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## **CSI K-STATE: INTERSESSION, ONLINE SOCIOLOGY COURSE PROFILES, EXPLORES MYTHS, TRUTHS, MOTIVATION OF SERIAL KILLERS**

MANHATTAN — One of L. Susan Williams' courses probably should come with an advisory warning: "Content includes material that may not be suitable for everyone."

Better yet: "Don't try this at home."

Williams, a Kansas State University associate professor of sociology, is the instructor for Social Construction of Serial Murder. The course will be offered during K-State's winter intersession, Dec. 27-Jan. 11, 2006, and online during the spring semester.

According to the course synopsis, serial killing is not a new phenomenon. It has long existed but only recently has been popularized as a concern of the criminal justice system and the general public. Williams said the course examines the social origins of the law, as well as the role of interest groups, public opinion and expert evidence in how crime is defined and regulated. Topics include myths and truths about serial killers and their victims; causes of serial murder; and categories and profiles of serial killers.

This will be the fourth winter intersession and third online version of the course taught by Williams. She said the course has evolved over that time, much like a serial killer. A new aspect this year will be detectives from the Wichita Police Department who will be talking at length about the BTK serial murder case; BTK stands for bind, torture and kill.

"When I first started I thought, as any good sociologist, that it was going to be 'all' about the social construction of a phenomenon that is not quite real but something we selectively put a lot of hype around, put a label on and treat it as if it is real or different from something else," Williams said. "The more I study, the more resources I gather from different perspectives. The course has become more. It's about successful killers.

"It's a very different thing for a serial killer; it's a social process," Williams said. "It doesn't happen overnight. They have to figure out how to sustain this enabling process that allows them to kill another human being, not just once, but over and over again."

The course is not, Williams said, a "how-to" manual for serial killers.

(more)

"There are already how-to courses if you want to log onto the Internet," she said. "In this course, we take a critical approach. We try to stand back outside the system and add some kind of perspective that sort of plays devil's advocate and says, 'what is it about our environment that nurtures this sort of mind-set even though it is very rare?'"

"The course is really about the killers themselves and also about us as a culture, us as a society," Williams said.

Social Construction of Serial Murder looks at patterns among serial killers and classic cases from serial killers such as John Wayne Gacy and Ted Bundy, as well as the cases of three Kansas-based serial killers: Gary Kleypas, Richard Grissom and Dennis Rader, who is better known as BTK.

"The BTK case is just fascinating because it doesn't fit the mold of everything we thought we knew about serial killers," Williams said. "We do focus on certain killers, but we also look at it historically and more as a subject matter, and then use particular killers as examples of different categories and psychologies, and so forth."

In addition to studying crime scene reports and investigation materials, students also must research a case, review a "true crimes genre" and do an analysis on how the particular book covered the case and analyze the case within a more scientific framework.

One poignant aspect of the course is when students hear from the survivor of a serial killer attack, Williams said. One survivor, now 16, was 10 years old when an attacker left her for dead after killing her best friend.

"She comes back every year to talk to us about her experience, but also about picking up your life and being a survivor; what it means to be a survivor," Williams said. "Students are just awestruck by this young woman who is just so courageous and determined to not let this change her life."

While the course is an upper level sociology course, it is available for general education credit. Because of that, Williams said it draws a wide cross section of students from various majors.

Space is still available for both courses. To enroll or for more information, contact K-State's Division of Continuing Education at 785-532-5566 or 1-800-432-8222, or on the Web at <http://www.dce.ksu.edu/intersession>