When a person commits an illegal activity s/he is subsequently charged with the crime. Then a set of actors enter the scene particularly the courtroom which serves as the main platform in which they perform. This unit shall focus on reasoning and decision making, the witness, the jury and the psychologist as expert witness which have dominated psychology in the courtroom.

**Course structure**

1. Introduction to the Unit
   - Unit aims and objectives
   - Assessment

2. The Psychology of reasoning and decision making
   - Findings from studies of reasoning and decision making
   - Reducing errors of judgment

3. Eyewitness memory
   - A broad introduction to psychological research concerned with the accuracy of witness memory
   - Making sense of the evidence; stages in eyewitness memory – acquisition, retention and retrieval of information
   - Witness factors such as confidence and age

4. The child witness in the courtroom
   - System-induced trauma suffered by child witnesses
   - The development and study of protective and preparative measures used to support child witnesses
   - Educating court and child protection professionals
5. Jury Behaviour
   - Jury research: the impact of evidence presented in the courtroom on jury decisions; effects of extra-evidential influences and events prior to the trial on jury decision
   - The composition of the jury and jury decision making

6. Expert Psychological Evidence
   - The role of the psychologist in the courtroom
   - Acting as an expert witness
   - Problems for psychologists giving expert testimony

7. Making Legal Decisions about Children
   - The welfare of the child
   - Divorce; Adoption; Foster and Residential Care
   - Balancing the rights of the child with the needs of the child

**Assessment**

1. Presentation Part 1 of the Assignment: 25% (also a hard copy of the presentation shall be handed in to lecturer on the day of presentation)

2. Assignment Part 2: 75%

Weekly presentations shall commence on Wednesday 2nd November 2011. Students shall be notified of its presentation date by Monday 10th October 2011. No marks shall be allotted to students who absent themselves from the assigned presentation.
Assignment titles: Choose one of the following. Write about 1500 words. Assignments are to be handed in by the 18th January 2012 at Room 114 by noon.

1. Are juries a good thing? Is it possible to propose a better alternative to this sentencing procedure based on the psychological research evidence?

2. Do you consider closed-circuit television as the solution to the trauma suffered by the child witness in court? Discuss.

3. From a psychological point of view, describe the impact of separation or fostering/adoption on a child (7-10 years). What recommendations could be forwarded to the child’s parents so as to minimise the negative consequences following separation or fostering/adoption?

4. Based on research evidence, which factors at the time of crime do you think are most important in considering the accuracy of eyewitness memory?

5. Discuss the different roles of a psychologist in courtroom proceedings. Also, explain the problems and ethical issues psychologists encounter as expert witnesses.
Reading List:


