

## STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT REPORT (AY 2015-2016)

---

**PROGRAM:** Forensic and Legal Psychology MA

**SUBMITTED BY:** Jason Doll, PhD

**DATE:** 9/30/2016

**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

**Program description from the Course Catalog:** This program provides graduates with the skills and knowledge they need to provide effective, high-quality services in a variety of forensic and legal settings. These include probation and parole, victim assistance, mitigation and sentencing advocacy, law enforcement, intelligence, trial consultation, policy, advocacy, and research. To accomplish this goal, the program balances traditional psychological knowledge and skills with a specialized understanding of the legal system.

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

Learning Outcome <sup>1</sup>	Year of Last Assessment	Assessed This Year	Year of Next Planned Assessment
Research and write critically about issues in forensic and legal psychology.	2014-15		
Develop and deliver effective oral presentations on topics in forensic and legal psychology.		X	
Argue the strengths and weaknesses of policy issues relevant to the field of forensic and legal psychology.	2013-14	X	
Propose and evaluate solutions to major problems in the legal system.	2014-15		
Identify strategies to appropriately address ethical dilemmas in the field.		X	

**Describe how the program's outcomes support Marymount's mission, strategic plan, and relevant school plan:**

The Department of Forensic and Legal Psychology meets the University's mission of academic excellence via all of the learning outcomes that were assessed in AY 2015-16. Each of the learning outcomes assessed in 2015-2016 emphasize the importance of researching and writing critically about issues, arguing the strengths and weaknesses of policy issues, and identifying strategies to appropriately address ethical

---

<sup>1</sup> As part of the program revision that went into effect in Fall 2014, the learning outcomes were updated. This explains why there is an absence of date for "Year of Last Assessment" for one of the revised outcomes.



dilemmas in the field. 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 and legal 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 “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 and Legal Psychology faculty continuously reexamine all of our courses to increase academic rigor. We are finding that more undergraduate programs are offering forensic psychology/psychology and law courses, concentrations or majors, 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 and provide evidence of the existence of a culture of continuous improvement based on assessment:**

The Forensic and Legal 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/psychology and law 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 Canvas 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 continuously re-examine our curriculum to ensure that it reflects, as accurately as possible, the career opportunities in the field and diversifying the types of electives offered. We also work 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) to identify ways to improve and enhance the quality of the education that our students receive.

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

Outcome	Planned Improvement	Update <i>(Indicate when, where, and how planned improvement was completed. If planned improvement was not completed, please provide explanation.)</i>
Research and write critically about issues in forensic and legal psychology.	The faculty will be discussing this outcome to develop techniques to help our students with their critical writing skills. Sample effective analytical argument pieces will be provided as examples of persuasive writing approaches. Additionally, students who are struggling will be encouraged to use the university's writing center for assistance with the second required essay.	Sample effective analytical argument pieces were provided in various courses. Faculty also spent time in class discussing persuasive writing approaches. In addition, students, who were exhibiting signs of struggle, were encouraged to take advantage of the services of the writing center, as well as the online writing services.
Propose and evaluate solutions to major problems in the legal system.	The instructor will gather materials to help the students understand earlier in the course how to write an effective brief. The students were initially anxious and negative about having two classes using peer critiques but ultimately came to view the process as helpful as they saw the dramatic difference in their briefs from initial draft to final. The instructor will reorganize the structure and assignments in the course to make expectations clearer and will supply a graphic syllabus to help students visually grasp the course structure. After more materials are gathered, developed, and piloted, the plan is to share, and discuss, and assess with the other faculty members who teach the course.	The instructor distributed effective brief writing materials to students in the class. In addition, the instructor reorganized the structure of and the assignments in the course in order to clarify expectations, including the distribution of a graphic syllabus.

**Provide a response to last year's University Assessment Committee review of the program's learning assessment report:** The 2014-15 learning assessment report was accepted as submitted. According to the UAC, "The Executive Summary is helpful. The discussion of challenges and



opportunities for improvement is detailed and thoughtful.....Data reported in the update on improvements from the prior year would be clearer if the data referenced, e.g. 'students reported' was quantified.....The program appears committed to continuous improvement....The honesty of this approach should prove very valuable to the program....The use of mastery learning in the program is to be applauded". In response to the UAC's report, the faculty will quantify how many students are reports and will continue to work on improving the program.

## Outcomes and Past Assessment

**Learning Outcome 1:** Develop and deliver effective oral presentations on topics in forensic and legal 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.

### Assessment Activity

<b>Outcome Measures</b> <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	<b>Performance Standard</b> <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	<b>Data Collection</b> <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	<b>Analysis</b> <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>															
<u>Direct:</u> Students, in groups of 3-4, are to create and deliver an effective oral presentation to their classmates and the instructor. The students are graded individually on the assignment.	The standard requires 75% of students to earn 17/20 points or greater on the assignment, using the grading rubric (see <b>Appendix A</b> ).	The population for this outcome measure consists of graduate forensic and legal psychology students enrolled in the Fall and Spring sections of FLP 511 (Legal and Investigative Psychology), a required course in the MA program. While most of the students are in their first year in the program, a few are in their second year. The total number of students enrolled in this course during the assessment timeframe was 88.	<p>Results of the class section assessed were:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><u>Section:</u></th> <th style="text-align: center;"><u># of students:</u></th> <th style="text-align: center;"><u>% of students</u></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Fall-A</td> <td style="text-align: center;">24</td> <td style="text-align: center;">100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fall-B</td> <td style="text-align: center;">25</td> <td style="text-align: center;">100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Spring-A</td> <td style="text-align: center;">15</td> <td style="text-align: center;">100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Spring-B</td> <td style="text-align: center;">24</td> <td style="text-align: center;">100%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Thus 100% of the students met the standard of 17/20 points on the assignment.</p>	<u>Section:</u>	<u># of students:</u>	<u>% of students</u>	Fall-A	24	100%	Fall-B	25	100%	Spring-A	15	100%	Spring-B	24	100%
<u>Section:</u>	<u># of students:</u>	<u>% of students</u>																
Fall-A	24	100%																
Fall-B	25	100%																
Spring-A	15	100%																
Spring-B	24	100%																
<u>Indirect:</u> We are using the question in the 2015-16 Graduating Student Survey:	The standard requires 85% of the students to respond good (4) or excellent (5).	The population for this outcome measure is the number of students who	On this question, 71.4% of the students responded with 4 (good) or 5 (excellent) (mean of 3.91). Therefore, the standard was not met.															

<p>“Please indicate how well you believe your education prepared you to deliver a coherent oral presentation?” Responses are given on a 5 point scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).</p>		<p>responded to this question in the Graduating Student Survey, n=35.</p>	
---	--	---	--

**Interpretation of Results**

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

Students met the standard when it came to the direct measure; however, the standard was not met when employing the indirect measure.

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

The ability of our students to deliver an effective oral presentation is crucial to their future success. We have found that some of the students do not come to the program with adequate skills in this domain. It is encouraging that many of our students are able to do well on this. However, it is discouraging that only 71.4% of the students answered on the GSS that they felt the program had prepared them to develop an effective oral presentation.

Forensic and legal psychology is a relatively new field, and some employers are 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 public policy sectors where employers might not have initially thought of hiring someone with a forensic and legal psychology degree. We are emphasizing, with our students, the development and demonstration of transferable skills, such as delivering an effective oral presentation, that are valuable in a wide variety of positions at the intersection of psychology and the law.

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

Taking into account the results of the Graduating Student Survey, it was decided that the rubric was inadequate to accurately assess the effectiveness of the presentations, and therefore the standard was set too low. The rubric will be revised to make the requirements clearer to the students. It will also help to more fairly assess their performance.

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

**Assessment Activity**

<b>Outcome Measures</b> <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	<b>Performance Standard</b> <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	<b>Data Collection</b> <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	<b>Analysis</b> <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>																		
<p><u>Direct:</u> The first outcome measure is taken from Question #2 (see <b>Appendix B</b>) in the take home final examination given in PS 566, Child Victimization. This question requires students to design a policy intervention program in collaboration with Palestinian professionals to help children traumatized by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.</p>	<p>The standard requires 90% of the students to earn 13/15 points using the grading rubric (see <b>Appendix B</b>).</p>	<p>The population for this outcome measure consists of graduate forensic psychology students enrolled in the Spring 2016 elective Child Victimization. The total number of students enrolled in this course was 23 students. This class contained a mixture of beginning and advanced students.</p>	<p>Results of the class assessed were:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="3"><u>Score: Number of Students Percent of students</u></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>11/15</td> <td>2</td> <td>8.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>12/15</td> <td>6</td> <td>26%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>13/15</td> <td>7</td> <td>30.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>14/15</td> <td>6</td> <td>26%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>15/15</td> <td>2</td> <td>8.6%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<u>Score: Number of Students Percent of students</u>			11/15	2	8.6%	12/15	6	26%	13/15	7	30.4%	14/15	6	26%	15/15	2	8.6%
<u>Score: Number of Students Percent of students</u>																					
11/15	2	8.6%																			
12/15	6	26%																			
13/15	7	30.4%																			
14/15	6	26%																			
15/15	2	8.6%																			
<p><u>Indirect:</u> We are using question number 15 in the 2015-2016 Graduate Student Survey: How well do you believe your education has prepared you to apply knowledge and skills to new situations. Responses are given on a 5-</p>	<p>The standard requires 90% of the students to respond “good” or “excellent.”</p>	<p>The population for this standard is the number of students who responded to this question 2015-2016 Graduating Student Survey, n=35</p>	<p>On this question only 74.3% of the students responded good or excellent (4-5). Therefore we did not meet the standard.</p>																		

point scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).			
---	--	--	--

**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 direct or 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.

Because our Psychology, Law and Policy class was being developed and we did not have all fulltime faculty to staff it, we used the Child Victimization assignment again. We tried to explain more fully to the students the importance of policy and why they should care more about it in their forensic work. They just did not seem that interested in policy questions.

**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, Public Policy and Law. We have changed our initial decision to use Policy as an elective for more advanced students and have made it a requirement for all students at the beginning of their program.

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.

**Learning Outcome 3:** Identify strategies to appropriately address ethical dilemmas in the field.

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.

**Assessment Activity**

<b>Outcome Measures</b> <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	<b>Performance Standard</b> <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	<b>Data Collection</b> <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	<b>Analysis</b> <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>																					
<p><b>Direct:</b> The outcome measure is an essay written by the students in FLP 512, Issues in the American Legal System. This 5-page essay requires the students to:</p> <p>1) Identify a group in the United States about whom they feel a visceral dislike and whose rights they would find difficult to protect. The group must be one whose rights or claim to rights are being challenged;</p> <p>2) Discuss and describe this group as well as current American attitudes towards the group;</p> <p>3) Discuss any landmark, especially Constitutional, cases that have protected</p>	<p>The standard requires 90% of the students to earn 18/20 points using the grading rubric. See <b>Appendix C.</b></p>	<p>The population for this outcome measure consists of graduate students in the Forensic and Legal Psychology program enrolled in the required course, Issues in the American Legal System in Spring 2016. The total number in this advanced class was 16.</p>	<p>Results of the class assessed were:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Score</th> <th>Number of students</th> <th>Percent of students</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>15</td> <td>2</td> <td>12.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>16</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>17</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>18</td> <td>6</td> <td>37.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>19</td> <td>5</td> <td>31.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20</td> <td>3</td> <td>18.7%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Percent meeting the standard was 87.4%. Thus the standard was not met.</p>	Score	Number of students	Percent of students	15	2	12.5%	16	0	0%	17	0	0%	18	6	37.5%	19	5	31.2%	20	3	18.7%
Score	Number of students	Percent of students																						
15	2	12.5%																						
16	0	0%																						
17	0	0%																						
18	6	37.5%																						
19	5	31.2%																						
20	3	18.7%																						

<p>or failed to protect the rights of the group; and 4) Make an argument for how and why to protect the interests of the group, using the Constitution and human rights laws or materials studied in class.</p>			
<p><b>Indirect:</b> We are using question in the 2014-2015 Graduating Student Survey: “How well did your program prepare you to determine the most ethically appropriate response to a situation in your field?” The responses are given on a 5 point scale: 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).</p>	<p>The standard requires 90% of the students to respond “good” or “excellent.”</p>	<p>The population for this standard is the number of students who responded to the question in the Graduating Student Survey (n=27).</p>	<p>On this question, 85.2% answered “good or excellent.” Thus the standard was not met.</p>

**Interpretation of Results**

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

Although we were close, we did not meet the standard on either the direct or indirect measures.

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

We believe that this assignment is a strong one as it requires the students to compare their subjective and emotional feelings towards a group as well as to research the treatment of the chosen group and devise ways to protect them. The GSS indicates that we are relatively successful in our goal of incorporating ethical issues in our program, but that we have room for improvement.

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

In examining these results, we have found some ways to improve this assignment. There is an unusual distribution of scores, in that there are few in the middle groups of scores. In examining the assignment, the students who did not do well had difficulty in one and/or two ways: they did not do adequate research into American attitudes and court cases and/or they were not able to adequately devise ways to protect their group, but rather tended to repeat their reasons for *not* protecting the group.

For Fall 2016, the assignment will be revised: the essay will be longer, to give them a chance to more thoroughly complete the research section, and the instructor will give them some abbreviated in-class exercises to practice the skill of representing a side that they find hard to protect.