

FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Winter 2023

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Course Description

This course examines the detection, recovery, and analysis of human remains within a medico-legal context. Students will explore the role of the forensic anthropologist in the investigation of criminal cases, human rights cases, and mass disasters.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Recognize basic human skeletal anatomy
- Identify specific elements of the human skeleton that are important to process of building a biological profile of an unknown individual
- Describe fundamental techniques for documenting and recovering human remains, and estimating the post-mortem interval based on their condition
- Describe what happens to a body after death
- Identify and interpret evidence for trauma in skeletal remains to assess events prior to, and after, death.

Content Warning

This class may include depictions and descriptions of murder, sexual assault, suicide, death and other forms of violence that some students may find offensive. The assigned readings and lecture materials will include images of human remains in various stages of decay. These images have been sourced from reputable, scientific sources and are intended for academic purposes only. They are not to be shared on social media. 'Censored' versions of the lecture slides, without these images will be posted on Avenue to Learn.

Required Materials and Texts

There is one required textbook for this course.

Christensen AM, Passalacqua NV, Bartelink EJ. 2019. *Forensic Anthropology: Current Methods and Practice*. 2nd edition. Academic Press.

Additional readings, such as journal articles, book chapters, documentaries and YouTube videos may also be assigned later in the course. If so, you will be notified at least one week beforehand and they will be available on Avenue to Learn (either in PDF format or via a weblink).

Class Format

This class will have three in-person lectures per week. Lecture slides will be posted on Avenue to Learn shortly before class, in PDF format. These PDFs will be simplified versions of the lecture slides with only key terms and concepts; they are for reference only and are not meant to replace attending lectures.

Teaching Assistants

There are two TAs assigned to this course and they will be assisting Dr. Siek in grading assignments. They're names, office hours, and contact information will be made available on Avenue.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Poster Proposal	20%
2. Midterm	25%
3. Poster	25%
4. Final Exam	30%

Course Evaluation – Details

Midterm (25%), 3 March

The midterm will include all previously covered material in class, including any online postings. Details regarding its format will be discussed in class.

Poster Project

Throughout the term you will work toward creating a research poster focusing on a topic or theme within forensic anthropology. This project is split into two components:

1) Poster Proposal (20%), due 17 February

You will prepare a proposal for your poster. This will give you the opportunity to create a clear plan for your project, early in the course. Your proposal should include a tentative title, a description of your project, and an annotated bibliography. Further details will be given in class.

2) Poster (25%), due 11 April

You will create a digital research poster, similar to the kind seen at academic conferences. The poster will be centered on a pre-approved topic relevant to forensic anthropology. Further details regarding this assignment will be discussed in class.

Final Exam (30%), McMaster Final Examination Period

The final exam will be cumulative and be held during the university's final exam period (14-29 April). The date and time of the exam will be determined by the Registrar's Office. Details regarding its format will be discussed in the final week of class.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (10, 12, 13 January)

What is Forensic Anthropology?

Readings:

Christensen et al. 2019, Chapter 1

Week 2 (17, 19, 20 January)

The Human Skeleton

Readings:

Christensen et al. 2019, Chapter 2

Week 3 (24, 26, 27 January)

Human Decomposition and Taphonomy

Readings:

Christensen et al. 2019, Chapter 5

Week 4 (31 January, 2, 3 February)

Forensic Archaeology and Forensic Contexts

Readings:

Christensen et al. 2019, Chapters 4 & 6

Notes: In-class workshop, "How to Create an Effective Research Proposal", 31 January.
Optional readings will be posted on Avenue.

Week 5 (7, 9, 10 February)

Establishing the Biological Profile Part I

Readings:

Christensen et al. 2019, Chapters 8 & 11

Notes: Chapter 11, sections 11.4 & 11.5

Week 6 (14, 16, 17 February)

Establishing the Biological Profile Part II:

Readings:

Christensen et al. 2019, Chapters 9 & 10

Notes: Poster Proposal due on Avenue to Learn by 17 February, 23:59.

Week 7 (21, 23, 24 February)

Reading Week ☺

Readings: None.

Week 8 (28 February, 2, 3 March)

Individual Identification

Readings: Christensen et al. 2019, Chapter 12

Notes: Midterm on 3 March, there is no lecture on this day.

Week 9 (7, 9, 10 March)

Cremated Remains

Readings:

Schultz et al. 2015. Analysis of Human Cremains. *In* Schmidt et al. (eds.) *The Analysis of Burned Human Remains*. Elsevier Science & Technology: 83-103.

Notes: In-class workshop, "How to Create an Effective Research Poster", 7 March.

Week 10 (14, 16, 17 March)

Cause and Manner of Death; The CSI Effect

Readings:

Vicary, Zaikman. 2017. The CSI Effect: An investigation into the relationship between watching crime shows and forensic knowledge. *North American Journal of Psychology* 19: 51-64.

Maeder EM, Corbett R. 2015. Beyond frequency: Perceived realism and the CSI Effect. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* 57: 83-114.

Killgrove. 2015. "Forensic TV post-mortem: The 5 most and least accurate episodes of 'Bones'". *Forbes*. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kristinakilgrove/2015/06/11/forensic-anthropology-on-tv-five-most-and-least-accurate-episodes-of-bones/#16583bb43ddb>

Week 11 (21, 23, 24 March)

Skeletal Trauma

Readings:

Christensen et al. 2019, Chapter 13

Week 12 (28, 30, 31 March)

Application of Forensic Anthropology

Readings:

Christensen et al. 2019, Chapter 14

Week 13 (4, 6, 7 April)

Final Review

Readings: None.

Notes: McMaster University is closed on Good Friday, April 7th, and there is no scheduled lecture.

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

All assignments are to be submitted to Avenue to Learn on the due date, by 23:59 EST, unless stated otherwise. If you have technical problems when submitting an assignment, take a screenshot that shows your submission screen and desktop clock/date as a timestamp. Refer to Avenue to Learn Support page for help.

Late Submissions and Extensions

You are expected to submit all assignments on the due date. All assignment deadlines are clearly marked in the syllabus and are made known to students at the beginning of the term by the instructor. There will be a 5% penalty for every day the assignment is late, for up to five days, including weekends. After five days from the original deadline, late submissions will not be accepted. If you feel that your assignment will be late due to reasons out of your control, please contact Dr. Siek in advance to discuss the matter with him. Extensions will only be given under extenuating circumstances and will be no longer than one week after the original due date. Ensure you frequently make backup copies of your work and please note that having a lot of other course work is not grounds for an extension.

Assignment Regrading

If you disagree with a grade that you have received, please follow these steps:

1. Wait 24 hours after viewing your mark, then re-read your assignment. Consider the assignment criteria guidelines and your instructor's feedback.
2. Seek more feedback: if you require more information about your grade, contact Dr Siek and ask for further feedback.
3. Formally request a re-appraisal via email to Dr Siek. Write a 300-word (min.) statement explaining why you believe the assessment was mistaken and submit it to Dr Siek along with the original assignment (with feedback). Your statement must directly reference the assignment guidelines.
4. Dr Siek will re-assess your work, and return it to you within 72 hours. Please note, requesting a re-appraisal does not guarantee that your grade will be increased.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE	Qualitative Scale (Unofficial)
90-100	A+	Exceptional performance: strong evidence of original thinking; good organization; capacity to analyze and synthesize; superior grasp of subject matter with sound critical evaluations; evidence of extensive knowledge base.
85-90	A	
80-84	A-	
77-79	B+	Competent performance: evidence of grasp of subject matter; some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with the literature.
73-76	B	
70-72	B-	
67-69	C+	Adequate performance: understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material; acceptable but uninspired work, not seriously faulty but lacking style and vigour.
63-66	C	
60-62	C-	
57-59	D+	
53-56	D	

MARK	GRADE	Qualitative Scale (Unofficial)
50-52	D-	
0-49	F	Inadequate performance: little or no evidence of understanding of the subject matter; weakness in critical and analytic skills; limited or irrelevant use of the literature.

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

University Policies

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Privacy Protection

In accordance with regulations set out by the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act, the University will not allow return of graded materials by placing them in boxes in departmental offices or classrooms so that students may retrieve their papers themselves; tests and assignments must be returned directly to the student. Similarly, grades for assignments for courses may only be posted using the last 5 digits of the student number as the identifying data. The following possibilities exist for return of graded materials:

1. Direct return of materials to students in class.
2. Return of materials to students during office hours.
3. Students attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with assignments for return by mail.
4. Submit/grade/return papers electronically.

Arrangements for the return of assignments from the options above will be finalized during the first class.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

ADVISORY STATEMENTS

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

ONLINE PROCTORING

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**. It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK

McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”: <https://academiccalendars.romcmaster.ca/content.php?catoid=44&navoid=9020#requests-for-relief-for-missed-academic-term-work>

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar’s Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors. The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

