

Module specification

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Module Code	SCI558
Module Title	Forensic Taphonomy
Level	5
Credit value	20
Faculty	FSLS
HECoS Code	101218
Cost Code	GAFS
Pre-requisite module	N/A

Programmes in which module to be offered

Programme title	Core/Optional/Standalone
BSc (Hons) Forensic Science	Core
BSc (Hons) Forensic Science with Placement Year	Core

Breakdown of module hours

Learning and teaching hours	15 hrs
Placement tutor support hours	0 hrs
Supervised learning hours e.g. practical classes, workshops	15 hrs
Project supervision hours	0 hrs
Active learning and teaching hours total	30 hrs
Placement hours	0 hrs
Guided independent study hours	170 hrs
Module duration (Total hours)	200 hrs

Module aims

The aim of this module is to introduce students to what happens to the body between death and recovery. This module will introduce students to several different processes of preservation and decay in various contexts. In addition, students will be introduced to the biological, geological and chemical interactions that take place following death and deposition of remains. Students will be encouraged to critically examine current taphonomic research and the ethical implications involved in this type of research.

Module Learning Outcomes

At the end of this module, students will be able to:

1	Critically evaluate chosen research article.
2	Assess the ethical implications of conducting and applying taphonomic research.
3	Communicate scientific arguments effectively through a clear and well-structured oral presentation.
4	Produce professionally formatted visual materials that effectively support the oral presentation.
5	Respond to critical questioning by demonstrating depth of understanding of the chosen research article.

Assessment

Indicative Assessment Tasks:

This section outlines the type of assessment task the student will be expected to complete as part of the module. More details will be made available in the relevant academic year module handbook.

Assessment 1: Presentation (15 minutes)

Students will select a research article and critically evaluate the article in the format of a presentation with accompanying slides. The students will have 10 minutes to critically evaluate the article and then will have to up to five minutes of questions to answer.

Assessment number	Learning Outcomes to be met	Type of assessment	Duration/Word Count	Weighting (%)	Alternative assessment, if applicable
1	1 to 5	Presentation	15 minutes	100	N/A

Derogations

N/A

Learning and Teaching Strategies

Students will be immersed in many practical sessions in the laboratory and in the field. These sessions will provide students with experience of observing taphonomic changes and preservation processes. Students will also gain an array of theoretical knowledge of taphonomy in different contexts and associated research.

Welsh Elements

Students may undertake and submit assessments in Welsh.

Indicative Syllabus Outline

- Taphonomy in different contexts
- Safe working practices
- Stages of decomposition
- Measuring decomposition
- Cognitive bias
- Isotopic analysis
- Differential decomposition and crime scene complexity
- Preservation processes
- Waterlogged environments
- Burial contexts and their effect on decomposition
- Scavenging
- DNA and protein degradation

Indicative Bibliography

Please note the essential reads and other indicative reading are subject to annual review and update.

Essential Reads:

Pokines, J.T. & Symes, S.A. (2021), Manual of Forensic Taphonomy, Florida: CRC Press.

Other indicative reading:

Haglund, W. & Sorg, M. (1996), Forensic Taphonomy: The Postmortem Fate of Human Remains, Florida: CRC Press.

Haglund, W. & Sorg, M. (2001), Advances in Forensic Taphonomy: Method, Theory, and Archaeological Perspectives, Florida: CRC Press.

Hayman, J. & Oxenham, M. (2016), Human Body Decomposition, Netherlands: Elsevier Science.

Ralebitso-Senior, T.K. (2018), Forensic ecogenomics: The application of microbial ecology analyses in forensic contexts, Cambridge: Academic Press.

Schotsmans, E., Márquez-Grant, N. & Forbes, S. (2017), Taphonomy of Human Remains, 1st Edition. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Administrative Information

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Initial approval date	10/05/2023
With effect from date	September 2023
Date and details of revision	January 2026: Major modification to change module name, module aims, module learning outcomes, indicative assessment tasks, and indicative syllabus outline.
Version number	2

