify and ameliorate injustice in their personal, professional and civic lives. Indeed, the impact of literacy is evident not only within the span of a specific course, semester, or academic program but also over the span of a lifetime.

Instructor

Rosa Vega earned her MS degree in Criminal Justice Administration with a concentration in Forensic Science Administration from Loyola University New Orleans, and her BS in Administration of Justice with a minor in Physical Anthropology from San Jose State University.

Rosa is the Chief Medical Examiner-Coroner Investigator for the Santa Clara County Medical Examiner-Coroner's Office where she's worked for 15 years. She supervises 11 Investigators and conducts death investigations. She has performed thousands of death investigations; including homicides, accidents, natural, suicides and child deaths. Her office is Room 207 Health Building.

FS 160-06 Death Investigations F20 Course Schedule

Schedule is Subject to Change

Week	Date	In-Class Topics	Due	Readings, Assignments
1	8/20	Introduction and Class Overview TV vs Real Life-The Death Investigator		Body of Proof Show Assignment DiMaio Ch 1 Bucholtz Ch 1
2	8/27	Coroner vs. Medical Examiner-Origins	TV Show Report Reading Notes	Canvas Reading
3	9/3	Reportable Deaths-CA 27491 Legal Mandates Class Exercise		Canvas Reading Bucholtz Ch 2
4	9/10	Death Scene Investigations	Reading Notes	Canvas Reading Bucholtz Ch 3
5	9/17	Cause, Mechanism & Manner of Death Medical Terminology Class Exercise	Reading Notes	DiMaio Ch 2, 4, 7 Bucholtz Ch 4, 7 (pg. 121-131)
6	9/24	Signs of Death & Injury Patterns Lab-	Reading Notes	Study for Midterm, Prepare for Class Presentation
7	10/1	Midterm 1 Project: Medical Examiner vs. Coroner		Canvas Reading Bucholtz Ch 5
8	10/8	The Autopsy- Guest Speaker	Reading Notes	Canvas Reading Bucholtz Ch 6
9	10/15	Forensic Identification ID Essay	Reading Notes	DiMaio Ch 9 Bucholtz Ch 7 (pg. 132-144)
10	10/22	Traffic Fatalities- Guest Speaker	Reading Notes	Canvas Reading
11	10/29	Introduction to Report Writing Class Discussion/Exercise		
12	11/5	Study for Midterm	Reading Notes	Canvas Reading
13	11/12	Midterm 2 Homicidal Violence- Guest Speaker		Canvas Reading DiMaio Ch 23
14	11/19	Drug Fatalities		
15	11/26	Thanksgiving-NO CLASS		Study for Final
16	12/3	Mock Death Scene Walk-Through Class Final		