PSYC 3335.001: Forensic Psychology

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Semester: Spring 2012 
Class Location: Bay Hall, Rm 205 
Class Time: 4:20 - 6:50 pm Wednesdays

Office: Bay Hall, Room 356 
Office Hours: Mondays 6:00 - 7:00 pm 
Wednesdays 3:15 – 4:20 pm or by appointment

Course Description: The focus of this course will be on examining the relationship between the practice of psychology and the functioning of the legal system. The course surveys many aspects of clinical forensic psychology, including assessment, treatment, and consultation services. Practical clinical issues will be highlighted as well as relevant aspects of criminal, civil, and family law. Note there will be a heavy emphasis on law. Special emphasis will be placed on ethical issues relevant to forensic psychology. The course will introduce students to various career opportunities in forensic psychology and beyond. Additionally, students will be exposed to a variety of professionals from disciplines whose work compliments or facilitates that of the forensic psychologist.

Student Learning Outcomes:
1. To critically evaluate the variety of psycho-legal issues from the often conflicting viewpoints of psychology/behavioral science and law.
2. To understand and describe the various roles that psychologists play in the legal system and discuss the ethical issues associated with those roles.
3. To analyze the relationship between legality and morality and apply it to such legal/moral issues as the death penalty, sentencing disparity, and attorney ethics.
4. To critically examine and debate some of the major ethical dilemmas faced by mental health professionals working with the legal system.
5. To recognize and apply some relevant statutes and case law as it impacts the mental health practitioner.
6. To recognize current and propose potential ways psychology can assist and influence the legal system.
7. To evaluate various career opportunities in forensic psychology.

Forensic Psychology Defined: Forensic Psychology is 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 “forensics”, meaning “of the forum”, which was 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 specially knowledgeable professionals play a role.

**Additional Required Reading:** [limited to select articles distributed in class]

**Grading:** Final course grades will be based on the percentage of total points earned during the semester. There are 265 points possible. Grades are based on the following:

- **A = 100 - 90%** (265-237 points)
- **B = 89 - 80%** (236-210 pts)
- **C = 79 - 70%** (209-184 pts)
- **D = 69 - 60%** (183-157 pts)
- **F = 59% - below** (156 pts - below)

- Test 1 = 50 pts
- Test 2 = 50 pts
- Test 3 = 50 pts
- Test 4 (Final) = 50 pts
- Court Summary = 50 pts
- Class Attendance = 1 pt per entire class attendance (max 15)

Tests may include M/C, T-F, matching, or short answer questions. Lectures, guest speakers, and required readings will be used in test construction. Tests are not cumulative. Grades will be available ASAP but no later than one week from the date a test was given.

**Academic Integrity:** Academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism and “cheating on tests” will be handled according to university policy (see current University Catalog and Student Handbook). Tape recording of lectures, guest speakers, or other class activities is prohibited without prior permission from the instructor. Exceptions can be made in advance for students with disabilities and/or special circumstances.

**Notice to Students with Disabilities:** Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you suspect that you may have a disability (physical impairment, learning disability, psychiatric disability, etc.), please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office, located in Driftwood 101, at 825-5816. If you need disability accommodations in this class, please see me as soon as possible.

**Academic Advising:** The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College's Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 825-3466.

**Grade Appeal Process.** As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the
number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.

**Missed Tests:** Make-up tests are given only under special circumstances; thus, you are strongly advised to be present for all tests. At the discretion of the instructor, make-up tests may be allowed if I am given notice of a personal emergency prior to the test or as soon as reasonably possible after the emergency, or other special circumstances. If you are a student-athlete, inform me immediately and provide a schedule of anticipated absences.

**Class Attendance & Participation:** Class attendance is expected and required. If you miss a class, you are responsible for all material covered during your absence, including changes in the schedule, reading assignments, etc. You should gather this information from your peers in the course rather than from the instructor. Class attendance for the entire period can earn you 1 point per class (full attendance) for a max of 15 points.

**Classroom Etiquette and Beyond:** Our learning environment will be best served when everyone adheres to a few basic courtesies. Do not talk with your neighbors during lectures or relevant classroom discussions. Do not walk into class late or leave early unless I am given prior notice or you have an emergency. Do not gather belongings until class is dismissed. Turn off cell phones and pagers before class. Read assignments in advance and be prepared. Pay attention. Ask questions. Only notify me of an emergency when one really exists. But remember: Lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on mine.

**Withdrawal/Incomplete:** The last day you may drop this class is Friday, March 30, 2012; you must complete necessary paperwork yourself. An “Incomplete” grade is given only with permission from the instructor. You may request an Incomplete if you have satisfactorily completed all course requirements to that point and you contact me at least one week prior to the end of class.

**Court Summary:** You are required to observe (live and in person) an actual felony trial in any State District or Federal Court for a minimum of four (4) hours. Your observations must be that of an actual trial or competency hearing, as opposed to simply a plea bargain or any other court hearing. Among various other methods, information regarding Nueces County court activity can be obtained from their website. DO NOT WAIT.

- Write a summary of your observations, with a minimum of 700 words.
- Essay is due no later than Class #13 (April 11), handed in hard-copy to the instructor before or after class that day.
- Entitle the summary: “Forensic Psychology (Spring 2012): Court Summary.”
- Identify the court, date, time, case, and offense charged.
- Compare and contrast what you observed with what you thought or might have
anticipated before attending the actual trial.

- Discuss what was most salient to you regarding the experience.

**Guest Speakers:** Guest speakers are typically scheduled in advance of each semester. However, given that each guest is a working professional, it is possible that unanticipated scheduling conflicts will occur. This will require an adjustment to our schedule.

**Course Schedule:** [Note: I reserve the right to modify presentation or sequencing of topics as necessary]

**Class #1 - January 11, 2012**
- Syllabus Review
- Psychology & the Law: Choices & Roles (Ch. 1)
- The Legal System: Issues, Structures, and Players (Ch. 2)

**Class #2 - January 18**
- Introduction to Texas Judicial System (lecture & web material)
  *Guest Speaker:* The Honorable David Stith, Judge CCAL#3

**Class #3 - January 25**
- Psychology of Crime (Ch. 3)
- Crime Investigation: Witnesses (Ch. 5)

**Class #4 - February 1**
- **Test 1**

**Class #5 - Feb. 8**
- Evaluating Criminal Suspects (Ch. 6)

**Class #6 - Feb. 15**
- Forensic Assessment in Criminal & Juvenile Cases: *Competence* (Ch. 8 & lecture notes)

**Class #7 - Feb. 22**
- *Continuation of ...* Forensic Assessment: *Insanity* (Ch. 8 & lecture notes)

**Class #8 - Feb. 29**
- **Test 2**

**Class #9 - March 7**
- Forensic Assessment in Civil Cases (Ch. 9)

**March 14 - Spring Break Holiday: NO CLASS**

**Class #10 - March 21**
- Psychopathy & Personality Disorders (lecture material)
Class #11 - March 28
Psychology of Victims of Crime & Violence (Ch. 13)

Class #12 - April 4
Test 3

Class #13 - April 11
Forensic Assessment: *Capital Sentencing Evaluations & Juvenile Transfer* (Ch. 8)
Psychology of Punishment & Sentencing (Ch. 14)
DUE: Court Summary Papers

Class #14 - April 18
Continuation ... Forensic Assessment: *Capital Sentencing Evaluations & Juvenile Transfer* (Ch. 8) & Psychology of Punishment & Sentencing (Ch. 14)

Class #15 - April 25
Final Exam (Test #4) - *REGULAR CLASS DATE & TIME*