

# LIT 2410: TRUE CRIME LITERATURE

**Instructor Name:** Brianna Anderson

**Instructor Email:** [brianna.anderson@ufl.edu](mailto:brianna.anderson@ufl.edu)

**Class Meeting Times:** Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays during Period 9 (3:00 pm to 3:50 pm)

**Class Location:** CHE 0316

**Office Location and Hours:** Fridays from 1 pm to 3 pm in Turlington TBD.

If you would like to meet with me but cannot make it to my office hours, please send me an email with your availability and we will arrange a meeting time over Zoom:

<https://ufl.zoom.us/j/92243370399?pwd=a3BYbWRUNmdRcnBjZzJRc1NzdnUxUT09>

**Course website:** Canvas



## COURSE OVERVIEW

As the adage “If it bleeds, it leads” suggests, an uneasy fascination with crime, murder, and violence preoccupies American culture and media. From the colonial period to the present day, true crime narratives have simultaneously disgusted, riveted, and terrified their (primarily female) audiences. Critics have denounced the genre as trash culture that glorifies crime and merely seeks to titillate spectators. However, these real-life crime stories also invite readers to contemplate the psychology of people who engage in transgressive behavior that violates societal norms.

This course will examine the evolution of the true crime genre throughout American history in order to explore how these narratives reveal changing attitudes about gender, mental illness, morality, and race. Throughout the semester, our analyses will center on three pressing questions: How do these gruesome narratives reveal shifting societal anxieties surrounding crime, discipline, and trauma? How does true crime perpetuate, complicate, or refute harmful stereotypes about marginalized groups, such as racial minorities? And, finally, what are the ethics of consuming sensationalized tales of real-world tragedies?

## GENERAL EDUCATION OBJECTIVES

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- This course confers General Education credit for either Composition (C) or Humanities (H). This course also fulfills 6,000 of the university's 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).
- Composition courses provide instruction in the methods and conventions of standard written English (grammar, punctuation, usage), as well as the techniques that produce effective texts. Composition courses are writing intensive. They require multiple drafts submitted to your instructor for feedback before final submission.
- Course content should include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes and contexts. Students should learn to organize complex arguments in writing using thesis statements, claims and evidence, and to analyze writing for errors in logic.
- The University Writing Requirement (WR) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. This means that written assignments must meet minimum word requirements totaling 6000 words.

## GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES

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At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication and critical thinking:

1. **Content:** Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the academic discipline.
2. **Communication:** Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Students will participate in class discussions throughout the semester to reflect on assigned readings.
3. **Critical Thinking:** Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

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PDF versions of all assigned texts will be provided by the instructor in Canvas.

## GRADE DISTRIBUTION

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GRADE DISTRIBUTIONAssignment	Min. Word Count	Point Value	% of Final Grade
Active Participation	N/A	100 points	10%

Class Discussion Leader Presentation	500 words	150 points	15%
Image/Text Adaptation Project	1,500 words	250 points	25%
2 Podcast Episodes + Proposal	Proposal: 1,000 words  2 Podcast Episodes: 1,000 words/ episode = 2,000 words	300 points	30%
Final Exam	1,000 words	200 points	20%

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### GRADING SCALE

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A	93-100%		B-	80-82%		D+	67-69%
A-	90-92%		C+	77-79%		D	63-66%
B+	87-89%		C	73-76%		D-	60-62%
B	83-86%		C-	70-72%		E	0-59%

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### ASSIGNMENTS

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**Active Participation:** Participation takes many forms, including speaking during class discussions, contributing to group activities, writing responses in shared Google docs, participating in peer reviews, asking questions, and responding to your peers' presentations and projects. Although I will occasionally give brief lectures, most class sessions will be devoted to large- and small-group conversation. You should come to each class having read the assigned materials and be prepared to share the questions and insights you formed during your independent reading. Additionally, I expect you to listen and respond attentively to the contributions of your classmates. Consistent, thoughtful participation earns an A.

**Class Discussion Leadership:** Each student will be required to lead one class discussion by giving a **7- to 10-minute-long** presentation and then guiding the class through **3 to 4** discussion questions. While all students are responsible for completing all readings and participating in all discussions, the discussion leader is further responsible for finding background information about the assigned text to ground and extend discussion. Presentations may provide additional historical or social context for the text; analyze themes or motifs in the text; perform a close reading of a specific scene, passage, or image(s); or synthesize and draw connections to a

relevant secondary article not included on the syllabus. These presentations will serve as a springboard for class discussions.

During the week preceding their presentation, students will meet or email with the instructor and the other student(s) presenting on their chosen text to discuss their topics and questions.

**Image/Text Adaptation Project:** For this assignment, you will build on the image/text principles we have examined in class by creating your own comic, picture book, or zine that either 1) adapts a text we have read in class into image/text form or 2) adapts another true crime that you have researched on your own. You will also write a short artist's statement (500-750 words) that explains the creative and ethical choices that you made while producing your image/text.

Image/Text projects may be created using digital or physical tools or a combination of the two; they may be fictional or nonfictional but should be informed by at least some secondary research into the chosen true crime; and they should be at least 12 pages long. Your final submission should include your short artist's statement and a properly formatted Works Cited page.

**2 Podcast Episodes:** On your own or with a partner, you will propose and create 2 podcast episodes that either 1) critically analyze 1 or 2 true crime texts that we have read in class, or 2) present a different true crime that you have researched on your own. For instance, you may choose to create podcast episodes that analyze representations of gender or race in one of our texts, or you may choose to create episodes that evaluate the accuracy and inherent biases of a text we have read.

You will submit a 1,000-word proposal that outlines your two episodes and introduces the central questions and ideas you will examine, as well as identifies several resources you will draw from. Additionally, each podcast episode should have an accompanying script of at least 1,000 words. All submitted assignments must include a bibliography including at least 3 outside sources. The assignment will require students to compose and revise episode scripts, record episodes, and revise and edit episodes.

**Final Exam:** At the end of the semester, you will have a cumulative, take-home exam that will measure your ability to critically engage with the key concepts and texts that we have analyzed throughout the semester. The exams will comprise of multiple-choice questions and short essay questions based on readings, lectures, discussions, and your peers' presentations.

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## GRADING RUBRIC

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**A-Level Assignments** demonstrate a thoughtful, critical, engaging, and creative interpretation of the text. They present complex, original arguments that are fully supported with evidence and skillfully draw on outside sources. They use clear scholarly prose and have strong organization to ensure that the reader can easily follow the overall argument.

**B-Level Assignments** are competent papers that are competently organized, well-developed, and relatively free of errors, but they may be somewhat less critical or original than an A-level

assignment. While the argument is generally logical, it may have gaps in thoroughness or lack focus. Secondary sources may not be as skillfully incorporated as A-level assignments, and the chosen supporting evidence may not help further the author's own argument.

Both A-level and B-level assignments will contain proper MLA citations and formatting with few to no errors, and they will be carefully proofread to avoid recurrent grammatical errors.

Assignments that score lower than an A or B generally have larger problems with development, incorporation of outside research, structure, and grammar. While they may competently summarize a text and point out themes, they lack strong, coherent, and original arguments.

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## COURSE POLICIES

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**Attendance:** This class is heavily discussion-based, so attendance is mandatory. You are allowed to miss two classes without explanation. **Each unexcused absence after two will lower your final grade by 3%. Students who accrue six unexcused absences will fail the course.**

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this class are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

**Tardiness:** I may take attendance at the beginning or end of class. Latecomers (more than 5 minutes tardy) receive partial absences and must see me after class so that I know you attended.

**Late Papers/Assignments:** Assignments that are submitted late will lose ten percent off their final grade for each day that they are late. After three days, I will not accept late assignments. Discussion posts may not be submitted late.

Generally, I am quite flexible about granting short (1 to 3 day) extensions with no grade penalties, particularly for students who have consistently submitted previous work on time or who are dealing with challenging external circumstances, illness, etc. **However, I will only grant extensions if you request one BEFORE the assignment deadline.** If you submit an assignment late with no explanation and without my pre-approval, you will be subject to the grade penalties outlined above.

**Classroom Behavior:** Classroom discussion should be civil and respectful to everyone and relevant to the topic we are discussing. The issues that we are discussing are controversial and have no easy solutions, and everyone is entitled to their opinion. While you are certainly allowed to disagree with each other and (the instructor!), you should present your viewpoint in a polite and constructive manner. I will not tolerate any rude, coarse, or offensive remarks based upon race, gender, ability, or sexual identity, in written assignments or in class discussion. Dismissive, rude behavior will result in dismissal from class.

**Paper Format & Submission:** All papers should be formatted per MLA 8<sup>th</sup> edition standards (TNR 12, double-spaced, one-inch margins, MLA header, and MLA citations) and submitted to

the assignment on Canvas as a .doc or .docx file. **Please note that failure of technology is not an excuse for missing or late assignments, so plan your time accordingly.**

**Paper Maintenance Responsibilities:** Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.

**Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism:** UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge: “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: ‘On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.’” The Honor Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions.>

Plagiarism can occur even without any malicious intent to deceive if you fail to understand and employ proper documentation techniques. When in doubt, ask for help!

**Students with disabilities** who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://disability.ufl.edu/>), which will provide appropriate documentation to give the instructor early in the semester.

**Wellness/Counseling:** Students who are in distress or who are in need of counseling or urgent help: please contact <https://umatter.ufl.edu/> or 352-392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to you. UF’s Counseling and Wellness Center offers additional support: 352-392-1575, or contact them online: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>

**UF’s Policy on Sexual Harassment:** The University of Florida is committed to providing a safe educational, working, and residential environment that is free from sexual harassment or misconduct directed towards any and all members of the community:  
<https://titleix.ufl.edu/about/title-ix-rights/>

**Grading Policies:** For information on UF Grading policies, see:  
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

**Grade Appeals:** In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR; [cblount@ufl.edu](mailto:cblount@ufl.edu)). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

**Course Evaluations.** Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>

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## COURSE SCHEDULE

READINGS AND DUE DATES	
Week 1: Introduction to True Crime	
Monday 8/23	Introductions and Course Overview
Wednesday 8/25	What is True Crime?
Friday 8/27	<a href="#">Melissa Chan – “Real People Keep Getting Re-traumatized.’ The Human Cost of Binge-Watching True Crime Series”</a>
Week 2: Captivity Narratives	
Monday 8/30	<a href="#">“A Notable Exploit: <i>Dux Femina Facti</i>” – Cotton Mather</a>  <a href="#">“Hero or Killer? Statues of a Colonial Woman Face a Reckoning” – Amelia Mason</a>  <b>Sign up for Class Discussion Co-Leadership slots</b>
Wednesday 9/1	<a href="#">“The Duston Family” – Nathaniel Hawthorne</a>
Friday 9/3	“Capture and Escape of Mercy Harbison, 1792” – Mercy Harbison
Week 3: Gender and Crime	
Monday 9/6	<b>No class: Labor Day</b>
Wednesday 9/8	“The Record of Crimes in the United States” – Jesse Strang  Presenter: _____
Friday 9/10	“The Faithful Narrative of the Wicked Life of Patience Boston” – Patience Boston  Presenter: _____
Week 4: Race, Slavery, and Crime	

Monday 9/13	<p>“The Confessions of Nat Turner” – Thomas R. Gray</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
Wednesday 9/15	<p>“The Confessions of Nat Turner” – Thomas R. Gray</p>
Friday 9/17	<p><i>Nat Turner</i> – Kyle Baker. Read “Preface” and “Home”</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
<b>Week 5: Race, Slavery, and Crime</b>	
Monday 9/20	<p><i>Nat Turner</i> – Kyle Baker. Read “Education”</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
Wednesday 9/22	<p><i>Nat Turner</i> – Kyle Baker. Read “Freedom”</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
Friday 9/24	<p><i>Nat Turner</i> – Kyle Baker. Read “Triumph” and endnotes</p>
<b>Week 6: 1 Crime, 3 Retellings</b>	
Monday 9/27	<p>“The Hossack Murder” – Susan Glaspell</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
Wednesday 9/29	<p>“Trifles” – Susan Glaspell</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
Friday 10/1	<p>“A Jury of Her Peers” – Susan Glaspell</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
<b>Week 7: Defining the True Crime Genre</b>	
Monday 10/4	<p><i>In Cold Blood</i> – Truman Capote. Read “Part 1: The Last to See Them Alive”</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>



Wednesday 10/6	<i>In Cold Blood</i> – Truman Capote. Read “Part 2: Persons Unknown”  Presenter: _____
Friday 10/8	<b>No Class: Homecoming</b>
<b>Week 8: Defining the True Crime Genre</b>	
Monday 10/11	<i>In Cold Blood</i> – Truman Capote. Read “Part Three: Answer”  Presenter: _____
Wednesday 10/13	<i>In Cold Blood</i> – Truman Capote. Read “Part 4: The Corner”  Presenter: _____
Friday 10/15	<i>In Cold Blood</i> movie. View film clips in class  Presenter: _____
<b>Week 9: Serial Killers</b>	
Monday 10/18	<i>Becoming Unbecoming</i> – Una  Presenter: _____
Wednesday 10/20	<i>Becoming Unbecoming</i> – Una  Presenter: _____
Friday 10/22	<i>Becoming Unbecoming</i> – Una  <b>Image/Text Adaptations Due</b>
<b>Week 10: Serial Killers</b>	
Monday 10/25	<i>My Friend Dahmer</i> – Derf Backder  Presenter: _____

Wednesday 10/27	<i>My Friend Dahmer</i> – Derf Backder  Presenter: _____
Friday 10/29	<i>My Friend Dahmer</i> – Derf Backder
<b>Week 11: True Crime Podcasts</b>	
Monday 11/1	<i>Hunting Ghislane</i> – “Monsters” and “Pimp”  Presenter: _____
Wednesday 11/3	<i>Hunting Ghislane</i> – “The Black Book” and “Favours”
Friday 11/5	<i>Hunting Ghislane</i> – “The Lady Vanishes” and “Demons”
<b>Week 12: True Crime Podcasts</b>	
Monday 11/8	<i>Happy Face</i> – “Childhood” and “Disruption”  Presenter: _____
Wednesday 11/10	<i>Happy Face</i> – “Keith” and “Broken”
Friday 11/12	<i>Happy Face</i> – “Misdirection” and “Leroy”  <b>Podcast Proposals Due</b>
<b>Week 13: True Crime Documentaries</b>	
Monday 11/15	“House of Terror” – <i>Unsolved Mysteries</i> , Season 1, Episode 3 (In class screening)
Wednesday 11/17	“A Shock to the System” – <i>The Trials of Gabriel Fernandez</i> , Episode 1 (In class screening)
Friday 11/19	Discuss Monday and Wednesday’s episodes
<b>Week 14</b>	

Monday 11/22	In class workshop: Podcast Episodes
Wednesday 11/24	<b>No Class: Thanksgiving Break</b>
Friday 11/26	<b>No Class: Thanksgiving Break</b>
<b>Week 15: True Crime Documentaries</b>	
Monday 11/29	“Trial by Fire” – <i>The Confession Tapes</i> , Season 1, Episode 4 (In class screening)
Wednesday 12/1	Discuss Wednesday’s episode
Friday 12/3	<b>Final Podcast Episodes Due</b>
<b>Week 16</b>	
Monday 12/6	Final Exam Review Day
Wednesday 12/8	<b>No Class – At-home Final Exam</b>
Friday 12/10	<b>No Class: Reading Day</b>