# Special Topics: Murder in America
## Sociology 3510-001
**Spring Semester 2014**

Professor: Larry L. Bench Ph.D.
Office: 313 BEH
Email: lbench@comcast.net
Phone:  (801) 831-5111
Consultation: By Appointment
Classroom: BEH S 110
Time: Mon, Wed, 1:25 P.M. – 2:45 P.M.

Updated: October 15, 2013

## Course Description

On average about 16,500 people are murdered each year in the United States. While murder continues to intrigue, horrify, and mystify most Americans, it is a subject that is plagued by misinformation, stereotypes, misunderstanding, and a lack of scientific rigor. The objective of this class is to review the literature on several different dimensions of murder so as to gain a better understanding of what constitutes murder, how it has been defined both historically and sociologically, and investigate its overall role and function to society and the criminal justice system.

Topics to be covered in the course include:
- Murder from a Historical Perspective
- General Typologies of Murder
- What Constitutes Murder? Degrees of Murder
- Defenses to Murder (The Insanity Defense)
- The Demographics of Murder
- Serial Murders
- Female Serial Murders
- Mass Murders
- Sociopaths, Psychopaths, and Murder
- Weapons Used to Murder Others
- How A Murder Investigation is Carried Out
- The Innocence Project – Those Who Have Been Wrongly Convicted of Murder
- Street Level Murder vs. White Collar Murder (The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get  Prison)

- Trends in Violent Crime
- A step-by-step investigation of a recent high profile murder in Salt Lake County

## Class Format
Course material will be presented through lectures and supplemental readings on E-reserve. Students will be expected to attend class on a regular basis, keep up with the assigned readings and come to class prepared to participate in class discussions guided by the instructor. While the overall format of the class is lecture oriented the class will be augmented with videos and guest speakers from the Unified Police Department Homicide Squad, Medical Examiner's Office, District Attorney's Office, Public Defender's Office, and the Victim Advocate Department (Salt Lake City Police Department).

## Course Objectives:
- Understand the role of murder in the United States from a historical perspective
- Understand how murder/homicide and its various subcategories are defined
- Understand what legal requirements must be satisfied to obtain a criminal conviction
- Understand what factors lead to false convictions in murder cases
- Understand the major defenses to criminal liability involving murder
- Understand the demographics of murder (when, where people get killed)
- Comprehend how prevalent serial murder is, what motivates, serial killers, and how they are captured
- Gain an understanding of the differences between female and male serial killers
- Understand how a murder investigation is carried out
- Learn what is being done is curb murder rates around the country
- Gain an understanding of the role that handguns play in murders

## Grading
The final grade will be based on three exams each worth 25 percent of the total grade, and a group project worth 25 percent of the final grade. Grading Scale: A (100-93) A- (92-90) B+ (89-87) B (86-83) B- (82-80) C+ (79-77) C (76-73) C- (72-70) D+ (69-67) D (66-63) D- (62-60) E (<60).

## Special Accommodations
I accordance with the American Disabilities Act (ADA), persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations to meet the expectations of the course are encouraged to bring this to the attention of the instructor as soon as possible. Written documentation of the disability should be submitted during the first week of the quarter along with the request for special accommodations. Contact the Center for Disabled Student Services (160 Union, 1-5020) to facilitate requests.

**Academic Honesty**

Unfortunately, academic dishonesty has become a serious problem on many campuses. The purpose for including the following statement is to prevent any misunderstanding about what constitutes academic dishonesty and what consequences will result if it is detected.

Academic honesty is expected. An act of academic dishonesty will result in a failing course grade of "E" and may result in a recommendation of additional disciplinary action. (The University of Utah Student Code provides for these sanctions and provides appeal rights.)

1.  Cheating (as defined is Article XI of the Student Code) generally includes the giving or receiving of any unauthorized assistance on any academic work.
2.  Plagiarism, as defined in Article XI of the Student Code, is "the appropriation of any other person's work and the unacknowledged incorporation of that work in one's own work offered for credit."
3.  Falsification. Any untrue statement, either oral or written concerning one's own academic work or the academic work of another student, or the unauthorized alteration of any academic record.
4.  Original work. Unless specifically authorized by the instructor, all academic work undertaken in this course must be original. Work that has been submitted in a prior or existing course may not be submitted in a course being taken concurrently.