



Windsor Law
University of Windsor

2026 Winter Term | Professor Tanovich

EVIDENCE SYLLABUS (LAWG-5850-1)

1. DESCRIPTION

The law of evidence is procedural in nature. It is aimed at control and regulation in an effort to fairly promote the search for truth. Those it controls through rules of admissibility and proof include the factfinder, the lawyers and witnesses. The law of evidence consists of many rules and exceptions to the rules. As a result, the general guiding principles often get lost in a mass of cases and statutory provisions. In an effort to promote learning, the course is organized around the general principles and their application in various contexts.

The goal of the course is to briefly summarize the leading principles in lectures and then to critically explore the principles in context through case studies, problems and other class exercises. The course is organized into four parts. The first part will examine the location of evidence law: adversarial adjudication, the purpose of evidence law and its theoretical foundations. The second part will introduce you to the structural elements of the law of evidence including: burdens of proof, relevance, inductive reasoning, exclusionary discretion, limiting instructions, and exclusionary rules (character, sexual history evidence, hearsay, confessions, opinion evidence and privilege). The third part will examine how evidence is led including formal admissions, judicial notice, real evidence and witnesses. The fourth part will explore the basic rules governing fact-finding including assessing direct and circumstantial evidence.



2. LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, a student should be able to:

- Identify the purpose of the law of evidence and how that purpose informs which evidence we admit and how we use it in the relevant system of adjudication;
- Identify the basic foundational elements of the common law approach to the law of evidence;
- Reason persuasively in the context of fact-finding;
- Effectively identify admissibility issues with respect to evidence;
- Effectively identify and critically assess the basic principles and rules governing the proof of matters and evaluation of evidence in adjudicative proceedings;
- Provide some theoretical and social context to the rules;
- Identify how systemic issues such as gender and racial bias & wrongful convictions are relevant to thinking about evidence law & how evidence law can respond to address these issues; and
- Apply the law to new facts.

Many of the cases we will read in class involve sexual violence or sexual assault offences, often by men against women. As part of the course, we will spend time thinking about how evidence law can better respond to, and enhance, the fair adjudication of sexual assault cases. It is normal for students to have strong and sometimes conflicting feelings or reactions on this particular topic. **Respectful participation is a requirement of this course, agreement with others' viewpoints is not.** In light of this, the course discussions may be understandably difficult for any student for any variety of reasons. If you or someone you know find the readings or class discussions to be disruptive to your well-being, please consider making use of the available supports on and off-campus. This link provides more information about those resources: <http://www.uwindsor.ca/sexual-assault/>.

3. ANTI-INDIGENOUS & ANTI-BLACK RACISM

Anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism is a serious systemic problem in all adjudicative processes in Canada. This problem is particularly acute in the criminal justice system. While racism towards all racialized groups is a serious systemic problem, our focus is on Black and Indigenous communities because it is these communities who have been and, continue to be, disproportionately over and under-policed; disproportionately killed or seriously injured by the police; disproportionately denied bail or released with stricter conditions; disproportionately imprisoned; and, disproportionately the victims of wrongful convictions.

With respect to anti-Indigenous racism, the Supreme Court of Canada acknowledged in [*R v Barton*](#) 2019 SCC 33 that:

[1] We live in a time where myths, stereotypes, and sexual violence against women – particularly Indigenous women and sex workers – are tragically common. Our society has yet to come to grips with just how deep-rooted these issues truly are and just how devastating their consequences can be. Without a doubt, eliminating myths, stereotypes, and sexual violence against women is one of the more pressing challenges we face as a society. While serious efforts are being made by a range of actors to address and remedy these failings both within the criminal justice system and throughout Canadian society more broadly, this case attests to the fact that more needs to be done. Put simply, we can – and *must* – do better. ...

[198] Trials do not take place in a historical, cultural, or social vacuum. Indigenous persons have suffered a long history of colonialism, the effects of which continue to be felt. There is no denying that Indigenous people – and in particular Indigenous women, girls, and sex workers – have endured serious injustices, including high rates of sexual violence against women. The ongoing work of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is just one reminder of that painful reality (see Interim Report, *Our Women and Girls Are Sacred* (2017)).

[199] Furthermore, this Court has acknowledged on several occasions the detrimental effects of widespread racism against Indigenous people within our criminal justice system ... For example, in *Williams*, this Court recognized that Indigenous people are the target of hurtful biases, stereotypes, and assumptions, including stereotypes about credibility, worthiness, and criminal propensity, to name just a few (para. 28). Moreover, in *Ewert*, this Court stressed that “discrimination experienced by Indigenous persons, whether as a result of overtly racist attitudes or culturally inappropriate practices, extends to all parts of the criminal justice system, including the prison system” (para. 57). In short, when it comes to truth and reconciliation from a criminal justice system perspective, much-needed work remains to be done.

With respect to anti-Black racism, the Ontario Court of Appeal in [R v Theriault](#) 2021 ONCA 517 observed that:

[143] The existence of anti-Black racism in Canadian society is beyond reasonable dispute and is properly the subject matter of judicial notice. It is well recognized that criminal justice institutions do not treat racialized groups equally: Robin T. Fitzgerald and Peter J. Carrington, “Disproportionate Minority Contact in Canada: Police and Visible Minority Youth” (2011) 53 *Can. J. Crimin. & Crim. Just.* 449, at p. 450; *R. v. Le*, [2019 SCC 34](#), 375 C.C.C. (3d) 431. This reality may inform the conduct of any racialized person when interacting with the police, regardless of whether they are the accused or the complainant.

...

[146] In my view, it is incumbent on trial judges to consider relevant social context, such as systemic racism, when making credibility assessments. The trial judge did not err in doing so, and his findings are entitled to considerable deference on appeal.

Similarly, in *R v Morris* 2021 ONCA 680, the same Court held:

[1] It is beyond doubt that anti-Black racism, including both overt and systemic anti-Black racism, has been, and continues to be, a reality in Canadian society, and in particular in the Greater Toronto Area. That reality is reflected in many social institutions, most notably the criminal justice system. It is equally clear that anti-Black racism can have a profound and insidious impact on those who must endure it on a daily basis ... Anti-Black racism must be acknowledged, confronted, mitigated and, ultimately, erased. This appeal requires the court to consider how trial judges should take evidence of anti-Black racism into account on sentencing.

These are powerful exhortations from our highest courts that cannot be ignored by judges, Crown Attorneys, defence counsel and law students in criminal law and evidence courses. One of the themes of this course will be an exploration of how anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism manifests itself in the application of the rules of evidence and what steps can be taken to address it.

It needs to be said that it is disruptive and painful to talk about racism especially for our Indigenous and Black students. In addition, there is always a danger that in talking about these issues with respect to criminal (in)justice, that we will be triggering and furthering some of the harmful and untrue stereotypes that impose significant burdens on these communities. That said, change requires acknowledgment, understanding, a commitment to take action and to devise creative solutions. The key is to ensure that the instruction and discussion is done in a sensitive and thoughtful manner. I make that commitment to my Indigenous and Black students. If you or someone you know finds these discussions disruptive to your (their) well-being, please consider making use of the available supports at the law school (see #4).

4. MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

“From time to time, students face obstacles that can affect academic performance. If you experience difficulties and need help, it is important to reach out to someone.” A full list of on- and off-campus resources is available at: <http://www.uwindsor.ca/wellness>.

For a list of the resources available at the law school see: <https://www.uwindsor.ca/law/1148/mental-health-wellness-windsor-law>.

5. **SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION & SUPPORT RESOURCES**

The University of Windsor values dignity, respect and equality for all individuals and strives to foster an atmosphere of healthy attitudes and behaviours towards sexuality, sex and gender. The University is committed to maintaining a healthy and safe learning, living, social, recreational and working environment. The University's sexual misconduct policy can be found here: <https://www.uwindsor.ca/sexual-assault/301/university-policies>. If you wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual violence, please contact the Office of Sexual Violence Prevention, Resistance, and Support by email at svsupport@uwindsor.ca. Dusty or Anne will be happy to follow up to discuss the supports and information that will be most helpful to you. Please note, you do *not* have to formally report your experience in order to receive support, resources, and guidance. If you would like to consider filing a formal complaint with the University or have questions about policies and procedures regarding sexual misconduct, Dusty and Anne can also provide this information and assist with the process.

6. **RELEVANT ACADEMIC AND ACCOMMODATION POLICIES**

All relevant academic and accommodation policies for the law school can be accessed here: <https://www.uwindsor.ca/law/student-resources/41/forms-and-policies>.

7. **CLASSES**

Date: Tues/Thurs
Time: 10:30-12:50 pm
Location: Moot Court

All class power-points will be posted on Brightspace before or immediately after class

8. **RECORDING CLASS**

I will not be recording classes. However, all students may record lectures, provided that the recording is for their own personal study use. Recordings are intended to permit lecture content review to enhance understanding of the topics presented. Recordings are not a substitute for attending class and, of course, you cannot record a class for personal use if you are not in class to conduct the recording. To assist students in recording class, I will be using a microphone.

Regulations and limits surrounding recording of lectures are covered in the fair dealings section of the Federal *Copyright Act*. The *Copyright Act* and copyright law protect lectures by University lecturers. It is therefore stressed that the material recorded still belongs to the instructor and can only be used for personal study in the course in question. Students cannot disseminate these materials. If a student shares or disseminates a recorded lecture

in any way (including transcription), thereby breaching copyright legislation, the student will be subject to University misconduct policies, at a minimum, and may be subject to other legal action including disclosure of the misconduct to the Law Society of Ontario as part of the “good character” requirement. The University has implemented a new policy on recording guest lectures and student presentations as well as limits that may be placed on what is recorded: see <https://tinyurl.com/wgfenjn>.

9. TEXTS

Stuart, Tanovich & Dufraimont, *Evidence: Principles and Problems* (14th edition) (Toronto: Thomson Carswell, 2024) (CB) **This is a new edition. Cost: \$255**

Supplementary Casebook (SC) – pdf posted on Brightspace

Canada Evidence Act

<http://www.canlii.org/en/ca/laws/stat/rsc-1985-c-c-5/latest/rsc-1985-c-c-5.html>

Ontario Evidence Act

<http://www.canlii.org/en/on/laws/stat/rso-1990-c-e23/latest/rso-1990-c-e23.html>

10. EVALUATION

(i) Quizzes (30%) (Week of February 10 & March 17) (Online)

There will be two true/false on-line quizzes (Brightspace). Each will consist of 15 questions. They will be available for 5 days (Mon (9:00 am) – Fri (4:00 pm)). The first quiz will be in February, and the second quiz will be in March. Given that I am giving students a week to write the exam, I expect that students will not make any record of the questions or communicate their content to other students. By taking the quiz, you will be committing to keeping the questions confidential.

(ii) Final Exam (70%) (April 14 (Tuesday) 1-4 pm) – MOOT COURT

The final exam will be a three-hour hypothetical-based modified open-book (see below) exam. The exam questions will be, generally speaking, 60% criminal-based and 40% civil based. You will not be able to access content on your laptop. The laptop can only be used to access Exam Soft. A practice bank of questions will be posted at the end of January along with the model answers to assist in your preparation for the exam. There will also be five practice true/false quizzes posted on Brightspace throughout the term. Finally, a mock exam will be posted the week before the exam.

Modified Open Book – The only material that you can bring into the exam is an outline prepared by you of a total of 60 pages (or 30 pages double-sided) typed (8.5 x 11) with font no smaller than 10 inch and margins no smaller than ½ inch on all sides – these notes must be prepared by you – you cannot bring in CAN notes prepared by other

students Your outline may be tabbed with Post-It notes/tabs no bigger than 3'x3'.

Rationale - Learning how to navigate and summarize lengthy and complex material is an important skill for lawyers. As is organizing the material and tabbing it to facilitate quick access when needed. It is also an effective way to better understand the material. This outline you will prepare will also serve as an invaluable source during your career especially if you intend on becoming a litigator.

11. STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHING

A new survey instrument known as Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPT) will replace the old Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) survey this Fall. In accordance with Senate Bylaws 54, and 55, you will be provided with 15 minutes to complete the STPs online at the beginning of one regular class session within the last 2 weeks of scheduled classes.

12. OFFICE HOURS

My office is on the second floor (#2310). My official office hours are Mondays from 11:30 pm to 2:00 pm. Office hours can also be arranged in-person or on Teams by appointment. I will also be in my office most days and students should feel free to drop by with questions. Extended online office hours will be offered before the quizzes and final exam. To book an appointment, please contact my Assistant, Cassie Jewell at Cassie.Jewell@uwindsor.ca. My contact information: tanovich@uwindsor.ca (e-mail); <https://www.uwindsor.ca/law/tanovich/> (website); extension 2966 (phone).

13. OUR WORKING CASE



Throughout the course, we will examine a number of issues relating to the admissibility of evidence that arises in the NetFlix Documentary “The Staircase”

<https://www.netflix.com/ca/>. The relevant portions of the documentary are identified in the Syllabus, others will be identified in class. All references to Episodes relate to this documentary.

15. CLASS AND READING SCHEDULE

PART I - INTRODUCTION	READINGS	DATE
1. The Course 2. What is the Law of Evidence?	Syllabus CB 1-3; 31-37 SC 1-7 Episode 1 of the Staircase (0:00-5:19); Episode 4 - 33:40-43:00	January 6 (Class #1)
3. Evidence Theory	CB 3-18; 24-31; 37-42 Episode 7 (43:38- end) & 8 (1:28-4:00)	January 8 (Class #2)
PART II - STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF THE LAW OF EVIDENCE	READINGS	DATE
1. Burdens		
Allocation	CB 43-55	January 13 (Class #3)
Screening Mechanism: The Evidential Burden - (i) Criminal Cases (ii) Civil Cases	(i) CB 121-133 (ii) CB 134-141 Problem (page 126)	
The Onus of Proof: The Persuasive Burden - (i) Criminal Cases (ii) Civil Cases	(i) CB 63-66; 76-79 (ii) CB 55-63 Episode 8 (21:00-23:07)	
2. Relevance	CB 143-161; 225-229 (character evidence & motive) Episode 6 (8:50-11:40); Episode 8 (14:30-17:15) Problems #1,4 (pages 212-213)	January 15 (Class #4)
3. Inductive Reasoning 4. Judicial Instructions	CB 79-95; 162-172; 18-21; 178; 87 (paras 33-34) Problems #7-8 (page 214)	January 20 (Class #5)
5. Exclusionary Discretion - (i) Criminal Cases - Common Law (ii) Civil Cases	(i) CB 172-197 (Case Study: The Admissibility of Rap Lyrics) (ii) CB 197-201 Problems#1, 6, 8 (pages 212-215)	January 22 (Class #6)
6. Exclusionary Canons		
Character Evidence	CB 224-225; 232-233	January 27 (Class #7)
Nature Of (i) Criminal Cases (ii) Civil Cases	(i) CB 236-252; 287-292 (ii) CB 233-236; SC 8-32 Problems #2-4 (pages 252-253)	
Similar Fact Evidence - (i) Criminal Cases (ii) Civil Cases	(i) CB 253-279; 287-290 (ii) CB 281-287; SC 25-32 Problems #2, 4-5 (pages 279-280)	January 29 (Class #8)

Sexual Activity Evidence	CB 310-359; SC 33-104	February 3 (Class #9)
Hearsay		
Identification	CB 367-378; SC 105-114	February 5 (Class #10)
Principled Approach	CB 380-434; SC 115-154	February 10/12 (Classes #11-12)
Exceptions	CB 435-439; SC 155-161; 443-453; SC 162-168; 455-459; SC 169-175; 462-477; 480-483; SC 200-209; SC 185-199; 489-491	February 24/26 (Classes #13-14)
Starting to Prepare for the Exam	Practice Bank (posted on Brightspace) Part A (1-3; 8-9; 11; 13-14; 17; 21-23; 29-31) Part B (4; 7; 9-10; 12; 17; 19) Part C (4; 6; 8; 11-13; 16-19; 22; 24; 25-27; 28-29; 31-34; 37)	Practice Quiz #1 (All PQs are posted on Brightspace)
Voluntary Confessions Rule	CB 493-520; 561-568; SC 210-240 Making a Murderer (2018) (Episode 2) (4:39-16:10) Problems #1-5 (pages 558-561)	March 3 (Class #15)
Opinion Evidence Rule		
Lay Opinion Evidence	CB 568-577; SC 241-250	March 5 (Class #16)
Expert Opinion Evidence	CB 637-666; 578-615; SC 251-263 Episode 5 (23:21-35:38; 39:00-45:40) (blood splatter & cause of death)	March 10/12 (Classes #17-18)
PART III - MECHANICS OF PROOF	READINGS	DATE
1. Judicial Notice	CB 776-806 Problems #1-2; 4-5 (pages 806-807)	March 17 (Class #19)
2. Real Evidence	CB 808-847; SC 264-277 Episode 5 (12:35-17:00) (photographs) Episode 7 (24:26-27:70) (animation) Episode 7 (33:10-37:00) (view)	March 19 (Class #20)
3. Witnesses		
Questioning Your Own & Opposing Party Witnesses	Competency & Compellability: CB 848-855; SC 278-296 Direct Examination: CB 925-943 Cross-Examination CB 946-958; SC 297-318	March 24 (Class #21) Practice Quiz#2 & #3
Impeachment	CB 966-983; 984-986; 1005-1034	March 26 (Class #22)

Bolstering Credibility/Rehabilitation	CB 1041-1063; 1072-1075	March 31 (Class #23) Practice Quiz#4
PART IV - FACT-FINDING	READINGS	DATE
1. Direct Evidence		
Assessing Credibility	CB 66-76; 856-876; 906-925; 1034-1041; 1063-1072	April 2 (Class #24) Practice Quiz#5
Identification Evidence	CB 96-104	
2. Circumstantial Evidence	CB 105-117	
3. Corroboration	CB 1075-1085; SC 319-323	