

WHAT IS FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY?

Relevant Courses at U of M

PSYC 3010/3020 – Research and Statistics I/II

PSYC 1300 – Careers in Psychology

PSYC 3507 – Research Methods

PSYC 3102 – Abnormal Psychology

PSYC 3520 – Legal/Forensic Psychology

PSYC 3106 – Social Psychology

Any courses and/or a minor in Criminology and Criminal Justice

Look for Available Research Opportunities in the Correctional and Forensic Psychology Lab under Dr. Batastini!

“The application of the science and profession of psychology to questions and issues relating to law and the legal system.”

FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY DEFINED

Forensic Psychology is broadly defined by the American Board of Forensic Psychology (ABFP) as “the application of the science and profession of psychology to questions and issues relating to law and the legal system. The word ‘forensic’ comes from the Latin word ‘forensis,’ meaning ‘of the forum,’ where the law courts of ancient Rome were held. Today forensic refers to the application of scientific principles and practices to the adversary process where knowledgeable scientists play a role.” It is a rapidly growing, multi-disciplinary field which draws on the fields of clinical, counseling, personality, social, and abnormal psychology, as well as legal and criminal justice studies.

Forensic psychologists are often called upon to offer expert testimony and psychological evaluations for courts, law firms, corporations, and governmental agencies. Work can involve evaluation of eyewitness testimony, competency to stand trial, criminal responsibility, assistance with jury selection, trial strategy, evaluation of crime scenes, psychological assessments, and profiling. Forensic psychologists work in a variety of settings that include law enforcement agencies such as the state police and FBI, state mental institutions, penal institutions, private practice, academia, and research facilities. The diversity within and broad scope of the field allows students/practitioners many options to fit their interests.

Master’s and doctorate programs specifically in forensic psychology are *generally* geared for the student interested primarily in the criminal justice system. Dual doctorate degrees in law and psychology, and doctorate degrees in clinical, community, or social psychology with specific training in forensic psychology and law are among other pathways one can pursue.

TRAINING DEGREES

Different routes can be taken depending on your interests. Here is a basic breakdown of degree options:

JD – Doctor of Jurisprudence

MLS – Master of Legal Studies

PhD – Doctor of Philosophy

MA/MS – Master of Arts/Science

PsyD – Doctor of Psychology

And different combinations of these degrees offer specialized training:

- MA/MS in forensic psychology prepares one to pursue a PhD and to work in law/psychology settings (2-3 years)
- JD/PhD or JD/PsyD extensive training in research, clinical application, and practice of law (6-8 years)
- JD/MA training for student who wants to practice law and have a strong psychology background (5-8 years)
- PhD/MLA training that concentrates in psychology while offering a better understanding of law (5-7 years)
- PhD in forensic psychology or in clinical, social, or community psychology with either concentrated studying in forensic psychology or a minor in forensic psychology and law trains you to conduct research and perform clinical and forensic services (5-7 years)

Note: These descriptions are meant only as guidelines. You should inquire about the focus of the program for each specific school. Forensic psychology programs may also be subdivisions of clinical or counseling tracks.

HOW TO APPLY

The following list represents what most graduate school programs seek in an applicant. Program requirements vary! Be sure to identify the specific requirements of each school to which you plan to apply.

Recommendations for PhD (or joint PhD/JD):

- BA /BS or MA/MS (psychology most preferred)
- GRE general exam (some programs also require subject test and/or the LSAT exam)
- Research and internship experience

Recommendations for MA/MS/MLS:

- BA/BS (psychology most preferred)
- GRE general exam (some programs require subject exam)
- Research and/or internship experience

AVAILABLE JOBS AND SALARIES

Forensic psychologists work in a variety of settings. The following is a list of positions related to Forensic Psychology (i.e. clinical) and the annual wage mean for 2019 as listed in the Occupational Outlook Handbook <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes193039.htm>.

- Hospitals (Psychiatric and Substance Abuse Hospitals) – \$73,000
- Research (private organization, university) – \$85,000
- Law enforcement (Local government/ state government) – \$87,300
- Academia (assistant professor, instructor) – \$85,000

Many careers in forensic psychology do not require licensure. However, if direct service is offered to the public for a fee (as in private practice), one must obtain licensure by the state in which he/she is practicing. *The FBI and Secret Service have special qualifications for employment. More information can be obtained at www.fbi.gov.

ALTERNATIVES TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

The practice of forensic psychology is restricted to those with a graduate degree. However, there are employment opportunities within hospitals and institutions that require only a Bachelor's degree. The following are relevant careers in which a BA/BS in psychology is desirable, as noted by the Occupational Outlook Handbook <https://www.bls.gov/home.htm>.

Correctional officers monitor inmate activity and assign and supervise inmate work. Officers must be at least 18-21 years of age. A BA/BS in psychology increases opportunities. The mean annual wage for 2019 is approximately \$50,130.

Social/Human Service Assistants work under professionals providing client services, such as crisis intervention, counseling, and living skills. Preference is given to applicants with BA/BS in social or behavioral sciences, social work, and human services. The 2019 median annual salary is approximately \$37,050.

OTHER RESOURCES

American Academy of Forensic Psychology: www.abfp.com

American Psychological Association, Div. 18:
<http://www.apadivisions.org/division-18/>

American Psychological Association, Div. 41:
<http://www.apa.org/about/division/div41.html>

American College of Forensic Examiners: <http://www.acfei.com/>

International Association of Correctional and Forensic Psychology:
<http://www.aa4cfp.org>

