Definition of Forensic Psychology

- Dramatic Increase in Popularity
  - Due to Popularity of Television Dramas and Managed Care Obstacles for Professionals
- Numerous misconceptions about the field: often confused with other forensic sciences such as crime scene investigation, etc.
Defining Forensic Psychology

- First need to define psychology
- Psychology is the science that seeks to understand behavior and mental processes

- Psychology is a broad field
  - Most people are familiar with clinical psychology – a specialty and one of the four applied areas recognized by the APA
Areas of Study in Psychology

- **APPLIED AREAS**
  - Clinical
  - Counseling
  - School
  - Industrial/Organizational

- Developmental
- Social
- Cognitive
- Educational
- Biological
- Psychometrics
- Health
Broad and Narrow Definition of Forensic Psychology

- Broad definition – *any application of psychological knowledge or methods to a task faced by the legal system*
  - Includes just about everything from insanity pleas to testifying about the psychological impact of trade mark infringement
Broad and Narrow Definition of Forensic Psychology

- **Narrow definition** – the *practice of psychology as related to the law and legal profession*
  - This definition, adopted by the American Psychological Association, focuses on the applied aspect of the field… that is, the practice of psychology
Forensic Psychology versus Legal Psychology

- **Forensic psychology** – *application of clinical specialties to the law*
  - Examples: insanity plea, competency hearings, child custody, death penalty sentencing, sexual predator evaluations, parole hearings, etc.

- **Legal psychology** – *experimental areas of psychology as applied to legal questions*
  - Examples: accuracy of eyewitness testimony, size of the jury, effects of pretrial publicity, trial consultation, etc.
Legal Psychology

- Consists primarily of the *non-applied* areas of psychology addressing legal questions: non-applied refers to the APA’s definition of applied psychology

- Distinction between *non-applied* and *applied* areas of psychology

- Legal Psychology can include
  - Social Psychology
  - Cognitive Psychology
  - Developmental Psychology
  - As well as other specialties in psychology
Example of Legal Psychology

- A developmental psychologist may have determined that this boy is mature enough to be a credible witness.
Legal Psychology

- *Social psychology* – study of the individual in the group
- Social psychologists can work as trial consultants:
  - research on effects of pretrial publicity, mock jury trials to test persuasiveness of courtroom strategy,
  - jury selection,
  - witness preparation,
  - this area is discussed in chapter 9 of the text
- Social psychologists can also study legal issues such as the size of a jury or effects of judge’s instructions to the jury
Legal Psychology

- *Cognitive psychology* – study of human thought (cognition)
  - Cognitive psychologists serve as expert witness on accuracy of eyewitness testimony, recovered memories and false memory syndrome
  - Cognitive psychologists can also conduct research on ways to improve gathering of eyewitness evidence
Legal Psychology

- **Developmental psychology** – study of changes in behavior and mental processes over time
- Developmental psychologists can serve as an expert witness on how the courts treat children
  - For example, the suggestibility of children’s testimony, ability to make legal decisions such as offering a confession, and impact of various child custody arrangements on the emotional health of the child
- Developmental psychologists can also research ways to improve questioning of children or effects of custody arrangements
Legal Psychology

- A legal psychologist may do a detailed crime scene analysis in an effort to identify the perpetrator’s “signature” of modus operandi.
The Practice of Forensic Psychology

- A specialty in the professional practice (applied areas) of psychology
  - Applied areas of psychology include clinical, counseling, school, and industrial/organizational.

- Most forensic psychologists are *clinical* psychologists who practice in the specialty of forensic psychology

- Large part of forensic psychology involves assessment and treatment

- Psychologists are frequently asked to assess an individual on a *psycholegal* question and then report back to the court, offering an *expert opinion*
Examples of common forensic evaluations are: (1)

- Insanity plea evaluations
- Competency evaluations including:
  - competency to stand trial, civil competency, competency to waive Miranda rights, to offer a confession, to be executed.
- Child custody evaluations
- Death penalty sentencing evaluations as in mitigating or aggravating factors
- Risk assessment for individuals about to be released from prison
  - sexual predator evaluations
  - Dangerousness
Examples of common forensic evaluations are: (2)

- Suicide risk assessments for inmates
- Clinical assessment for inmates
- Fitness-for-duty evaluations for law enforcement
- Pre-employment evaluations for law enforcement candidates
- Assessment of psychological injury for personal injury lawsuits
Forensic Psychology: Treatment

- Provision of treatment in correctional facilities (Correctional Psychology – discussed in chapter 6 of the text)
- Post-release treatment in the community
  - Sex offender groups, anger management, domestic violence, drug treatment, etc.
  - Often times this type of treatment is mandated as part of the conditional-release
Training and Credentials in Forensic Psychology

- Most forensic psychologists are clinical (or counseling) psychologists
- Ph.D. or the Psy.D in clinical or counseling psychology with specialized training in forensic work, usually post-doctoral work in the form of continuing education; possibly a forensic internship or fellowship
Training and Credentials in Forensic Psychology

- Master-level practitioners – usually provide direct mental health services within correctional or police settings or community-based treatment programs.

- Although work is available at the master’s level, credibility increases with the doctoral degree for work as an expert witness in court proceedings.
Basic skills required beyond the academic degree

- Psychological Assessment Skills:
  - intellectual, personality and specialty areas, such as competency, violence potential, criminal responsibility, etc.

- Strong writing skills:
  - Reports to the courts, lawyers, probation officers, etc.

- Oral presentation skills:
  - Social presence when appearing as an expert witness
Career Opportunities in Forensic and Legal Psychology

- Forensic Psychology
  - Full time v. part time work as a practitioner
  - Correctional Psychology
  - Police Psychology

- Legal Psychology
  - Work in academic settings as researcher and mentor
  - Work as a consultant to attorneys
Brief Overview of the Course Topics (1)

- Ethical Issues in Forensic Psychology
  - Clash of psychological and legal professional ethics
- Forensic Assessment
  - Differences between clinical and forensic assessment
  - Overview of assessment instruments
- Criminal Responsibility and Competency to Stand Trial Evaluations
  - Case law
  - Assessment instruments
Brief Overview of the Course Topics (2)

- Police Psychology
  - Selection of law enforcement personnel
  - Fitness-for-duty evaluations
  - Counseling and Peer counseling

- Correctional Psychology
  - Unique role of the correctional psychologist

- Assessment of Psychological Injury
  - Tort Law
  - Evaluation for psychological damages
Police Psychology

- One of the responsibilities of police psychology is to aid in the selecting police officers.
Brief Overview of the Course Topics (3)

- Child Custody Evaluations
- Trial Consultation
  - Jury selection
  - Change of venue request
- Witness preparation
- Criminal Investigative Techniques
  - Detection of deception
  - Investigative Hypnosis
  - Criminal Profiling
  - Psychological Autopsies
Brief Overview of the Course Topics (4)

- Eyewitness Memory and Recovered Memory
  - Accuracy of eyewitness memory
  - Techniques to improve eyewitness evidence
  - Repressed memories and false memory syndrome

- Emerging Trends in the Field of Forensic Psychology
  - Increase growth and sophistication
  - Increased cooperation between the two professions
  - Future training models in forensic psychology
  - Therapeutic Jurisprudence
Web Sites

- American Board of Forensic Psychology
  - www.abpp.org
- American Psychology-Law Society
  - www.ap-ls.org
- American Psychological Association
  - www.apa.org
- American Psychology-Law Student Section
  - www.aplsstudentsection.com