COURSE NAME: Wrongful Convictions 1

COURSE NUMBER: 635S

PROFESSOR: Sean O’Brien

ESSENTIAL PREREQUISITES: Criminal Law

DESIRABLE PREREQUISITES: Criminal Procedure 2, Evidence, Constitutional Law


METHOD OF GRADING & APPRAISAL OF STUDENT FOR GRADE: Students will be graded on written work product generated during the course. The type of work product may vary according to case assignment, but may include investigative memos, case assessments or pleadings, depending upon the status of the case.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF COURSE: Interdisciplinary examination of the causes of wrongful convictions, remedied for those wrongfully imprisoned, and proposals for reforms. Topics include eyewitness identification use of informants, prosecutorial and police misconduct, scientific evidence (DNA, junk science), false confessions, incompetent lawyering, compensation, media and investigative journalism, all with a focus on wrongful conviction. Students will have an opportunity to work on screening of inmate files to identify possible cases of wrongful conviction. Paper required. 2 credits. Limited Enrollment.

COURSE CONTENT: Students will be trained in the screening and assessment of prisoner inquiries for potential cases of actual innocence and the investigation and legal pursuit of meritorious innocence claims. This includes the recognition of factors contributing to wrongful convictions, the development and implementation of investigative plans, and the instigation of appropriate judicial or extrajudicial remedies. Students will be assigned to work in teams on specific cases or groups of cases. Weekly classroom sessions will be devoted to training and discussion of the status of ongoing case assessment and investigation.

RELEVANCY OF COURSE FOR CAREER PURPOSES: Students interested in administration of criminal justice, criminal litigation, civil rights or prisoner rights will benefit from the exposure to policy issues and practical skills learned in this class.