Anthropology 88A

“Forget CSI: The Reality of Forensic Anthropology.”

Seminar Description:

“Bones are often our last and best witnesses: they never lie, and they never forget.”- Dr. Clyde Snow, American Forensic Anthropologist.
Bones give a variety of evidence, if you know where to look, and how to study them.

Forensic anthropology is the application of the science of physical anthropology and the study of the human skeleton in a legal setting, most often in criminal cases where the victim's remains are more or less skeletonized. This class will study methods on determining the sex and age of a skeleton, and use those methods while we examine real bones in class. We will discuss different controversy surrounding the question of "ancestry" and problems with techniques used in determining sex. This course will look at different types of trauma, and assess the indicators of peri vs. post-mortem trauma. We will read and discuss case studies, and get an inside look at the journey of bones as they travel from the crime scene to the lab and then on to court.

Course Objectives:

The objective of this course is to help students develop an informed appreciation for, and basic familiarity with the field of Forensic Anthropology. Students will not be experts in this field after taking this class, but instead will hopefully have a more scientific view of Forensic Anthropology than what is currently available through popular media. The goal of this class is for students to better understand the role of a Forensic Anthropologist, and what they are required to identify from bones. This goal will not only be accomplished with hands on experience with bones, but also by addressing specific questions and controversy surrounding Forensic Anthropology in our discussions every class.

Course Participation/Attendance:

Students are expected to attend class, actively participate in discussions, and complete the weekly readings. As this is a one-unit Pass/No Pass seminar, attendance is essential. Missing more than two classes will result in a no pass. Please email me in advance if you cannot make class.
Course Requirements:

Please finish the assigned reading, which will be posted online, before coming to class as we will always be discussing the topics. Please bring any questions to class, as they will be an integral component of our discussions. There may be some graphic images or material pertaining to human bodies; I remind all students that this is a respectful class environment. There will be one pop quiz during class, to ensure that students are keeping up with the material. The quiz will only cover material discussed during class. There will be one final paper which is due by email one week after the last day of class. On the last class meeting, students will watch segments of the television show “CSI” and discuss in groups parts of the program pertaining to what we have learned in class, and if there were any flaws. The final paper is a 2-page write-up of the discussion, what we have learned, and any flaws in the show.

Grades will be based on attendance, participation, the pop quiz, and the final paper as follows:

- Attendance – 15%
- Participation – 15%
- Pop Quiz- 35%
- Final Paper- 35%

Course Schedule/Reading List:

Week 1- Introduction and History of Forensic Anthropology
Power-point presentation.

Week 2- Brief Introduction to Human Osteology
Briefly go over the bones in the human skeleton with particular emphasis on those to be discussed when determining gender and age.
Handout on bones.

Week 3-Sex Determination
The femur, skull and pelvis may be used to determine sex, but there are some problems we will discuss. We will study BONES in class.
Readings:

Week 4-- Guest Speaker- Dr. Elizabeth Miller
Dr. Miller is a faculty member at CSULA, Consulting Anthropologist to the Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner/Coroner, and a member of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences.
**Week 5- Age Determination**
The dentition and pelvis are used, as well as other characteristics for specific age ranges. We will also look at BONES in class.

*Readings:*
- *Introduction to Forensic Anthropology* Chapter 9, pgs 207-208 and 226-232. We will also look at BONES in class.

**Week 6- Evidence of Trauma on bone.**
Evidence of sharp force such as knife and chop marks, blunt force (an example is from a frying pan) and gun shot wounds.

*Readings:*

**Week 7- Ante, Peri, and Postmortem defects of bones.**
Evidence of trauma on bones that occurred before death, around the time of death, or after death.

*Readings:*
- *Introduction to Forensic Anthropology* Chapter 11, pgs 289-293.

**Week 8- Mass Disasters, Genocide, and Human Rights**
Discussion of Clyde Snow’s work. Dr. Snow is a well known U.S. Forensic Anthropologist, his skeletal conformations include John F. Kennedy and King Tutankhamen. We will be discussing his involvement with various human rights groups on mass graves.

*Readings:*

**Week 9- Field Methods and Ethics**
Handling of evidence, when a forensic anthropologist is needed, and obligations when testifying in court.

*Readings:*

**Week 10- Conclusion**
Students will watch a segment of the Television show “CSI” and discuss in groups any flaws in the program pertaining to Forensic Anthropology. A 2-page write up is due one week after the last day of class.