Mystery, Madness, and Murder  
Spring 2022

**Psych 405-002:**  
Tuesday & Thursday  
9:00AM – 10:15AM  
Horizon Hall Room 3010

Instructor: Erika De Los Santos  
Email: edeloss@gmu.edu

Office Location: David King Hall Room 1014C (basement of David King in the Centec Room)

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 10:30AM – 12:00PM or by appointment

**Course Overview**

Psychology 405 is an exciting course where you will learn to apply psychological principles to areas related to mystery, murder, and madness!

The first section we will do a deep dive into season 1 of the highly addictive Serial Podcast. Serial Season 1 is a true crime story about the 1999 murder of Hae Min Lee, an 18-year-old student at Woodlawn High School in Baltimore, Maryland. The aim of this section is to learn how principles from different areas of psychology (cognitive psychology, social psychology, clinical psychology, etc.) can be applied to and used to help understand mystery, murder, and madness topics. Each week will usually consist of one lecture and one student-led presentation/classroom discussion on how a journal article relates.

We will also learn about theories and principles of psychopathology and how they relate to mystery, murder, and madness topics. We will spend time looking at Adnan, The Iceman Killer, and Joker.

The end of the course will focus entirely on student group presentations for a mystery, madness, and murder topic of your choosing.

**Required Materials**

Serial Podcast (season 1) – Available on Spotify, YouTube, or the official website (https://serialpodcast.org/season-one)

Journal Articles – Posted on blackboard under “Journal Articles.”

**Grading Scheme**

**Attendance-** 10%

Attendance will be taken every class and make up 10% of your grade. You are allowed to miss 3 classes before I start subtracting a percentage point from your grade. In order to excuse an
absence after the two unexcused absences, students must obtain written documentation and contact the instructor within one week of the missed class. These absences will be considered on a case-to-case basis.

**Participation - 15%**

A large portion of this class will be driven by contributions from class participation. It is imperative that you participate and participate often in order to receive full credit here. At minimum, students are expected to contribute to one in-class discussion each week for full credit.

**Discussion Board Classroom Discussions - 15%**

For the first section of this course, you will write individual journals weekly for each assigned article. Due dates vary—please see calendar. In general students should plan to write about 1-1-2 paragraphs for their article summaries. Each summary should also contain **at least one** thought-provoking takeaway, comment, and question to guide discussion. The purpose of these posts is to ensure you have read the articles, have thought about how they relate to themes from the podcast, and to stimulate classroom discussions. More details can be found in the instructions for each discussion forum.

**Article & Discussion Reflection – 15%**

Once per semester, students will be asked to write a 1-page summary of a week’s reading and student-led discussion. While it is the student’s choice of which week that wish to summarize, the reflection will be due no later than **one week following** the in-class discussion of the journal. For example, if students wished to write about the Graham & Lowery (2004) article/discussion, then their reflection would be due on Thursday, February 15th, by 11:59PM. More details can be found within the journal reflection assignment on blackboard.

**Group Journal Article Presentations – 20%**

For the first section of the course, groups will present an assigned journal article and facilitate a classroom discussion on how the principles from the article relate to a topic of their choosing. The focus of this assignment should be on facilitating discussion among your fellow classmates (e.g., class activities, asking content/theory questions, etc.) rather than disseminating information, and each discussion should last about 30-minutes. I will do the first presentation to help you understand what is expected from you. Presentations dates can be found on the calendar. All group members will receive participation grades that will affect their overall score on the assignment.

**Final Group Presentation - 25%**

In the middle of the semester, you will form groups and begin working on a project within your group. The project is to create a 15-minute presentation in which you psychologically analyze a topic related to mystery, murder, and/or madness. I will give more information about this when
the time comes. It is up to the student to create their groups. All group members will receive participation grades that will affect their overall score on the assignment.

**Late/Missing Assignments**

**Discussion Posts**

Late discussion posts will be accepted until Friday, March 25th at 11:59PM. Any late work/missed assignment can be made up to 50% of the original grade so long as it is turned in by this date. Late worked received on Saturday, March 26th at 12:00AM will not be accepted.

**Missed Presentations**

Without prior approval, any student who misses a group presentation (journal article or final) can only receive up to 70% with full participation points from their group members. Without prior approval, students who receive failing participation scores from their group members will receive a zero for their presentation grade.

With prior approval and appropriate documentation, students who miss a group presentation (journal article or final) and cannot reschedule their group presentation, will receive an alternate assignment. It is the student’s responsibility to communicate with the instructor about the details of their alternate assignment.

**Grading Policy/Scale**

Grades will be rounded to the nearest whole number percentage at the end of the semester. For example, if a student gets 88.5% or higher, their grade will be rounded to 89%. If a student gets 88.4% or lower, their grade will be rounded to 88%. Whole number percentages will not be rounded to a higher grade. For example, 89% will not be rounded to a 90%. This is non-negotiable.

I will assign final grades based on the following scale:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>98-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>63-66</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Below 60</td>
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</tbody>
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**Mental Health Resources**

In this course, there may be some material that evokes some negative emotion. For that reason, I wanted to make students aware of the resources available through GMU. Additionally, students are more than welcome to reach out to me via email if they are uncomfortable with a specific topic so that we can make an alternate plan together.
CAPS:
Individual and group counseling, crises support, virtual mental health workshops, etc.
https://caps.gmu.edu
(703) 993 – 2380

Student Support and Advocacy Center:
Patriot pantry, financial well-being, substance abuse, & domestic violence
https://ssac.gmu.edu
(703) 993 – 3686

Important Dates

- Last Day to Drop with 100% Tuition Refund: February 7th
- Last Day to Drop with Partial Tuition Refund: February 14th
- Last Day to Drop with No Tuition Refund: March 1st

*It is your responsibility to drop yourself from the course*

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Disability Services

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at (703) 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. If you have a Faculty Contact Sheet, please be sure to give that to me at the start of class or as soon as possible so that we can work together to make the semester as smooth as possible for you.

Honor Code

George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. It is every student’s responsibility to familiarize himself or herself with the Honor Code. The Honor Code is available at: http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking

As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Responsible Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX
Coordinator per University Policy 1412. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

**Technology Usage**

Communications regarding class, assignments and other important announcements will be disseminated through Blackboard and GMU email accounts. Students are expected to regularly check both Blackboard and their GMU email accounts. All email correspondence with the instructor must be done via GMU email accounts. This is to make sure that I know the email is coming from you. Emails that do not include the course and section number in the subject line and the student’s name in the body of the email may not receive a response.

**Religious Holidays**

Please refer to George Mason University’s calendar of religious holidays and observations(http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/). It is the student’s responsibility to speak to the instructor in advance should their religious observances impact their participation in class activities and assignments.

**Student Privacy**

George Mason University strives to fully comply with FERPA by protecting the privacy of student records and judiciously evaluating requests for release of information from those records. Please see George Mason University’s student privacy policy https://registrar.gmu.edu/students/privacy/

**Mason Diversity Statement**

George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth.

*Instructor reserves the right to change any items on this syllabus at any time*