



**PSY 6337
Forensic Psychology
3 credits (online)**

Spring 2022

**Accelerated 8-week course
January 18, 2022 – March 11, 2022**



Instructor

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Texts

Selected academic publications available via the [Porter Henderson Library](#) and [Google Scholar](#).

Introduction and Course Description

Forensic psychology refers to the application of psychological principles and methods to address legal matters ([APA, 2013](#)). Practitioners of forensic psychology can hold formal training in any subdiscipline of psychology including clinical, cognitive, developmental, or social psychology. Psychologists contribute their expertise in theory, methods, and data analysis to recommend strategies for improvement of legal processes and outcomes.

Three goals guide this course. The first goal is to establish baseline knowledge among students of how aspects of the legal system operate. The second goal is to develop students' understandings of the reciprocal relationship between psychology and the law: The law inspires empirical research questions, and psychology informs legal practice. The third goal is to recognize that the intersection of psychology and law motivates intellectual debate to which students in this course can meaningfully contribute.

Course Format

This course is hosted online asynchronously via the [Blackboard Learning Management System](#). Each week, students will select instructor-curated readings to analyze, evaluate, and critique. Students will apply their critical analyses to real-world examples of forensic psychology in instructor-moderated online discussions. Readings, critiques, and discussions will prepare students for an end-of-term presentation that mirrors the work of a forensic practitioner.

Prerequisite Skills

Accessing Internet websites, using ASU Library resources, and proficiency with Microsoft Word and PowerPoint are expectations of the Applied Psychology M.S. program.

Student Learning Outcomes

By completing all course requirements, students will be able to...

Student Learning Outcome	Assignment/s or Activity/ies Validating Outcome Achievement
Consider how aspects of the legal system operate.	Weekly analyses, critical discussion activities, professional application presentation
Apply principles of psychology to address legal matters.	Critical discussion activities, professional application presentation
Understand, articulate, and apply technical terms used by forensic practitioners.	Weekly analyses, critical discussion activities, professional application presentation
Communicate in writing about informed and novel perspectives on forensic psychology.	Weekly analyses, critical discussion activities
Contribute to intellectual debate about how psychology can inform legal procedures and outcomes.	Critical discussion activities
Produce a deliverable demonstrative of expertise in forensic psychology.	Professional application presentation

IDEA Objectives

Students will formally evaluate this course by describing their progress toward:

IDEA Objective	Assignment/s or Activity/ies Validating Outcome Achievement
Gaining a basic understanding of the subject (e.g., factual knowledge, methods, principles, generalizations, theories).	Weekly analyses, critical discussion activities, professional application presentation
Learning to apply course material (to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions).	Critical discussion activities, professional application presentation
Developing specific skills, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals in the field most closely related to this course.	Critical discussion activities, professional application presentation
Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.	Weekly analyses, critical discussion activities
Learning to apply knowledge and skills to benefit others or serve the public good.	Critical discussion activities, professional application presentation
Developing skill in expressing myself orally or in writing.	Weekly analyses, professional application presentation

Course Requirements and Grading

Grades are comprised of 5 components: Weekly Analysis Assignments (30%); Critical Discussion Posts (18%), Replies (18%), and Responses (18%); and a Professional Application Presentation (16%). I will automatically “drop” (i.e., exclude from the gradebook) each student’s lowest score in each assignment category *except* for the Professional Application Presentation (because the presentation is a singular assignment). Thus, effectively, each student may “skip” one Weekly Analysis and one Critical Discussion Post, Reply, and Response (the latter three must be in the same week) without penalty.

Weekly Analysis Assignments

Students will analyze, in writing, readings they select from an instructor-curated list (IDEA Objectives 1, 4, 6).

How to Select Readings. Each student is responsible for selecting and reading at least two articles/chapters each week from the reading list. See the Expanded Course Schedule at the end of this syllabus for lists of readings separated by week, topic, and numbered subtopic. Students must select readings from two separate subtopics to facilitate exposure to varied concepts in forensic psychology. For example, in Week 1, students must select at least one reading from *Subtopic 1: What is Forensic Psychology?* and one reading from *Subtopic 2: Perspectives on Psychology and the Law*. Although students are welcome and encouraged to read (and download for future reference) more than two articles/chapters per week, their Weekly Analysis Assignments must highlight two readings. That is, students are required to select only two readings even when a week has more than two subtopics. These readings should be ones that engaged students’ professional interest, challenged students’ preexisting ideas, or otherwise provoked application of and critical thinking about forensic psychology.

How to Read Articles/Chapters. Students should practice *reading with purpose*. APA style mitigates the tedium of reading academic publications by requiring descriptive headings and formulaic organization. Use these tools as intended: Rather than reading articles linearly as you might read a novel, read with purpose by identifying the section headings that are relevant to you and carefully analyzing those sections. It is okay if you do not read every word of an academic article/chapter. Practice deploying attention with care to extract pertinent information.

How to Write the Weekly Analysis Assignment. After selecting two articles/chapters from different subtopics and reading them with purpose, the student’s task is threefold: First, the student must indicate the two selected readings by listing their subtopics and full citations within the Weekly Analysis document. The citations should appear in proper APA style (students can copy them from the Expanded Course Schedule). Second, for each reading, the student must write a 150-word *abstract* summarizing the relevant contents of the article/chapter. Each abstract should provide a concise description of the topic, purpose, approach, and implications of the reading. Several readings will include an abstract written by the author/s; however, the student must produce an original abstract to facilitate thorough understanding of the reading and proficiency at applying technical terms used by forensic psychologists. Third, for each reading, the student must produce a 150-word *analysis* that presents an informed and novel perspective on the topic. Each analysis should convey an original point generated by the student. The 150-word analysis represents the student’s opportunity to disagree with the premises of the article/chapter or assumptions of the author/s (e.g., “The authors seem to assume that criminal interrogation practices are unduly psychologically manipulative, but I disagree because...”), articulate additional implications of the article/chapter (e.g., “Although the article addresses the adult criminal justice system, its findings have unique applications to juveniles such as...”), rectify apparent discrepancies in the readings (e.g., “This article seems to contradict the previous one in the following

ways...but the findings are compatible in so far as...”), and so on. Each Weekly Analysis Assignment is a tool for students to develop advanced written communication skills and practice critical thinking about matters in forensic psychology.

The Purpose of Weekly Analysis Assignments. Rather than assigning the same readings to every student, students select from a list of provided readings to tailor learning, discussion, and assignments to students’ applied interests. Students must provide the subtopic and APA citation for each article so that the instructor is aware of their selections, but also because the citations help students to reference these assignments in the future (i.e., beyond this class: in a thesis, in a research project, when considering career paths, etc.). The purpose of the 150-word abstract is to prepare students to discuss the contents of readings with one another or with the instructor. The purpose of the 150-word analysis is to encourage development of novel perspectives and applications—a vital component of graduate training in psychology. Writing should be formal in nature to practice professional written expression and to enhance students’ comfort applying technical terms.

Critical Discussion Activities

Students will discuss and critique novel applications of course material (IDEA Objectives 1-4).

Assigned Discussion Inspiration. Each week, your instructor will post to Blackboard a video, podcast, popular press article/website, or other activity as the impetus for Critical Discussion Activities. Whereas Weekly Analysis Assignments encourage students to select two academic readings of their choice from the Course Schedule, Critical Discussion Activities require students to review real-world content selected by the instructor. This content will serve as a canvas to apply and discuss students’ academic perspectives on topics in forensic psychology. Because the content is selected by the instructor and is the same for every student, it will provide a common basis for students to converse with one another about the topics of their Weekly Analysis Assignments.

Creating a Critical Discussion. After writing the Weekly Analysis Assignment, each student should review the real-world content posted by the instructor. Students should consider how their academic readings relate to the real-world content. Such consideration requires an additional form of critical evaluation not necessarily engaged by Weekly Analysis Assignments: namely, applying academic concepts to the real-world—a complex social system that can be guided by imperfect human judgment, tradition, and lay beliefs rather than (or in addition to) rigorous empiricism. For instance, students might read an academic article about data-driven recommendations for criminal interrogation but wonder how interrogations really operate in precincts across the U.S. In this example, the instructor will post to Blackboard footage of an actual police interrogation for all students to watch. After watching the footage and in light of their academic understanding of interrogations from the Weekly Analysis Assignment, students will write a 200-word critical discussion post that applies their understanding of the readings to the real-world content. Students should use this post to describe their reaction to the content (e.g., “Based on my readings, I expected...but this footage surprised me because...”; “My readings stated that...but I didn’t understand it until I saw the part of the video where...”; etc.) and explain how they would apply their academic understanding to address legal matters (e.g., “The detective seemed to bias the witness through feedback by...but this bias could be reduced through...”). This post will be readable by all students in the class. Each student is responsible for posting a professionally written and reading-informed 200-word reply to another student’s post. The creator of the original post must respond to the reply with equal professionalism in 100 words. Students should not simply state that they agree or disagree, but instead contribute an intellectually stimulating idea in their replies and responses.

The Purpose of Critical Discussion Activities. Graduate training in psychological science is most compelling and impactful when students collaborate to generate, share, and critique ideas. Critical Discussion Activities provide a worthy substitute for live/in-person discussions. Critical Discussion Activities will ground students' learning by directing their attention to a common discussion prompt (e.g., a video, podcast, popular press article/website, or other activity). Students will discuss their selected readings with one another within the context of this prompt, resulting in exposure to ideas from additional readings, opportunities to challenge interpretations of information, and novel applications of forensic psychology to real-world situations. Such activity generates the skills, competencies, and perspectives needed by professionals in this field.

Professional Application Presentation

Students will present an informed analysis of a topic in forensic psychology (IDEA Objectives 1-3, 5-6).

Pervasiveness of Presentations in Forensic Psychology. Practitioners of forensic psychology must often share their expertise via verbal presentation. For instance, expert witnesses might communicate legally relevant psychological information to the jury; forensic mental health evaluators might report their findings to the judge; and psychology-law researchers might describe their studies at professional conferences. Students will develop the skills required to effectively convey applications of forensic psychology to interested audiences.

Presentation Assignment Prompts. The instructor will provide students with mock presentation prompts analogous to the types of presentations expected of forensic psychologists. Each student may choose one of the provided prompts or devise a novel presentation topic that meets the Professional Application Presentation assignment guidelines.

Assignment Guidelines. Each student must produce a digital slideshow (e.g., Microsoft PowerPoint, Google Slides, Apple Keynote) with an accompanying audio recording lasting 8 to 12 minutes. The presentation should describe a topic of forensic psychological inquiry (e.g., any topic listed in the instructor-provided prompts, or any topic listed in the Course Schedule for students who choose to devise their own topic). Students should apply their novel and informed perspectives on the semester's readings to address the legal matter of their choosing. The grading rubric for the Professional Application Presentation assignment is posted to Blackboard.

The Purpose of the Professional Application Presentation. This assignment facilitates development of skills that define forensic psychology practice. Professionals in this field must (1) remain apprised of the most current literature in their area of expertise (e.g., eyewitness memory, risk assessment, elder law), (2) apply that literature to specific legal matters, and (3) communicate their conclusions to interested audiences of researchers, attorneys, or legal decision makers. This assignment additionally causes students to create a tangible product, demonstrative of their newfound expertise in forensic psychology, that can contribute a professional portfolio (e.g., adapted as a conference presentation, written as a literature review, provide the basis of a research proposal).

Evaluation and Grades

Assessment	Points toward Total Grade
Six Weekly Analysis Assignments	5 pts each, 30 pts total
Six Critical Discussion Posts	3 pts each, 18 pts total
Six Critical Discussion Replies	3 pts each, 18 pts total
Six Critical Discussion Responses	3 pts each, 18 pts total
Professional Application Presentation	16 pts
Total points	100

Grading System

Course grades will be dependent upon completing course requirements and meeting the student learning outcomes.

The following grading scale is in use for this course:

- A = 90.00 – 100 points
- B = 80.00 – 89.99 points
- C = 70.00 – 79.99 points
- D = 60.00 – 69.99 points
- F = 0 – 59.99 points (Grades are not rounded up)

Late Work and Missed Assignment Policies

The work of forensic practitioners must be completed on time. The instructor will deduct 10% per day from the final score of any late assignment. All missing assignments will receive a score of 0%.

Teaching Strategies

Students are expected to be “active learners.” It is a basic assumption of the instructor that students will be involved (**beyond the materials and lectures presented in the course**) discovering, processing, and applying the course information using peer-review journal articles, researching additional information and examples on the Internet, and discussing course material with their peers.

Syllabus Changes

The instructor reserves the option to make changes as necessary to this syllabus and the course content. If changes become necessary during this course, the faculty will notify students of such changes by email, course announcements and/or via a discussion board announcement. It is the student’s responsibility to look for such communications about the course daily.

Assignment Submission

Students must submit all assignments through the Assignments link on the [Blackboard](#) website for grading, documenting, and archiving purposes. If a technology issue arises regarding assignment submission, email the instructor at tyler.livingston@angelo.edu and attach a copy of the assignment. Additionally, please contact the [IT Service Center](#) to report the issue. This process will document the issue and establish a timeline for your attempted submission. Be sure to keep a backup of all your work.

Religious Obligations

Students who have religious obligations that interfere with the course schedule should inform their instructor during the first week of class. The instructor will make specific course adjustments to ensure that students can submit their assignments prior to their absences. See [ASU Operating Policy 10.19: Student Absence for Observance of Religious Holy Day](#) for more information.

Academic Integrity

Cheating, plagiarism, or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses constitutes academic misconduct according to the [ASU Student Handbook](#). The instructor will not tolerate academic misconduct. Penalties for such behavior can include posting a grade of F for the assignment or for the course or requiring the student to retake the assignment.

Audio or Video Recording

The instructor prohibits surreptitious or covert audio or video recording of class content (e.g., lectures, discussions, demonstrations, etc.).

Disability Services

The [Office of Student Affairs](#) reviews and authorizes student requests for reasonable accommodation based on disability. Any student who requires accommodation should contact [Student Disability Services](#) as soon as possible. The employee responsible for reviewing and authorizing accommodation requests is Dallas Swafford, Director of Student Disability Services, available at (325) 942-2047 or dallas.swafford@angelo.edu.

Incomplete Grade Policy

It is policy that incomplete grades be reserved for student illness or personal misfortune. Please contact faculty if you have serious illness or a personal misfortune that would keep you from completing course work. Documentation may be required. See ASU Operating Policy 10.11 [Grading Procedures](#)ⁱ for more information.

Title IX at Angelo State University

ASU prohibits discrimination based on sex. Students are encouraged to report any incidents involving sexual misconduct to the [Office of Title IX Compliance](#). Note that as a faculty member at ASU, your instructor is mandated to report any incidents involving sexual misconduct to the [Title IX Coordinator](#). Students who wish to speak with someone in confidence may contact [Counseling Services](#), the 24-hour [ASU Crisis Helpline](#), or the [University Health Clinic](#).

End of syllabus.

ⁱ <https://www.angelo.edu/content/files/14197-op-1011-grading-procedures>