

Forensic Psychology

Department of Psychology, College of Arts & Sciences



What Is Forensic Psychology?

The common objective of forensic psychology is to consider how the principles of scientific psychology are applied to legal issues at every level of the justice system. Clinical work in the forensic area may include assessments involving competency to stand trial, risk of reoffending, and treatment for drug abuse and mentally disordered offenders. Non-clinical work in the forensic area may involve research on memory, perception, child development, and decisionmaking as it pertains to eyewitnesses, juvenile offenders, and police training and procedures. The goal of forensic psychology as a field is to support and influence law enforcement officers, attorneys, and judges to adopt and implement empirically based policies that increase accuracy and fairness in the justice system.

Faculty

Western Illinois University's Department of Psychology has 24 full-time faculty, all with advanced degrees from major universities, thus ensuring that every course is taught by someone who has extensive training in psychology. No courses are taught by graduate students. Psychology faculty also maintain active research programs in their disciplines, consistently publishing numerous articles and books, and presenting papers at regional, state, national, and international conferences each year. Specializations and research interests cover several psychology subfields, including clinical, cognitive, development, neuroscience, personality, school, and social. Several faculty members have clinical and non-clinical experience with forensic issues related to assessment, drug abuse and treatment, eyewitness memory, and police training. Much of the research conducted by faculty is carried out with student collaboration.

Scholarships and Awards

The Jim Joyce Scholarship is given automatically to incoming freshman Psychology majors with an ACT score of 26 or above. The Jim Joyce Award honors superior scholarly and professional performance at Western. Two Eric Ward Tutoring Awards are given each year to the best statistics students. The Donald Poindexter Award supports independent research carried out by ethnic minority students, and the Jim Ackil Award supports neuroscience research. There are several other awards and scholarships available within the psychology department as well. Detailed information on scholarships is available from WIU's Scholarship office, (309) 298-2001, or on the web at wiu.edu/Scholarship.

The Forensic Psychology Major Option

The Bachelor of Science degree with a major option in forensic psychology requires that all students take introductory psychology, statistics, research methods, specialty courses in forensic psychology, directed electives in clinical and non-clinical psychology, and forensically relevant electives. Students also complete a capstone project that consists of an independent, scholarly paper demonstrating a depth of knowledge about a forensically relevant psychological topic. Class size in the required statistics, research, and forensic seminar courses is limited to just 20 students. Most courses are limited in enrollment size. The forensic psychology major option pairs well with a substance abuse minor, which is also available in the Department of Psychology. The substance abuse minor is designed for students interested in substance abuse and treatment.

The Forensic Psychology Minor

The forensic psychology minor is designed to complement majors that will benefit from a deeper understanding of human behavior in a forensic context, such as Law Enforcement and Justice Administration. The forensic psychology minor may be a better option for students with aspirations to work as a law enforcement officer, social worker, nurse, or firefighter.

Honors in Psychology

To be eligible for the Centennial Honors College, entering freshmen must meet two of the following three criteria: Have an 1160 SAT (24 ACT), have a 3.4/4.0 GPA or higher, or be in the top 15 percent of their graduating class. Transfer and current WIU students who wish to join the Honors College (including the Quad Cities Honors Program) must have a 3.4 grade point average on a 4.0 scale based on 12 or more semester hours. Honors credit is given for honors coursework completed at other accredited institutions. To find out more, visit wiu.edu/Honors.

In Forensic Psychology, in addition to completing other requirements, each Honors student completes a thesis, which can serve as a showpiece of academic ability for graduate school admission and job entry.

Special Opportunities

The Laboratory for the Investigation of Psychology and Law is uniquely designed to provide forensically relevant research experience, and students may earn credit for their participation. An application process is required, and a minimum GPA of 3.0 is necessary for consideration. Other opportunities include field experience credit for work in such agencies as community mental health or rehabilitation centers as well as earning credit for participation in HOTLINE, a student-run crisis intervention telephone service.

Besides assisting in research projects, students have opportunities for extensive contact with faculty through individual reading projects, undergraduate seminars, and departmental committee memberships. Advanced students have opportunities to present their research projects at student-oriented and professional conferences, and to apply for financial assistance in the form of research grants.

Psychology students can join the Psychology Club or its companion organization Psi Chi, the national honor society in psychology. These organizations publish a newsletter; put on social activities; and sponsor educational events such as lectures, field trips, and programs on topics such as careers and graduate school.

After College

Western's graduates are employed in a variety of fields, including social services, management, education, and professional trades. Graduates with the Forensic Psychology major option will be well-suited for work as a psychiatric technician or paraprofessional in the mental health field. Work venues may include psychiatric and substance abuse hospitals, state government, and general medical and surgical hospitals. Other options for employment may include working in mental health, substance abuse, and intellectual or developmental disability facilities. Graduates will also be competitive for police work.

Graduate Programs

The Department of Psychology offers a Master of Science degree in the areas of clinical/community mental health and general experimental psychology, and a Specialist degree in school psychology.

Facilities

The department is housed in Waggoner Hall, which contains teaching, clinical training, and research facilities. Waggoner Hall has observation rooms, small experimental cubicles, an equipment construction shop, animal facilities, and a psychology-training clinic serving adults and children. There are several student lounges and three computer labs available.

For More Information

The Department of Psychology can be contacted by telephone at (309) 298-1593, by e-mail at psychology@wiu.edu, or by fax at (309) 298-2179. Information can be accessed via the Internet at wiu.edu/psychology.

Campus Visits

The Admissions Reception Center (Sherman Hall 115) is open most weekdays from 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. when the University is in session. Group information sessions are available on Mondays and Fridays at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m., and individual appointments can be made on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Campus tours are conducted at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., Monday through Friday. Appointments with advisors, faculty or a financial aid advisor may be arranged separately during the week. The Admissions Reception Center is open from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. most Saturdays when the University is in session. A group information session is available at 10 a.m., and a campus tour is conducted at 11 a.m. Students may schedule a visit or tour online at wiu.edu/admissions by selecting "Visit Campus." Students may also schedule a visit, tour or individual appointment by calling toll free (877) PICKWIU (742-5948) or (309) 298-3157, or by emailing admissions@wiu.edu.



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