

General Information on Forensic Psychology

[after West Chester University:

http://www.wcupa.edu/_ACADEMICS/sch_cas.psy/Career_Paths/Forensic/Career08.htm#top]

FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY is the application of psychology to the criminal and civil justice systems. Many people confuse Forensic Psychology with forensic science. Although the two are closely related, there are many differences. The primary difference is that while forensic scientists are in the business of applying the chemical and biological sciences to law enforcement, national security, defense, or intelligence work, forensic psychologists delve into the psychological perspectives of human behavior and apply them to the legal systems.

Forensic Psychology knowledge is used in various forms, such as in treating mentally ill offenders, consulting with attorneys (e.g., on picking a jury), analyzing a criminal's mind and intent, and practicing within the civil arena. A forensic psychologist may also chose to solely focus his/her career on research, ranging anywhere from examination of eyewitness testimony to learning how to improve interrogation methods. Another form of Forensic Psychology work is in public policy, where researchers can help in the design of correctional facilities and prisons.

There are a very limited number of undergraduate academic institutions that specifically offer a specialization in Forensic Psychology. Therefore, in most undergraduate programs individuals interested in pursuing a Forensic Psychology career take psychology and specific criminal justice courses during their academic studies. Clinical, social, cognitive, criminal investigative, and developmental psychology are some of the types of courses that help one prepare for this specialty.

Brief History

Forensic Psychology dates back to at least the turn of the twentieth century. William Stern studied memory in 1901 by asking students to examine a picture for forty-five seconds and then try to recall what was happening in it. He would see how much the person could recall at various intervals after seeing the picture. These experiments came before more contemporary research about the reliability of eyewitnesses testimony in court. Stern concluded from his research that recall memories are generally inaccurate; the more time between seeing the picture and being asked to recall it, the more errors were made. People especially recalled false information when the experimenter gave them a lead-in question such as, "Did you see the man with the knife?" The person would answer, "yes," even if there was no knife present. Lead-in questions are often used in police interrogations and in questioning witnesses.

Hugo Munsterberg is often called the first forensic psychologist. He wrote a book called *On the Witness Stand*. It was published in 1908, after the work of William Stern. Other psychologists before this, such as Alfred Binet and Sigmund Freud, had also constructed tests that could be used in judicial proceeding. They both did studies suggesting that the time it takes for a person to answer a question could be a factor in determining guilt or innocence.

In 1916, Lewis Terman, a Stanford psychologist, began to apply psychology to law enforcement. He revised Alfred Binet's intelligence tests and formed the Stanford-Binet intelligence test. These tests were used to assess the intelligence of thirty applicants for the police and firefighting jobs in San Jose, CA. A

few years later, L. L. Thurstone used the same type of test in Detroit. Now, this type of testing is used in most police departments in the country.

The application of psychology in law and law enforcement continued throughout the 1920's and 1930's. To this day, there is still a special interest in extending psychology to police work. The demand for psychologists in the legal system has grown considerably over the past several decades. Currently, almost 2,000 psychologists belong to the American Psychology-Law Society.

More on What Forensic Psychologists do for a Living

[from: Dayton University <http://www.udayton.edu/~psych/handbook/AREASO~1.HTM>]

Forensic psychology is the term given to the applied and clinical facets of psychology and law. Psychology and law is a new field with career opportunities at several levels of training. As an area of research, psychology and law is concerned both with looking at legal issues from a psychological perspective (e.g., how juries decide cases) and with looking at psychological questions in a legal context (how jurors assign blame or responsibility for a crime).

Forensic psychologists might help a judge decide which parent should have custody of the children or evaluate the victim of an accident to determine if he or she sustained psychological or neurological damage. In criminal cases, forensic psychologists might evaluate a defendant's mental competence to stand trial. Some forensic psychologists counsel inmates and probationers; others counsel the victims of crimes and help them prepare to testify, cope with emotional distress, and resume their normal activities. Some specialists in this field have doctoral degrees in both psychology and law. Others were trained in a traditional graduate psychology program, such as clinical, counseling, social, or experimental, and chose courses, research topics, and practical experiences to fit their interest in psychology and law.

Today, a few graduate schools have joint law/psychology programs and grant the Ph.D. and J.D. Jobs for people with doctoral degrees are available in psychology departments, law schools, research organizations, community mental health agencies, law enforcement agencies, courts, and correctional settings. Some forensic psychologists work in private practice. Master's and bachelor's level positions are available in prisons, correctional institutions, probation departments, forensic units of mental institutions, law enforcement agencies, and community based programs that assist victims.

Suggested Undergraduate Courses, Research Fields & Co-op Job Areas as Preparation for Careers & Graduate School in Forensic Psychology

- Clinical & Counseling Psychology
- Developmental Psychology
- Social Psychology
- Cognitive Psychology
- Abnormal Psychology; Biological Bases of Mental Illness
- Research & Statistics in Psychology

- Criminal Investigation; The Psychology of Crime
- Sociology of: Violence; Juvenile Delinquency; Deviancy; Crime

Useful Web sites on Forensic Psychology

This is a good place to start if you are interested in Forensic Psychology. Contains many good links to find out more about the specific job areas in this field: <http://psychologyinfo.com/forensic/>

The American Psychology Law Society provides a link to investigate graduate training programs in psychology and law: <http://www.unl.edu/ap-ls/>. It also provides a link for careers in psychology and law.

Other links to forensic psychology information can be found at David Willshire's Forensic Psychology:

<http://members.optushome.com.au/dwillsh/index.html>

and Psychiatry page and Scott Carpenter's Forensic Science Resources page:

<http://www.tncrimlaw.com/forensic/>

Psychwatch.com:Forensic Resources page <http://psychologyinfo.com/forensic/> may also provide useful information.

A new American Psychological Association site called PsycLAW may also be helpful:

<http://www.psyclaw.org/forensic.html#misc>

A Spring 2001 article in Eye on Psi Chi (Journal of Undergraduate National Honor Society in Psychology) discusses the field of forensic psychology while identifying career and training opportunities: "What is Forensic Psychology? It's Not Silence of the Lambs!"

http://old.psichi.org/content/publications/eye/volume/vol_5/5_3/huss.asp

A link on careers in forensic psychology from West Chester University is well done:

http://www.wcupa.edu/_ACADEMICS/sch_cas.psy/Career_Paths/Forensic/Career08.htm

American Academy of Forensic Psychology provides information on education programs, law and psychology opportunities, and link to requirements for Board Certification in Forensic Psychology:

<http://www.abfp.com/careers.html>

The intersection of Psychology and law in the criminal-justice system is the focus of this web site

<http://www.oklahoma.net/~jnichols/forensic.html>

Information on Forensic Science and Forensic Medicine, as well as Forensic Psychology, can be found at:

<http://forensic.to/>

