

University of Guelph
College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
Department of Sociology and Anthropology

SOC 4330 – Miscarriages of Justice

Winter 2025

Lecture: Monday, 11:30 a.m. – 2:20 p.m.

Instructor: C. Yule

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Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to provide a critical and interdisciplinary examination of the current functioning of the Canadian criminal justice system. We will explore procedures used by various criminal justice actors to assess their potential for producing errors in justice. We will consider the implications of balancing the rights of the accused with crime control and examine the retributive aims of the system for victims and society-at-large. While the content of this course focuses on wrongful convictions, it is not one-sided. A broad definition of ‘justice’ requires that we consider the implications of both convicting the innocent and neglecting to convict the guilty. The focus of scholarship on wrongful convictions is relatively new, yet a wealth of factors have been identified as contributing to miscarriages of justice. This course will canvass the international literature, but will focus more heavily on recent Canadian developments.

Course Goals and Learning Objectives:

The main learning objectives for this course include:

- Identify sociological, psychological, legal, scientific, and psychological factors that contribute to miscarriages of justice, broadly defined.
- Examine the role of the police, crown, defence, witnesses, and the judiciary in contributing to unintended consequences like the wrongful apprehension, prosecution, conviction, and incarceration of the innocent.
- Reveal the psychological, familial, emotional, and economic consequences of wrongful convictions.
- Explore the collateral consequences of punishing “false positives,” including implications for undermining the legitimacy of the criminal justice system and allowing impunity for culpable offenders who remain at-large.
- Consider existing redress mechanisms to remedy miscarriages of justice and provide suggestions for policy change.

Course Readings: Available on Courselink

(Tentative) Assessment/Evaluation:

Quizzes.....	15%
Collaborative Seminar Presentation.....	20%
Research proposal.....	10%
Term Paper (12-15 pages)	25%
Take-Home Final Assignment.....	10%
Class Participation	20%

Class Format:

This is an advanced seminar course. As such, student participation is expected and encouraged. I expect that you will be prepared for class by reading the assigned material prior to class and actively participating in discussion during class time for the entire semester. I will supplement the course with films and guest lectures to facilitate the application of course material.

*****Please note:** I reserve the right to make changes to the outline as posted. I will provide a complete course outline on the first day of class.