STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT REPORT

SUBMITTED BY: JASON DOLL, PHD, CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

DATE: 10/03/14

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE WHERE AND HOW ARE DATA AND DOCUMENTS USED TO GENERATE THIS REPORT BEING STORED: ALL DOCUMENTS AND DATA ARE STORED ON FACULTY COMPUTERS.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

List all of the program’s learning outcomes: (regardless of whether or not they are being assessed this year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Year of Last Assessment</th>
<th>Year of Next Planned Assessment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think and write critically about issues in forensic psychology and deliver conclusions in an effective oral presentation.</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>2015-16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discriminate between the various types of criminal behaviors</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>2015-16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examine justice and legal issues via various lenses, including, but not limited to, social psychology, neuropsychology, abnormal psychology, and developmental psychology and sociology.</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>2015-16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compare and contrast biopsychosocial theories that explain the reasons why people engage in deviant and criminal acts.</td>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>2017-18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Argue the strengths and weaknesses of relevant public policy issues to the field of forensic psychology.</td>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>2017-18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appraise the legitimacy and utility of numerous investigative and assessment techniques.</td>
<td>2014-15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assess the structure of the American adversary system, its strengths and weaknesses, and its relationship to our democratic society.</td>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Propose and evaluate solutions to major problems in the system, taking into account political and ethical considerations.</td>
<td>2014-15</td>
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</table>

1 Early in AY 12-13, it was brought to the department’s attention that we were assessing the wrong learning outcomes. We have since corrected this error by starting fresh with the correct learning outcomes (i.e., the outcomes listed in the catalog). This explains why there is an absence of dates for “Year of Last Assessment” for most of the outcomes.
Describe how the program’s outcomes support Marymount’s Mission, Strategic Plan, and relevant school plan:

The Department of Forensic Psychology meets the University’s mission of academic excellence via all of the learning outcomes that were assessed in AY 2013-14. Each of the learning outcomes assessed in 2013 – 2014 emphasize the importance of critical analysis/understanding and effective presentation of one’s argument via written assignments or oral presentations. Given the careers that our graduates pursue, the ability to analyze information effectively to support a well-reasoned conclusion is vital to their success in the program, as well as in the field.

Turning to the Strategic Plan, the department supports academic excellence because the assignments are intellectually rigorous. In addition, in order to successfully teach and communicate the requirements of these assignments, faculty must possess an extremely high level of expertise and be able to teach the material to forensic psychology students.

Finally, with regard to the school plan, the learning outcomes also support academic excellence and rigor (see explanations as mentioned above). Specifically, regarding 1.F. (“Work to provide excellence in career and program advising.”), department faculty use feedback from the Board of Visitors and current employers to address their advice on what our graduates need to learn and know in order to succeed. Recently, the department surveyed professionals who supervised our students as they completed their internships to identify areas where our students excel as well as areas faculty can address to improve the competitiveness and success of our students.

In sum, the Forensic Psychology faculty continuously reexamine all of our courses to increase academic rigor. We are finding that more undergraduate programs are offering beginning forensic psychology courses or concentrations, and we are working to make sure each course and assignment reflects advanced instruction, is differentiated from that received in undergraduate programs, and meets the expectations of an increasingly demanding marketplace.

Provide a brief description of the assessment process used including strengths, challenges and planned improvements:

The Forensic Psychology faculty is small, but collegial and committed to intellectual rigor. Our challenges include a small number of faculty for a large body of students, numerous adjuncts, and an increase in the number of forensic psychology master’s programs in the Washington, DC region. We are working to improve mentoring and communication with our adjuncts. One of the ways we are accomplishing this is via the creation of a Blackboard site, which consists of information, documents, and forms which adjuncts need. We also host an Annual Appreciation Dinner, in which we recognize the efforts of our adjuncts. During this event, we also spend time discussing the program and planned/suggested improvements and solicit feedback from our adjuncts. In addition, we are re-examining our curriculum to ensure that it reflects, as accurate as possible, the career opportunities in the field and diversifying the types of electives offered.

Currently, the faculty are working towards establishing concentrations to reflect the changes in the field and ensure that the program remains competitive and prepares students for the recent evolutions in the work place. In addition to changes within the department’s curriculum, the faculty
are working with Graduate Admissions to identify ways to collaborate with regional universities (e.g., George Mason University Law School) and other programs at the university (e.g., the Cybersecurity MA program) to offer a wider breadth of courses to our students to ensure that they are able to tailor their education to the changing needs of our field. We are also working with various agencies and organizations in the Metro DC area (e.g., members of the Intelligence Community, private security and intelligence consulting firms, public defender offices, police departments).

Describe how the program implemented its planned improvements from last year:

Regarding Learning Outcome 1 (“Think and write critically about issues in forensic psychology and deliver conclusions in an effective oral presentation.”), the performance standard was met. Therefore, it was not reexamined.

Regarding Learning Outcome 2 (“Discriminate between the various types of criminal behaviors.”), the performance standard was met. Therefore, it was not reexamined.

Regarding Learning Outcome 3 (“Examine justice and legal issues via various lenses, including, but not limited to, social psychology, neuropsychology, abnormal psychology, and developmental psychology and sociology.”), the performance standard was met. Therefore, it was not reexamined.

Provide a response to last year’s University Assessment Committee review of the program’s learning assessment report: (List each recommendation and provide a specific response to each).

The 2012-13 learning assessment report was accepted as submitted. According to the UAC, “This is a solid report. It appears as though the program regularly reviews student progress and makes adjustments where necessary.” The department’s response – we agree.
Outcome and Past Assessment

**Learning Outcome 1:** Compare and contrast biopsychosocial theories that explain the reasons why people engage in deviant and criminal acts.

Is this outcome being reexamined? [ ] Yes [X] No

If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.

Not applicable.

### Assessment Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measures</th>
<th>Performance Standard</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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</table>
| Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect. | Define and explain acceptable level of student performance. | Discuss the data collected and student population | 1) Describe the analysis process.  
2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable. |

**Direct:** In PS 584 (Psychology of Criminal Behavior), students complete a research paper in which they choose a specific type of criminal behavior, research the dominant biopsychosocial theories about what leads people to engage in that behavior, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the various theories, and present an argument for the theory that has the strongest evidence behind it. (See Appendix A for assignment guidelines)

The standard for this assignment is a score of 90% or above on the assignment for 85% of the students enrolled in a section.

The population consists of graduate forensic psychology students enrolled in PS 584 (Psychology of Criminal Behavior) for AY 13-14. While some of the students are in their second year of study in the program, most of the students are first year students. The total number of students enrolled in this course during the assessment timeframe was 81.

Results of the two sections of PS 585 taught in Fall 2013 are as follows: 20 of 26 students (77%) in one section and 14 of 18 (78%) in the second section received a 90% or above on the assignment.

In the two sections taught in Spring 2014, 17 out of 22 students (77%) in one section, and 12 out of 15 students in the other section (80%) earned a 90% or above on the assignment.
Interpretation of Results

Extent this Learning Outcome has been achieved by students: (Use both direct and indirect measure results):
Although a large percentage of students achieved the standard score for the assignment, several students in each section fell below the standard for a variety of reasons. Some students struggled to present an empirically-supported argument in a professional manner, reflecting a need for instruction and guidance on professional writing skills. Most students failed to fully complete the assignment, particularly in the required adherence to APA formatting, which significantly lowered their score. The integration of the literature and research regarding the strengths, weaknesses, contrasts, and commonalities among the various biopsychosocial theories of criminal and deviant behavior, as well as being able to adhere to the specific instructions of a task or project, is essential for a successful career in various settings in the forensic and legal psychology fields, and a crucial aspect of completing the assignment at a satisfactory level.

Program strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to assessment of outcome:
As indicated above, a key aspect of the assignment requires students to not only be able to understand and synthesize literature that argue for conflicting or different viewpoints, but to present a professional and informed argument, and adhere to strict procedural guidelines (APA format).

Given the nature of our program, understanding criminal and deviant behavior from a biopsychosocial perspective, using effective written communication skills, and understanding and implementing required standards of product output are important skills for our students to master. Because of the importance of these skills, and their salience to the assignment, improving students’ abilities to effectively address questions posed to them in a professional manner, as well as to comply with the standards set forth by a task at hand (e.g., conforming to formatting requirements) will be an area for continued faculty focus and instruction.

Discuss planned curricular or program improvements for this year based on assessment of outcome:
Based on the assessment of this outcome, several modifications will be made to better prepare students’ abilities to use their research and writing abilities to answer a structured task. First, sample effective and ineffective (unprofessional) analytical argument pieces will be provided as examples of persuasive writing approaches. A second modification will be to encourage students to utilize peer-review prior to submitting their assignments, and for offering extra-credit points for those students that submit evidence of a peer review and subsequent modifications to their paper prior to its final version. Furthermore, students will be encouraged to make use of the University’s writing center for assistance. Finally, the directions of the assignment will be modified to highlight the importance of strictly adhering to APA format guidelines.
**Academic Year:** 2013-2014  
**Program:** Forensic Psychology

**Learning Outcome 2:** Argue the strengths and weaknesses of relevant public policy issues to the field of forensic psychology.

Is this outcome being reexamined? □ Yes ☒ No

If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.
Not Applicable

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2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable. |

1) **Direct:** The first outcome measure is taken from Question #2 (see Appendix) in the take home final examination given in PS 591. This question requires students to design a policy intervention program in collaboration with Palestinian professionals to help children traumatized by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

   - The standard requires 90% of the students to earn 13/15 points using the grading rubric (see Appendix B).

   - The population for this outcome measure consists of graduate forensic psychology students enrolled in the Spring 2014 elective Child Victimization. The total number of students enrolled in this course was 12 students. This class contained a mixture of beginning and advanced students.

   - Results of the class assessed were:

     | Score | Number of Students | Percent of students |
     |-------|--------------------|---------------------|
     | 11/15 | 2                  | 17%                 |
     | 12/15 | 4                  | 33%                 |
     | 13/15 | 3                  | 25%                 |
     | 14/15 | 2                  | 17%                 |
     | 15/15 | 1                  | 8%                  |

2) **Indirect:** We are using question number 15 in the 2013-2014 Graduate Student Survey: How well do you believe your education has prepared you to apply knowledge.

   - The standard requires 90% of the students to respond “good” or “excellent.”

   - The population for this standard is the number of students who responded to this question Graduating Student Survey, n=40.

   - On this question only 77.5% of the students responded good or excellent (4-5). Therefore we did not meet the standard.
and skills to new situations. Responses are given on a 5-point scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

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**Interpretation of Results**

**Extent this Learning Outcome has been achieved by students** (*Use both direct and indirect measure results*):

The outcomes achieved for these learning outcomes were disappointing, as we did not meet the standard on any of the 4 direct and indirect measures.

**Program strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to assessment of outcome**:

A recent Chronicles of Higher Education article (6/17/13) presented findings of a survey showing that 93% of employers want “a demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems,” and similar percentages want job applications “to demonstrate ethical judgment and integrity, intercultural skills, and the capacity for new learning,” as well as “applied knowledge in real-world settings.” Employers “consistently rank outcomes and practices that involve application of skills over acquisition of discrete bodies of knowledge...”

In the take-home final exam in Child Victimization, students are asked to apply research and analytic skills to a real-life situation involving psychology, law, and policy.

Forensic psychology is a relatively new field, and some employers and unfamiliar with its content. Our students have been finding jobs in a number of different areas, such as the federal government, law enforcement, mitigation, jury consulting, victim advocacy, research, and social policy sectors where employers might not have initially thought of hiring someone with a forensic psychology degree. We are emphasizing, with our students, the development and demonstration of transferable skills, such as understanding of what forensic psychology can bring to public policy, that are valuable in a wide variety of positions at the intersection of psychology and the law. We understand from our graduates that increasingly, the internship and employment supervisors are assuming some understanding and training in policy issues.

**Discuss planned curricular or program improvements for this year based on assessment of outcome**:

In examining these results, we realized that we need to be much more explicit in our teaching of policy development and its relationship to forensic psychology. Therefore, as part of our recent program revisions, we have developed a new required course, FLP 529, Psychology, Social Policy and Law (in 2015, the name will be changed to Psychology, Public Policy, and Law). We expect most students to take this in the later stages of their program because it requires the integration of a number of areas of forensic psychology.
We will also be revising the rubric for the take home examination in the Child Victimization course to more explicitly grade for understanding of policy.

On the direct standards the faculty will be discussing how to work with the students to help them see how their coursework and internships relate to the issues of applying knowledge and skills to new situations and solving problems in the field.