COURSE NAME: Wrongful Convictions

COURSE NUMBER: 8635 S

PROFESSOR: Lyndsay Runnels

ESSENTIAL PREREQUISITES: Criminal Law

DESIRABLE PREREQUISITES: Criminal Procedure I & Evidence

COURSE BOOKS: Cases and articles provided by professor.

Actual Innocence: When Justice Goes Wrong and How to Make it Right, Barry Scheck, Peter Neufeld, & Jim Dwyer (2003)

MAJOR LEARNING OBJECTIVES OF THIS COURSE:

At the completion of the course, students will be able to do the following:

- Articulate and explain the causes of wrongful convictions.
- Identify facts and legal issues indicating the possibility of a wrongful conviction.
- Develop skills and approaches intended to minimize the likelihood of future wrongful convictions.
- Learn the causes and identify the indicators of false confessions by innocent people.
- Discuss how ethical violations in the performance of the prosecution and the defense function can lead to wrongful convictions.

METHOD OF GRADING & APPRAISAL OF STUDENT FOR GRADE:

Students will write a paper concerning not only the topics discussed but also the practical casework completed during the semester.
SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF COURSE: Wrongful Convictions, a three credit hour course, offers students an insider’s look into the operation of the criminal justice system, and specifically flaws within the system. The course examines the causes of wrongful convictions and the procedural mechanisms allowing for the litigation of actual innocence claims. During the course of the semester, students working with the Midwest Innocence Project will review actual cases of wrongful convictions and the state and federal processes necessary for exoneration. Additionally, we will look to current examples of wrongful convictions and the path to exoneration. The Wrongful Convictions Course is a prerequisite to enrolling in the Midwest Innocence Project Clinic.

RELEVANCY OF COURSE FOR CAREER PURPOSES: Wrongful Convictions is relevant to all who practice law. It is particularly useful to those planning a career as a prosecuting attorney, criminal defense attorney, and those planning to devote time in their career to pro bono work. Students will analyze flaws within the criminal justice system; will study specific instances of wrongful convictions; will focus on recurring ethical issues that confront prosecutors, and criminal defense lawyers; and, will review post-conviction and civil habeas corpus litigation. This course will also look at suggested system reforms to avoid wrongful convictions in the future.