

AP-LS Teaching Techniques

Implementing a Mock Crime, Investigation and Trial in Your Psychology and Law Course

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Editors Introduction: We are pleased to present the first article in the new Teaching Techniques section. The Teaching Techniques section, sponsored by the APLS Careers and Training Committee, will offer useful ideas and activities for those of us who teach (or plan to teach) courses in Psychology and Law, Forensic Psychology, or more specialized areas of legal psychology. We hope that the Teaching Techniques section of the Newsletter will become the best place to find activities, simulations, and demonstrations that engage students in the learning process and help professors to teach important content in psychology and law.

The Editors welcome your comments, ideas, suggestions, or submissions. We are especially interested in articles describing techniques that promote active learning in psychology and law. Please send submissions, questions, or ideas for articles to any of the four editors listed below.

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The article below describes a semester-long simulation developed by Professor Kimberly MacLin at the University of Northern Iowa. This elaborate simulation engages students in nearly every phase of the criminal justice process, from the commission of a mock crime through a simulated criminal trial.

Implementing a Mock Crime, Investigation and Trial in Your Psychology and Law Course

This semester-long class project is designed to engage students in the criminal justice process so that they can effectively apply the theoretical and methodological principles they are learning in a psychology and law course to the real-world situations to which they relate. The project is comprised of a mock crime and a mock trial, with all of the necessary preparations in between. Given the flow of the project, it is beneficial to cover course material in terms of the criminal justice timeline such that relevant course material is covered at roughly the same time that the major events of the project are taking place. Each student chooses a role to play and participates in the

criminal justice and legal systems as that role throughout the entire semester. The class project requires individual and group work, and thus the students receive both individual and group grades for their participation.

Class Type and Size:

This project has been designed for a Psychology and Law, semester long (15-week) course that requires Introductory Psychology as a pre-requisite and is open to majors and non-majors alike. You can effectively carry out this project with class sizes from 25-50. There are minor roles that can be excluded or included depending on the size of your class. Many roles can realistically have more than one person, and your jury size can range greatly. A class size of 38 is an ideal number.

Type of Crime and Location:

I recommend that you stage a murder as your crime. This allows for a lot of investigative opportunities and an intense crime scene and trial. Good locations for the crime include lobbies, wide hallways, and open areas (e.g., in your Union). Given that the crime occurs during class time, pedestrian traffic is often limited. Your crime site should not block any walkways. Be mindful of the weather (if outdoors), possible noise issues (the media and law enforcement often clash—loudly!) and getaway possibilities for your perpetrator.

Alerting Necessary Parties:

Contact offices/personnel immediately adjacent to the location of the crime as well as campus police and the Provost to inform them of your plans. Optional parties to alert are public relations and the campus newspaper.

Class Time:

The crime occurs during class and you will need to allow in-class time for some activities, including the trial. These class project days allow for students to work with their groups to do in-class activities (lineup administration, sketch artist, etc), and to coordinate out of class time with their group members (witness interviews, case planning, etc), as well as to review and update their group's resource book (see Products, below).

Trial Location:

I recommend that you find a different location than your regularly scheduled room for the trial. This helps add to the formality of the trial, as you are not in a class room environment. Most campuses have reception halls or other formal areas that are ideal for trial setup.

Equipment and Materials:

You will need to provide (or information on where to access):

- Video camera
- Camera
- Tape recorder
- Cell phones (for detectives and police officers—the students usually use their own)
- Jury pamphlet
- Jury number slips
- Jury questionnaires (this is usually an assignment for lawyers to create)
- Gavel
- Robe (I loan out my old MA thesis robe)
- Instructions for your state (this is usually an assignment for the judge)
- Bible
- PA system
- Forms—subpoena, autopsy, police reports, etc, etc (Google is your friend)
- FACES 3.0 or 4.0 (http://www.iqbio-metrix.com/products_faces_40.html)
- Weapon
- Ketchup/Salad Dressing
- CSI Kit (components available on-line (<http://www.chiefsupply.com>) and at your local grocery store, and should include: do not cross tape, chalk, fingerprint kit, blood collection kit, evidence envelopes, evidence tape, chain of evidence labels, wet wipes, zip lock bags, disposable cameras, tongs, garbage bags, pens, and a duffle bag or box to keep it all in)
- Attire (POLICE and CSI shirts are available online and at some retail stores, while optional, they do add a lot to creating a realistic scene; encourage attorneys and court personnel to dress professionally during trial)

Roles and Groups:

Law Enforcement Group:

- Police Officers (2)
- Detectives (2)
- Crime Scene Investigators (2)
- Sketch Artist (1)
- Profiler (1; optional)
- Bail Bonds (1; optional)

The Courts Group:

- Bailiff (1)
- Judge (1)

The Jury Group:

- Jurors (8-16)

- Jury Commissioner (1; optional)

The Attorneys Group:

- Defense Attorneys (2)
- Prosecuting Attorneys (2)
- Expert Witnesses (2; one for each side)
- Character Witnesses (2; one for each side)
- Eyewitnesses (2-5)

The Media Group:

- Camera Person (1)
- TV Correspondent (1)
- Newspaper Reporter (1; optional)
- Newspaper Photographer (1; optional)

Accomplices to the Project (People not in the class):

You will need to find people from outside your course to play the following roles:

- Victim (1)
- Perpetrator (1)
- Innocent suspect(s) (1 or more; optional)

Making it All Happen – Timeline, Meetings, Instructions, and Planning:

On the first day of class I introduce the course, review the syllabus and do an ice breaking activity. They are instructed to review the roles and role requirements available on the course website before the next class period. On the second day of class I introduce the class project, providing information on what they will need to do, how it relates to course principles and objectives, my expectations, and how they will be graded. I then assign the roles. I go through the list once and any roles that are uncontested or have the requisite number of volunteers (shown by students raising their hands) are assigned first. Those roles that are contested are decided by picking a number between 1 and 100.

Next, students meet with their groups and exchange contact information and review the resource book for their group.

Recruit a victim and perpetrator (and an innocent suspect if you will be using one). I often use graduate students or non-majors. Decide on a crime location. Alert necessary people of the event. Reserve your trial location. Often this type of room is used a lot toward the end of the semester (for receptions, etc),

so make sure to get it reserved as soon as possible.

Meet with your victim, perpetrator and any innocent suspects at the crime location so that you can show them what you want them to do. You should provide the perpetrator with a weapon. I recommend that the weapon be obviously fake to avoid potential problems with people not in the class project who may view the incident (I use a large plastic machete, sword or knife available in the toy/Halloween section). The perpetrator should carry a small container or bag of Ketchup, Catalina dressing, or BBQ sauce to squirt on the victim/floor (warn the victim!). I don't recommend using the Halloween "blood" that is available in a tube as it can stain clothes and flooring. Have the perpetrator and victim practice the event and the escape route. Warn the victim that he or she will need to "die" and lay still for 45 minutes. Ask him or her to have only items with them that they don't mind the students in the class looking over. All items will likely be bagged and labeled by the CSI team, however, essential items (e.g., keys) will be returned at the end of the class period. If you use an innocent suspect, you should instruct them to be near the location during the crime time period. I usually have them wear similar clothing as the perpetrator.

I recommend having the crime occur approximately 3 weeks into the course. This allows for coverage of course material related to causes of crime and the crime itself. You will have a specific date and time identified for the crime. However, you should indicate to the class that you don't know exactly which day the crime will occur. On the course calendar I indicate that there are three or four possible days for the crime to occur. You can then have the crime occur on the second day, or the third day. At the beginning of class on each of those days, provide the eyewitnesses with a map (or directions to follow) that takes them out of class, around campus and back. On the first day, don't plan for the crime to occur. Let them follow the map and return. You should have 1 or 2 TAs or other volunteers (not in the course)



available to travel behind the eyewitness on their walk. They should not know when or where the crime is going to occur. They should have with them 8 ½ x 11 signs that say “Class Project in Progress,” tape, and some of your business cards. When the crime goes down, they should tape the signs around the location and stand back and watch. They should step in and deal with any interactions from passersby or concerned citizens (thus your business card). They should not interact with course participants or give them guidance or information in any way. On one of the remaining days scheduled for the crime (but not the last day, so that there is some surprise factor), their map (a different one each day) will take them through the crime area. The eyewitnesses will need to alert the police (either by running back to class or using a cell phone). Law enforcement will arrive and CSI has until the end of the class period to collect their evidence. The media will often follow law enforcement to the scene (the equivalent to them listening to a police scanner) which can create some interesting interactions! As the instructor, you will be back in your class with the other students. At the end of the class period I usually check up on them and help them clean up (fingerprint dust is a mess!).

Over the next several weeks, investigation and trial preparation will occur. Students are warned at the beginning of the course that a fair amount of outside class time will be required to successfully complete the project. I do try to work in one or two class project days so that groups can meet in class.

I structure the course so that the last three days of class, and then the final period are devoted to the trial. Jury selection is slated for Day 1; opening statements (5 minutes per side) and the prosecution’s case (30 minutes) take up Day 2; defense’s case (30 minutes) and closing arguments (5 minutes per side) comprise Day 3; and jury instructions (20 minutes), deliberation (60 minutes) and verdict/discussion (20 minutes) are done during the final period. I have all products related to the project due one or two days after the final period so they can incorporate the end of the semester-

long project in their Personal Portfolio (see Products, below).

Coordinating the Chaos:

This project is dynamic in every sense of the word. You set up and coordinate a lot, but actually orchestrate very little. Ultimately the project has a life of its own. There is no script. Particularly in the beginning, you will need to continually remind the students of this. I often end up saying “I guarantee a crime and a trial, the rest is up to you.” The students (including your victim and perpetrator) will often ask you “what should I do?” Your response should be: “Don’t ask me what you should do, there is no script! What would you do under these circumstances?” You will periodically need to force the students back into role. They will often try to do too much double thinking, jumping back and forth between the real world and the project. After my most recent mock crime, one of the eyewitnesses came up to me and concernedly said, “Dr. MacLin, I know the victim and the perpetrator.” She clearly thought that this was going to wreck the project in some way. Instead, I looked at her wide-eyed and said “How traumatic for you to have witnessed a murder of someone you know, and feel like you know who did it!” She got the point immediately and clearly saw that she could stay in role even given the circumstances. (As an aside, this situation provided for an interesting expert witness on face recognition and transference). Another example of getting the real world mixed up in the project is the following: a detective might say she wants to contact the Registrar’s office to get a course schedule of a suspect but she “knows” she can’t do that. You should encourage the student to stay in role and think within that role. “Is this something you would do in the real world if you were a detective on this case? If yes, then you do it here too”—BUT with some important guidelines. Instruct students that ANY contact with people outside the class environment must come through you. That way, you can coordinate the logistics of that request. If the request can be carried out “for real” then great (e.g., one semester the students wanted to arrest a suspect in a

class that he was in. I knew the professor who was agreeable, so I allowed for that to happen). Other times, the request is not logistically possible (like the Registrar example) or, you may want to tailor the information that they receive (e.g., coroner report). In these cases, you create the information and provide it back to the requesting individual. In this sense you (or your TAs) become any outside agency (coroners’ office, crime lab, Registrar’s office, etc) and you mock up the requested information and materials using as realistic forms as possible. Because you also guarantee a trial, the only thing you need to strive to control for is that there is ultimately a suspect and defendant (no plea bargaining!). Once, with a very slow moving law enforcement team, I came to class with a 911 transcript that I had mocked up where there was an anonymous tip that led them to someone. The only time that I allow the students to interact with people not in the class without first going through me, is at the crime scene. Detectives will often interview passersby, ask people what they saw, etc.

This type of project will undoubtedly produce some of its own problems. Normally, this would be quite distressing to have a class project or demonstration go awry! However in this instance, you can almost always have these problems work to your advantage, as these are the same problems that occur in the real world (evidence is lost or not collected, attorneys don’t fully disclose evidence, personality clashes, etc). Often when confronted with a student concern or complaint regarding the project, I look at him or her and say “might this happen in the real world?” Inevitably they admit, that yes, it could, and then I respond “then I’m going to let it happen here in this project.” This response also usually serves to diffuse whatever anger or frustration they are having as it relates their experience back to the project and course. So instead of being furious with Sally, a fellow student, they realize really that they are furious with Sally, the nosey report who keeps ignoring the judge’s gag order.

Some Caveats:

This is a fun, highly engaging project. Therefore:

- You must guard against the project serving as the dominating content of the course. It is very important that students are engaged in reading material, assignments and lectures that fall squarely within the literature of topics relevant to psychology and law. The project can then serve as a highly salient example for the theoretical and methodological content that is inherent in the course.

- It is also time and labor intensive (for you and the students), and can at times be frustrating for the students as they don't have the benefit of seeing the big picture (or knowing that when it is all over, they will realize that it was a great learning experience). Be as organized and clear about the project as you can up front, and clear about the time commitment and role responsibilities. Also, clearly link course content to the project and convey to the students how and why this project contributes to their learning of psychology and law. Even doing all of this though, you may find that student evaluations somehow always seem to take place during the one point of the project when students are most busy with the project! And thus, they may reflect some frustrations. As an untenured faculty member, I usually solicit end of semester feedback as well, at which time I nearly always have high praise for the process and products of the project.

- Students get deeply invested in the project and often are surprised by their motivation and intensity with regard to the project activities. In my opinion, this is a good thing, but it can also create the need for managing student issues and concerns as they arise, usually with the happen in the class project (e.g., police confiscate media's video camera for crossing the crime scene line; defense attorney wants to strangle prosecuting attorney for withholding information; the attorneys can't sleep the night before trial; etc).

Grading Criteria:

You can adjust these as needed. This is my breakdown of the project points such that the project is worth 220 points out of a 750 point class.

Personal Portfolio: 100 pts
Group Resource Binder: 50 pts
Individual Webpage Update: 10 pts
Real Court/Trial Experience: 30 pts
Mock Trial Reflection Notes: 30 pts

The Products:

There are several tangible products that result from this project. You can modify these to best fit your style and course. Some semesters I have students do oral presentations on their roles, APA style research papers, or include research articles pertinent to their role in their binders. Below is the current mix of products I have students complete.

Personal Portfolio: 100 pts

The portfolio summarizes their role, experiences, and organizes their work on the project. The Portfolio should include: (1) an overview of the role (who, what, when, where, why, how); (2) how-to information for the role; (3) a log or journal that documents what they did for their role and when; (4) Trial Experience paper; (5) Reflection notes; (6) Individual Webpage Update.

Group Resource Binder: 50 pts (This is a group grade; I used to have the binder have their work product from their trial included here. This made for huge binders that were difficult to grade for individual contribution, and difficult for the next class to use. The Personal Portfolio now holds their individual work.)

The resource binder is a generic (i.e., not case specific) guide and resource for the roles that are part of a particular group. The resource book should include: (1) a welcome note for the next semester's group; (2) how-to information for the roles and for the group as a whole; (3) relevant forms; (4) timelines; (5) lists of supplies/equipment; (6) helpful resources (e.g., websites, checklists, etc); and anything else they think will help the next group do their roles better.

Individual Webpage Update: 10 pts (This is something new I am trying, as I've gotten behind in updating these pages. We'll see how the students do!)

Each role has an individual webpage with some resources on it (linked on the class project website). They should improve on this page by including resources and information that should be added to that page. This information should be typed up and included in the Personal Portfolio. At the end of the semester I will update the webpages. I anticipate that in the future I will have the students create/update the Group Resource Binder all on-line through these pages.

Real Court/Trial Experience: 30 pts (I used to have just the court personnel do this, but all of the students get a lot out of this experience)

Every student is required to gain some real court/trial experience and write a 3 page summary of this experience. Jury selection or a jury trial are ideal experiences, however, any court/trial experience will be acceptable. I provide information and directions to our local courthouse. After grading it is returned to the student to include in their Portfolio.

Mock Trial Reflection Notes: 30 pts (students are engaged during trial, but I have found that the notes help them relate the experience to the course content)

During each trial day the students are required to take notes reflecting on their experience that day. If they are a juror they may turn in the notes they are taking as a juror. All notes are returned prior to deliberation (for the jurors to use in their deliberations if they so wish, and if allowed by the judge). All students should include their notes in their Personal Portfolios.

For More Information:

View the project website for much more information about the project and details about role responsibilities and assignments at http://fp.uni.edu/maclink/class_project.htm. Feel free to contact me with any questions you have about the organization and coordination of this type of project, or of how to link course content to the project activities (kim.maclin@uni.edu). Good luck!

