

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

SOC 4330 – Miscarriages of Justice
Winter 2023

This course is a critical and interdisciplinary examination of real and potential weakness in the Canadian criminal justice system in the context of international literature scholarship and research on the issues.

We will learn about the various places in criminal justice process in which errors have occurred by exploring criminal justice procedures used by various criminal justice actors to accuse, arrest, try, determine guilt and convict suspects and assess their potential for producing errors.

Some errors are flagrant and intentional (i.e. forms of misconduct). Others are the result of permissible practices and procedures result in mistakes even where various checks-and-balances fail to prevent them before (and sometimes after) a conviction.

We will,

- examine the tension between balancing the need for crime control with the rights of the accused.
- describe the psychological, familial, emotional, and economic consequences of wrongful convictions.
- assess existing redress mechanisms to remedy miscarriages of justice
- explore procedures used by various criminal justice actors to identify and assess their potential for producing and avoiding errors.
- examine the retributive options for victims and society.
- consider suggestions for policy change.

We focus on problematic actions and procedures in the context of a broad definition of ‘justice.’ This demands that we consider the implications of both convicting the innocent and neglecting to convict the guilty.