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A SURVEY OF GRADUATE TRAINING PROGRAMS AND COURSEWORK IN FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY*

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Forensic psychology encompasses the activities of psychologists, both clinical and non-clinical, who apply the science of psychology to questions and issues related to the law and legal system (American Board of Forensic Psychology, 2009). For example, psychologists interested in the relationship between psychology and law may participate in a variety of psycholegal activities, such as conducting forensic mental

health assessments of criminal defendants and civil litigants, studying the reliability of eyewitness testimony and jury decisions, or providing mental health services in correctional settings. The American Psychological Association recognized forensic psychology as specialty area in 2001, indicating that the field is defined by a discrete body of knowledge and set of practice competencies (Otto & Heilbrun, 2002).

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4 • INTRODUCTION

Although the field of forensic psychology dates to the early 1900s, formal training programs in forensic psychology have only developed during the last 35 years. The University of Nebraska established the first training opportunity in forensic psychology in 1973, followed by the creation of 14 more forensic psychology programs over the next 20 years (Ogloff, Tomkins, & Bersoff, 1996). Since then, the field has seen a rapid expansion in the number of training programs being offered at the undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral levels of education (DeMatteo, Marczyk, Krauss, & Burl, 2009). At the graduate level specifically, students can now receive training in both master's and doctoral programs, as well as in joint-degree programs that allow students to pursue a law degree and a master's or doctoral degree simultaneously.

Students interested in pursuing graduate training in forensic psychology must not only be aware of the different degree paths available to them, they must also develop an understanding of the variations in educational foci across programs. Students should arguably receive training in seven core competency areas during their graduate training: (1) substantive psychology; (2) research design/methodology and statistics; (3) conducting research; (4) legal knowledge; (5) integrative law-psychology knowledge; (6) ethics and professional issues; and (7) clinical forensic training (DeMatteo et al., 2009). However, given the numerous intersections between psychology and law, as well as the diversity in current forensic research and practice, the available law and psychology course-work can potentially vary considerably across programs. The range of forensic course-work offered by graduate programs adds another layer of complexity to the daunting task that faces the growing number of students interested in pursuing a graduate degree in forensic psychology.

Undergraduate academic advisors who are familiar with the current graduate training opportunities in forensic psychology can better assist students with accessing relevant information and can indicate what type of

training students can expect to receive at the graduate level. The purposes of this study are to assist undergraduate faculty who advise students interested in forensic psychology graduate training and to provide information that will allow students to make informed decisions about which forensic psychology graduate program will best meet their professional needs. To achieve these complementary goals, this study provides advisors and students with three descriptive sources of information. First, this study attempts to identify all current graduate programs offering training in forensic psychology, and second, to categorize them according to degree type. Third, this study aims to identify the categories of integrative law-psychology coursework, a core competency for students and practitioners in forensic psychology, offered by these programs. Understanding the variety of forensic training programs available to students, as well as the breadth of coursework offered in these graduate programs, will help advisors more effectively steer students toward programs that offer training consistent with each student's professional goals.

METHOD

Two previously compiled lists of forensic psychology graduate programs served as the sources used to identify programs reported in this study. We defined graduate forensic psychology programs as those that were included (a) on the website of the American Psychology-Law Society (AP-LS [n.d.]; Division 41 of the American Psychological Association) or (b) in the Guide to Graduate Programs in Forensic and Legal Psychology (2007–2008), which was created by the Teaching, Training, and Careers Committee of AP-LS (AP-LS, 2008). Using these lists, we categorized programs according to the degree offered: master's, clinical PhD (defined as both clinical and counseling programs), non-clinical PhD (e.g., social, developmental), PsyD, and joint-degree (combining a law degree with a graduate degree in psychology).

After identifying the current graduate programs in forensic psychology, we then conducted a thorough online search to identify integrative law-psychology course offerings in each program. Using the definition provided by DeMatteo et al. (2009, p. 189), this study classified law-psychology knowledge as “Introductory/overview foundational courses on forensic psychology, and knowledge of research in psycholegal areas such as eyewitness testimony, jury decision-making, admissibility of scientific testimony, forensic assessment measures and techniques, and the treatment of offender populations.” The selected courses were then divided into specific categories based on course titles. To the authors’ knowledge there are no defined and established categories for law-psychology coursework. Therefore, categories were created for this study when it was determined that at least 10% of all training programs offered coursework in a specific area (e.g., introductory courses, treatment courses, assessment courses, etc.). Although this inevitably excluded courses that some programs offered, this rule was necessary to limit the number of groupings. In addition, when programs offered multiple courses in a single category, only one course was incorporated into the data, which was sufficient to indicate the program offered some training in the respective category. Courses that were a part of the general graduate psychology curriculum (e.g., research methods) were excluded because this study focused exclusively on the forensic specialty. Law school curricula in joint-degree programs were also excluded because the goal of this study was to focus solely on the offerings of psychology departments.

We used the Internet as our exclusive means of obtaining information about various schools, programs, and coursework. Programs are motivated to keep websites up to date because of the Internet’s increasing role as the initial (and even primary) information source for prospective students (Fauber, 2006). Using the Internet to examine graduate programs is therefore an ecologically valid way of researching graduate training options. For this reason, we believe that the Internet was an appropriate data source for this exploratory study.

RESULTS

Forensic Psychology Training Programs

Using the AP-LS website and the Guide to Graduate Programs, we initially identified 41 institutions that offered training in forensic psychology through 64 different programs. The discrepancy between these numbers reflects that several institutions offer more than one training program (e.g., PhD and JD/PhD programs). During the course search, however, we also found that some institutions offered one or more degree programs not listed on the AP-LS website or in the Guide to Graduate Programs. These programs were added to the initial results and included in the study. Therefore, after closely examining each institution offering graduate training in forensic psychology, we identified a total of 41 institutions that offered training through 68 programs. The 68 programs included 15 clinical PhD programs, 10 PsyD programs, 15 non-clinical PhD programs, 12 joint-degree programs (i.e., JD/PhD, JD/PsyD, and JD/master’s), and 16 master’s programs. . . .

Forensic Coursework

Using the approach described above, we identified the following 10 broad categories of forensic psychology coursework offered throughout the various training programs: Introductory/General Forensic Psychology, Forensic Assessment, Forensic Treatment, Social Psychology and the Law, Juvenile Offending, Psychology of Criminal Behavior, Law and Mental Health, Ethical Issues in Forensic Psychology, Victimology, and Socio-Cultural Issues in Forensic Psychology. In this section, we explain each of the 10 categories and identify examples of such courses. Table 2 identifies the percentage of programs within each degree type that offer courses in each of the 10 identified categories.

Table 2 Percentage of Programs Offering Training in Integrative Law-Psychology Categories

<i>Course Category</i>	<i>Clinical PhD</i>	<i>PsyD</i>	<i>Non-Clinical PhD</i>	<i>Joint Programs</i>	<i>Master's</i>	<i>Total</i>
Introductory	87	100	87	100	100	94
Forensic Assessment	67	70	40	50	75	60
Forensic Treatment	20	60	13	8	75	35
Social Psychology	7	0	47	0	19	16
Juvenile Offending	33	60	33	33	63	44
Psychology of Criminal Behavior	27	30	27	17	94	41
Mental Health Law	33	20	20	33	31	28
Ethics	13	10	0	8	50	18
Victimology	13	0	13	0	38	15
Socio-Cultural	0	0	7	25	31	13

Note: The values represent percentages of schools within each degree program offering a course in each course category.

Introductory/General Forensic Psychology. Courses in this category provide a general overview of the integration of psychology and law (civil and/or criminal law). They typically do not focus on any specific psycholegal area or population, although the scope of content appears to vary somewhat. Examples of such courses include Psychology and Law; Law, Psychology, and Policy; Civil Forensic Psychology; and Criminal Forensic Psychology. These courses were well represented across program websites. Depending on the degree type, the surveyed websites showed that between 87% and 100% offered at least one course in this category.

Forensic Assessment. Courses in this category focus on clinical mental health assessment in forensic settings, which may include such activities as reviewing records, interviewing

offenders/litigants and collateral informants, and testing offenders/litigants. Such courses include Forensic Assessment; Forensic Diagnostics; and Psycholegal Assessment, Diagnosis, and Testimony. At least half of the program websites for each type of degree, with the exception of non-clinical PhD programs, offered a course in forensic assessment.

Forensic Treatment. Courses in this category focus on the rehabilitation and treatment of individuals involved in the legal system, or more broadly focus on the means to reduce recidivism among offenders. However, we excluded courses having to do with the treatment of a specific subgroup of individuals (e.g., juvenile, sex offender); these courses were placed in other categories. Examples of courses in this category include Evaluation and Treatment of the Adult; Correctional Psychology; Psycholegal Intervention and Treatment; and Probation, Parole, and Community Corrections. The majority of

master's and PsyD program websites indicated the presence of treatment-oriented courses (75% and 60%, respectively).

Social Psychology and the Law. This category is defined by courses that focus on social psychology research relevant to the legal system, such as eyewitness testimony and jury decision making. Such courses include Psychology of Juries, Actual Innocence and Wrongful Conviction, Contemporary American Jury, Jury Decision-Making and Jury Selection, and Psychology of Eyewitness Testimony. As Table 2 indicates, non-clinical PhD programs had the largest representation of these courses (47%).

Juvenile Offending. This category explores child and adolescent offending, including the evaluation and treatment of juvenile offenders. Such courses included Juvenile Delinquency, Evaluation and Treatment of the Juvenile Offender, and Juvenile Offenders. The percentage of program websites showing a course in this category ranged from 33% (clinical PhD, non-clinical PhD, and joint-degree programs) to 63% (master's programs).

Psychology of Criminal Behavior. Courses in this category generally deal with efforts to understand both general and violent offending and specific forms of criminal behavior. Examples include Psychology of Criminal Behavior; Sex Offender Evaluation and Treatment; White Collar Crime; Terrorism; and Family Violence and Disputes. The percentage of programs offering courses in this category ranged from 17% (joint-degree programs) to 94% (master's programs).

Law and Mental Health. These are courses that examine issues relevant to psychological science and practice in mental health law. Mental health law encompasses a variety of topics relevant to criminal and civil forensic psychology, including civil commitment, various competencies (e.g., competence to stand trial), and criminal sentencing. Examples

include Mental Health Law; Mental Health Issues in Policing; and Mental Health Law and Policy. Across degree types, one-third or fewer of the programs offered coursework in law and mental health.

Ethical Issues in Forensic Psychology. This category includes courses dealing with ethics in a forensic psychology context or the specific ethical guidelines pertaining to forensic psychology. Titles of such courses are Advanced Ethics, Legal, and Clinical Issues in Professional Practice in Psychology; and Counseling and Forensic Ethics. Half of master's degree programs offered coursework in this category, but 13% or fewer of all other degree types offered a course in forensic ethics.

Victimology. This category is defined by courses focusing on the psychology of victims of criminal behavior. Such courses include Victimology; Legal Policy and Analysis in Victimology; and Assessment, Diagnosis, and Treatment of the Victim. Master's degree programs had the largest representation of such courses (38%), with other degree types indicating either very little (13% in PhD and non-clinical PhD programs) or no exposure to victimology coursework.

Socio-Cultural Issues in Forensic Psychology. Courses in this category deal specifically with race, ethnicity, or gender in a forensic psychology context. Examples include Psychology, Gender, and Law; Race, Crime, and Justice; and Sociocultural Issues in Forensic Psychology. Program websites indicated that this category was offered the least with just 13% of programs offering coursework across all degree types.

DISCUSSION

The growth of forensic psychology graduate training programs during the last 35 years has been an important development in the field of psychology and law, but it may present a

challenge for undergraduate academic advisors and interested students who are less familiar with this specialty area. This project sought to compile a list of current forensic psychology graduate programs, categorize the programs by degree type, and identify the content of psychology-law courses that are offered within these programs. Although the results revealed a wide array of options in forensic psychology graduate training, these findings should provide a foundation for faculty who advise their students on graduate programs.

Students can presently seek graduate training at 68 forensic psychology programs housed in 41 different institutions. To put this in context with two other specialty areas in psychology, Clinical Neuropsychology and Industrial and Organizational Psychology currently list 35 doctoral programs and 243 graduate programs, respectively, on their division websites (Division of Clinical Neuropsychology, 2011; Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 2011). This study identified both master's level and doctoral level (PhD, PsyD, and joint law-psychology degree) forensic psychology programs, with several institutions offering more than one training program. Results indicate that most integrative law-psychology course-work in these programs falls into 1 of 10 identified categories. The data revealed that these content areas varied considerably across the different degree types, with master's programs offering the greatest selection in forensic coursework, but with most categories made up of courses offered by less than half of all the programs.

Students—and faculty advising them—should be aware of the variability in graduate forensic training. These findings suggest that forensic coursework at the master's level is quite varied and exposes students to a wide range of topics in psychology and law. In contrast, the focus at the doctoral level appears to be on developing a general competency in psychology research and practice (which is consistent with APA's view that specialization should

occur primarily at the post-doctoral level), with specialized forensic coursework being more limited and based on specific areas emphasized by each program. For example, PsyD programs tend to place more importance on treatment coursework over social psychology content, whereas non-clinical PhD programs have the opposite focus. An understanding of these differences between degree types and programs will better prepare advisors to guide students in their search for advanced training that best fits their academic and professional goals.

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