

STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT REPORT (AY 2017-2018)

PROGRAM: Forensic and Legal Psychology MA

SUBMITTED BY: Mary W. Lindahl and Jason Doll

DATE: 12/17/2018

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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	Year of Last Assessment	Assessed This Year	Year of Next Planned Assessment
Research and write critically about issues in forensic and legal psychology.	2015-16		
Develop and deliver effective oral presentations on topics in forensic and legal psychology.			2018-19
Argue the strengths and weaknesses of policy issues relevant to the field of forensic and legal psychology.		X	2018-19
Propose and evaluate solutions to major problems in the legal system.	2015-16		
Identify strategies to appropriately address ethical dilemmas in the field.	2015-16	X	2018-19

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 (intellectual curiosity) via all of the learning outcomes that were assessed in AY 2017-18. Each of the learning outcomes assessed in 2017-2018 emphasize the importance of researching and writing critically about the strengths and weaknesses of American policy and legal issues as well as addressing issues of ethical

dilemmas. 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 University Strategic Plan (“The University offers a rigorous, cohesive, and integrated curriculum that produces superior graduates able to succeed in their positions and communities”) the Department supports academic excellence with assignments that are carefully designed for intellectual rigor. In addition, faculty members possess an extremely high level of expertise, enabling them to teach complex material to Forensic and Legal Psychology students.

Finally, with regard to the School Strategic Plan, the learning outcomes in that plan also support academic excellence and rigor (see explanations as mentioned above). Specifically, regarding the outcome “Work to provide excellence in career and program advising,” Department faculty use feedback from the Board of Visitors and current employers to incorporate 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.

The Department also holds a yearly Career Day with a keynote speaker followed by a panel of alumni and professionals discussing various types of employment. Last year the keynote speaker was Phillip Mudd, who discussed his career path and offered the students advice on how to succeed in their future endeavors.

In sum, the Forensic and Legal Psychology faculty members continuously reexamine all courses to increase academic rigor. Increasingly, as undergraduate programs offer forensic psychology/psychology and law courses, concentrations or majors, we are working to ensure that 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 Department meets during each semester to discuss the assessment report and the plan for the next year. An effort is made to include direct and indirect outcome measures from a variety of professors and classes. The main challenge we have had is to find a suitable indirect outcome measure, and we would welcome any suggestions from the Assessment Committee. The Graduating Student Survey is helpful, but is not a large enough sample of our graduates.

For the current year, we are tying both of the direct outcome measures to assignments that reflect the specific language used in the two learning outcomes we will assess again (ethics and policy), so that students will be more apt to feel prepared to deal with an ethical dilemma in

the field, as well as to write a coherent written argument. We also are considering revising some of the questions in the GSS to more clearly reflect the expectations in our learning outcomes.

The Department is fostering a culture of continuous improvement based on assessment by holding ongoing discussions of our strategic plan, the development of assignments and outcome measures for each year’s plan, and paying close attention to student feedback in the classroom and end-of-course evaluations.

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.	<p>The faculty developed techniques to help our students with their critical writing skills. Instructors in FLP 527, Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, provided samples of effective analytical arguments which were then graded and discussed in class.</p> <p>Additionally, the instructors in this course provided information and referrals to the University Writing Center for interested and/or struggling students to encourage them to use this valuable academic resource for assistance.</p>	The three instructors in the Policy course reported that this strategy was successfully implemented and suggested that the Department might consider developing a learning outcome in the future to measure student improvement.
Identify strategies to appropriately address ethical dilemmas in the field.	The FLP 512 Essay assignment was revised: the essay is longer, to give students a chance to more thoroughly complete the research section; and the instructor provides students with weekly in-class discussion and brainstorming to practice the skill of representing the group in a legal case whose Constitutional rights they find hard to protect.	This strategy was measured as one of the learning outcomes in the present report.

Outcomes and Past Assessment

Learning Outcome 5: 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.

In the 2015-2016 Student Learning Outcomes Report, we wrote the following:

In examining the 2015-2016 results for the essay assignment in FLP 512 (Learning Outcome # 5: Identify Strategies to Address Ethical Dilemmas in the Field) (see Appendix A for the assignment) we found 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, which was the opposite of what the assignment required.

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. Initially, the students report being overwhelmed and confused by this assignment: they tend to pick a group they dislike whose rights are **not** at stake (for example, the Westboro Baptist Church, a family group who protest at funerals for veterans killed in action, with such signs as “This soldier died for the homosexual sins of America”). Odious as this activity is, the Supreme Court ruled that speech on such a matter of public concern cannot be the basis for a tort of intentional infliction of emotional distress.

In the 2017-2018 semesters, the instructor postponed the assignment due date until the 12th class, and began discussing the assignment in each class; and the students brainstormed together to find appropriate groups. After the groups were chosen, the students began discussing how to research the court cases and then how to protect the rights of that group. Some argued that it is unethical to defend these groups and this led to discussion of minority rights enshrined in the Constitution. It seemed particularly difficult for students to vigorously defend the rights of a group they strongly disapproved of, but as the semester advanced, they became more enthusiastic in doing so. By the time they passed in the essays, a number of students in class agreed that it was the hardest assignment they had encountered in graduate school, but one whose results they were most proud of.

Some of the groups chosen were: anti-vaccers, pregnant women who use drugs, rights of sex offenders released from prison, pit bull dog bans, and parents who deny their child medical treatment for religious or philosophical reasons.

Assessment Activity

Outcome Measures <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	Performance Standard <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	Data Collection <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	Analysis <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>												
<p>Direct: The outcome measure is an essay written by the students in FLP 512, Issues in the American Legal System. This 7-8 page essay requires the students to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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; 2) Discuss and describe this group as well as current American attitudes towards the group; 3) Discuss any landmark, especially Constitutional, cases that have protected or failed to protect the rights of the group; and 4) Make an argument for 	<p>The standard requires 90% of the students to earn 18/20 points using the grading rubric.</p> <p>See Appendix A for assignment and rubric.</p>	<p>The population for this outcome measure consists of 17 graduate students in the Forensic and Legal Psychology program enrolled in the required course, Issues in the American Legal System, in Spring semester 2018.</p>	<p>Results of the class assessed were:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;">Score</th> <th style="text-align: left;">Number of students</th> <th style="text-align: left;">Percent of students</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>20</td> <td>8</td> <td>47%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>19</td> <td>8</td> <td>47%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>15</td> <td>1</td> <td>6%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Percent meeting the standard was 94%. Thus the standard was met.</p>	Score	Number of students	Percent of students	20	8	47%	19	8	47%	15	1	6%
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<p>how and why to protect the interests of the group, using the Constitution, human rights law, and/or materials studied in class.</p>			
<p>We are using the following question in the 2015-16 Graduating Student Survey (GSS): “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 (4) or excellent (5).</p>	<p>The population for this outcome measure is the number of students who responded to this question in the Graduating Student Survey, n=39.</p>	<p>In the GSS, 69.2% of the students responded with “excellent” or “good.” 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):*

We are pleased the standard for the essay assignment has been met. However, we are disappointed that only 69.2% of the students responded “good” or “excellent” to the question of whether the program has prepared them for the most ethical response to a situation in our field.

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

We will continue to assign this essay in the Advanced Issues in the American Legal System class. As our goals have been met, this is the last time we will assess this outcome using this assignment as a Direct Measure.

In considering the Indirect Outcome, we note that only 39 students responded out of a possible 65 (60% response rate), so the sample is not sufficiently large to reflect a broad cross-section of student views.

In addition, we recognize that any one assignment is not sufficient for students to adequately evaluate this question, and that they probably did not connect the ethical issues in this assignment with ethical dilemmas they have faced or may face in the future in their employment. For this reason, we will be looking at a variety of our course assignments to see whether we have one which addresses this issue and if we do not have one that fits, we will design one for each of next year's assessments.

This year we are tailoring both of the direct outcome measures to an assignment that addresses the specific language used in the two learning outcomes we will measure [ethics (dilemma) and policy (coherent written argument).]

For the indirect measures, we will again use the GSS, and are working to devise assignments that more clearly address the department learning outcomes of ethics and policy, so that students will be more apt to conclude that they feel prepared to deal with an ethical dilemma in the field as well as more prepared to write a coherent written argument.

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

See previous question.

Learning Outcome 3: 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.

In our last year's report, we stated, "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."

In looking for an assignment that teaches students how to research, understand, and advocate for a particular social policy, we looked at a number of examples and templates from such organizations as The Brookings, university writing centers, and governmental agencies. We then selected elements of several and designed our own assignment. The faculty member who designed the assignment invited a graphic artist to help train faculty and teach the students.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was especially helpful in describing the goal and best practices in writing a policy brief:

A policy brief is a concise summary of a particular issue, the policy options to deal with it, and some recommendations on the best option. It is aimed at government policymakers and others who are interested in formulating or influencing policy. It should:

- *Provide enough background for the reader to understand the problem.*
- *Convince the reader that the problem must be addressed urgently.*
- *Provide evidence to support one alternative (in an advocacy brief).*
- *Stimulate the reader to make a decision.*
- *Be short and to the point. It should focus on a particular problem or issue. Do not go into all the details. Instead, provide enough information for the reader to understand the issue and come to a decision.*
- *Be based on firm evidence, not just one or two experiments or a single year's experience. It should draw evidence from various sources – preferably from several different areas or organizations.*
- *Focus on meanings, not methods. Readers are interested in what you found and what you recommend. They do not need to know the details of your methodology.*
- *Relate to the big picture. The policy brief may build on context-specific findings, but it should draw conclusions that are more generally applicable.*

(Retrieved from fao.org)

Using these guidelines, we designed the assignment (see Appendix B for the packet and rubric given to students). The assignment on the syllabus reads: “Students will produce a policy brief on his/her selected policy issue. A copy of this brief will be presented in class towards the end of the semester for in-class peer review. Guidelines will be discussed in class and sample policy briefs from former classes will be available for viewing in class.”

We keep a book of all student briefs each semester, and current students may look at these. We also have a student from a previous class come in to describe the process and encourage current students. Three student briefs from the Spring 2018 semester can be found in Appendix B.

We begin during the first class to introduce the assignment. Initially, the students tend to protest with such comments as: “We can’t possibly do that; we are not artists, we don’t know how to begin,” etc.

Assessment Activity

Outcome Measures <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	Performance Standard <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	Data Collection <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	Analysis <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>																		
<p>Direct: The outcome measure is the policy brief as discussed above. (See assignment and rubric in Appendix B.)</p>	<p>The standard requires that 90% of the students receive a score of 27/30 points.</p>	<p>The population for this outcome measure consists of the 23 graduate forensic psychology students enrolled in one section of the Spring 2018 FLP 527 required policy course. This class contained a mixture of beginning and advanced students.</p>	<p>Results of the class assessed were:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;">Score</th> <th style="text-align: left;">Number of students</th> <th style="text-align: left;">Percent of students</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>30</td> <td>5</td> <td>22%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>29</td> <td>9</td> <td>39%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>28</td> <td>8</td> <td>35%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>27</td> <td>1</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Total population 23</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Percent of students meeting the standard:100%.</p> <p>Thus the standard was met.</p>	Score	Number of students	Percent of students	30	5	22%	29	9	39%	28	8	35%	27	1	4%	Total population 23		100%
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<p>Indirect: We are using question in the 2017-2018 Graduate Student Survey: “How well do you believe your education has prepared you to develop a coherent written argument?” Responses are given on a 5-point scale from 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 this question 2017-2018 Graduating Student Survey, n=39</p>	<p>84.6% of the students responded “good” or “excellent.” Thus we did not meet the standard.</p>																		

Interpretation of Results

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

This assignment was designed as a mastery learning exercise. One hundred percent of the students met the direct standard. Throughout the semester, the instructor worked with students individually and as a group in class, and during one class each of the students brought a draft for peer review and support. Students were told that they were not competing with each other, so they felt free to help the presenting student as much as possible.

On the indirect measure, we came close to meeting the standard we had set at 90%, as 84.6% of the students met the standard.

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

One of the strengths of the forensic program is the creativity of its faculty and the opportunity to develop assignments that teach the students new skills that they also enjoy. We believe that this assignment is one of those.

We feel pleased with the results of this assignment as the policy briefs are quite impressive, the students like doing them, and if they do the work, they can succeed. Since they met the standard we had set, we will not be using this assignment next year to measure the policy student learning outcome.

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

We will be developing a new outcome measure for the policy learning outcome which will address the issue of whether the students believe they are prepared to develop a coherent written argument. We are currently discussing in Department meetings the development of appropriate assignments to use as direct measures.

In addition, we have revised our **Department Learning Outcomes** to more clearly reflect the advanced level of our expectations.

1. Evaluate existing research in the field.
2. Develop and deliver effective oral presentations.
3. Analyze the effectiveness of public policies in the legal system and propose workable solutions.
4. Design and defend solutions to major problems in the field, using current research and theory.
5. Analyze the complexities involved in various ethical dilemmas in the field and argue for preferred solutions.

Summary:

1. We measured two Departmental Learning Outcomes.
 - a. *Identify strategies to appropriately address ethical dilemmas in the field*, using the essay assigned in FLP 512, Advanced Issues in the American Legal System.
 - b. *Argue the strength and weaknesses of policy issues relevant to the field of Forensic and Legal Psychology*, using the Policy Brief assigned in FLP 527, Psychology, Public Policy, and Law.
2. Both of the Direct Outcome measures met the standard we had set, but neither of the Indirect Outcome measures did.
3. We will be measuring the same two Outcomes this year with different assignments designed to address the Learning Outcomes as well as student perceptions of whether they are prepared to 1) resolve an ethical dilemma and 2) develop a coherent written argument.
4. In addition to using the results of the GSS as an indirect measure again for the current year, we would welcome the Committee's help in developing another indirect measure.
5. We revised our Departmental Learning Outcomes to more clearly reflect the advanced level of our expectations.