Medicolegal Death Investigations I
BIMS 4590.007
Department of Life Sciences
Spring 2019

A. COURSE INFORMATION
Course number/section: BIMS 4590.007
Class meeting time: As determined by the instructors
Class location: Nueces County Medical Examiner’s Office
Course Website: https://bb9.tamucc.edu/

B. INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION
Instructor: Ray Fernandez, MD & Adel Shaker, MD
Office location: Nueces County Medical Examiner’s Office
Office hours: MTWTF 8:00-4:00pm
Telephone: 361-884-4994
E-mail: Dr. Fernandez: Ray.Fernandez@nuecesco.com
Dr. Shaker: AShakerMD@hotmail.com
Appointments: Appointments made via email

C. COURSE DESCRIPTION
Catalog Course Description
This course is designed for both the student and investigative law enforcement personnel who have responsibility for the investigation of deaths, and who have had limited exposure to the various aspects of death investigation. It involves the process of analyzing all aspects of a death case so as to arrive at the true cause and manner of death (homicide, suicide, accident, natural, and undetermined). The importance of scene analysis, physical and psychological evidence, autopsy, etc., is emphasized. Motivations, both physical and psychological are discussed along with criminal investigative analysis, and investigative psychology. The concepts of the investigative process, scene management, required documentation, case management for incidences of death and the legal jurisdiction of cases will be discussed.

D. PREREQUISITES
Prerequisites
SMTE 0092 – Biomedical Laboratory Safety Seminar
BIMS 3325 – Professional Practice in Forensic Science

NOTE: Due to the sensitive nature of this course, permission from the instructor is required prior to registration.
E. **REQUIRED TEXTBOOK(S), READINGS AND SUPPLIES**

**Required Textbook(s)**
- Case Studies in Forensic Pathology by J. Dix & R. Calaluze (Univ of Missouri-Columbia)

**Optional Textbook(s) or Other References**
- Guide to Forensic Pathology by J. Dix (CRC Press)
- Forensic Pathology by V. DiMaio (CRC Press)
- Spitz and Fisher’s Medicolegal Investigation of Death by W. Spitz & D. Spitz (Thomas Publishers)

F. **STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT**

Assessment is a process used by instructors to help improve learning. Assessment is essential for effective learning because it provides feedback to both students and instructors. A critical step in this process is making clear the course’s student learning outcomes that describe what students are expected to learn to be successful in the course. The student learning outcomes for this course are listed below. By collecting data and sharing it with students on how well they are accomplishing these learning outcomes students can more efficiently and effectively focus their learning efforts. This information can also help instructors identify challenging areas for students and adjust their teaching approach to facilitate learning.

By the end of this course, students should be able to:
1. Describe the history and evolution of the discipline of forensic pathology.
2. Explain the role of the forensic pathologist in the criminal justice system.
3. Explain the various types of evidence typically available at a crime scene in a death investigation.
4. Identify and evaluate relevant methodology for identification of the dead
5. Describe circumstances when an autopsy is appropriate and the proper protocol and the procedures followed by coroners and medical examiners in conducting an autopsy.
6. Identify and evaluate relevant methods for determining time, cause, and manner of death.
7. Describe, compare, and assess various types and methods of injury for potential lethality.
8. Define, interpret, and apply relevant medical and legal terminology to real and hypothetical issues, problems, and case studies.
9. Identify and evaluate the ethical issues which are common to death investigations.
10. Appraise and interpret current literature, case studies, materials, and developments regarding forensic pathology.

G. **INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS AND ACTIVITIES**

This course will include lecture, PowerPoint presentations, and audio/visual materials. There will also be written case analysis, and documentation of findings will be required.
H. MAJOR COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING
   Students will be given three written examinations during the course of instruction. Progressive assessment of skills and documentation procedures will be conducted daily.

I. COURSE CONTENT/SCHEDULE
   This course will cover the following:
   - Death Investigation Overview
   - History of forensic pathology
   - Education, training, and duties of forensic pathologists
   - Practical Crime Scene Investigation
   - Determination of time of death
   - Determination of cause of death
   - Determination of means of death
   - Autopsy protocol
   - Forensic Pathology
   - Forensic Toxicology
   - Forensic Epidemiology
   - Forensic Anthropology
   - Forensic Odontology
   - Advanced Radiological Imaging
   - Drug Paraphernalia
   - Crime Scene Investigators and Homicide Detectives
   - Courtroom Preparation
   - Case studies in forensic pathology
   - Ethical issues in forensic pathology

   Note: Changes in this course schedule may be necessary and will be announced to the class by the Instructor. The assignments and exams shown are directly related to the Student Learning Outcomes described in Section F.

J. COURSE POLICIES
   Attendance/Tardiness
   Absences: Every effort will be made to accommodate students, who through no fault of their own, are absent from class. Consideration will be given to students who suffer medical or family tragedy.

   Tardiness: Students who are consistently late interfere with lectures, miss important information and disrespect their fellow classmates. Please be on time for class.

   Extra Credit
   There is no extra credit for this course.

   Cell Phone Use
   Cell phones will not be used during class.
K. COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

• **Academic Integrity (University)**
  University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examinations or examination materials, falsification, forgery, complicity or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work.) In this class, academic misconduct or complicity in an act of academic misconduct on an assignment or test will result in a failing grade.

• **Classroom/Professional Behavior**
  Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as an academic community, requires that each individual respect the needs of others to study and learn in a peaceful atmosphere. Under Article III of the Student Code of Conduct, classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program may be considered a breach of the peace and is subject to disciplinary sanction outlined in article VII of the Student Code of Conduct. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

• **Statement of Civility**
  Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi has a diverse student population that represents the population of the state. Our goal is to provide you with a high quality educational experience that is free from repression. You are responsible for following the rules of the University, city, state and federal government. We expect that you will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation or disability. Behaviors that infringe on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

• **Deadline for Dropping a Course with a Grade of W (University)**
  The grade of W will be assigned to any student officially dropping a course. Please consult with the instructor before you decide to drop to be sure it is the best thing to do. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class. Should dropping the course be the best course of action, visit the Office of the University Registrar for the Course Drop Form that must be submitted. No student is eligible to receive a W without completing the official drop process by this deadline. Please consult the Academic Calendar (http://www.tamucc.edu/academics/calendar/) for the last day to drop a course.

• **Grade Appeals (College of Science and Engineering)**
  As stated in University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading,
may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules website at http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html, and the College of Science and Engineering Grade Appeals webpage at http://sci.tamucc.edu/students/GradeAppeal.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the chair or director of the appropriate department or school, the Office of the College of Science and Engineering Dean, or the Office of the Provost.

- **Disability Services**
  The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call (361) 825-5816 or visit Disability Services in Corpus Christi Hall 116.

  If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

  [http://disabilityservices.tamucc.edu/](http://disabilityservices.tamucc.edu/)

- **Statement of Academic Continuity**
  In the event of an unforeseen adverse event, such as a major hurricane and classes could not be held on the campus of Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi; this course would continue through the use of Blackboard and/or email. In addition, the syllabus and class activities may be modified to allow continuation of the course. Ideally, University facilities (i.e., emails, web sites, and Blackboard) will be operational within two days of the closing of the physical campus. However, students need to make certain that the course instructor has a primary and a secondary means of contacting each student.

L. **OTHER INFORMATION**

- **Academic Advising**
  The College of Science & Engineering requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. Meetings are by appointment only; advisors do not take walk-ins. Please call or stop by the Advising Center to check availability and schedule an
appointment. The College’s Academic Advising Center is located in Center for Instruction 350 or can be reached at (361) 825-3928.

GENERAL DISCLAIMER
I reserve the right to modify the information, schedule, assignments, deadlines, and course policies in this syllabus if and when necessary. I will announce such changes in a timely manner during regularly scheduled lecture periods.