Psychology 860  
Forensic Assessment I  
3 Credit Hours  
Fall, 2007

Location: Psychological Services Center  
Time: Monday, 6-9

Instructor: Mary Alice Conroy, Ph.D., ABPP  
Office Phone: 294-3806  
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Office: Psychological Services Center  
Hours: 8-9 MTTh

Required Books


Course Description

The course is designed to introduce students to the literature on forensic assessment and the methods utilized in this endeavor. Ethics in forensic evaluation and the dilemmas encountered in dealing with the diverse criminal population are emphasized throughout the course. Students have the opportunity to observe and participate in actual forensic evaluations.

Course Objectives

1. To differentiate forensic assessment from other types of clinical evaluations and practice the thought processes necessary to this endeavor.

2. To provide an overview of the literature regarding forensic assessment, with special emphasis on assessments in the context of a diverse criminal population.

3. To familiarize students with specialty instruments utilized in forensic assessment.

4. To acquaint students with research methodology and problems unique to forensic assessment.

5. To prepare students to participate in criminal forensic assessments during practicum assignments and to consult with attorneys and the courts.
6. To analyze ethical dilemmas common to the forensic arena.

Schedule

The schedule outlined below is tentative and provided to assist you in planning your reading. Topics do not always fit neatly into 3 hour blocks, and the pace may be slowed or accelerated depending upon class response. You are strongly encouraged to begin reading immediately, as class sessions will be of limited value if you have not first read the material.

Aug 27  
What differentiates a forensic assessment? What competencies/credentials are needed?

Readings:


Sept. 10-Sept. 17  
Role of psychodiagnosics: Including analysis of psychological testing and assessment of malingering
Readings:


Sept. 24

Report writing/record keeping

Readings:


Oct. 1-Oct. 8  Evaluating criminal competencies

Readings:

Melton et al. Chs. 6 & 7


Oct. 15-Oct. 22  Mental state at the time of the crime

Readings:

Melton et al. Ch. 8


Oct. 29-Nov. 5 Risk assessment

Readings:


### Nov. 12-19 Sentencing/the death penalty

**Readings:**

Melton et al. Ch. 9


Nov. 26

**Trial Consultation**


Dec. 3

**Ethical Dilemmas in Forensic Assessment**

Melton et al., Ch. 4


Dec. 10

FINAL

**Attendance Policy**

Regular and punctual class attendance is expected. SHSU policy is that no student will be penalized for three or fewer hours of absence. However, a major portion of the learning objectives will be met through class discussion.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

1. 30% of your grade will be based on a research paper to investigate some area of forensic assessment. The paper for this semester should take the form of a literature review, with the idea that you will revise it, develop hypotheses, and design a research project on the issue for Forensic Assessment II. The paper should be prepared in APA format. The exact topic is your choice; however, to assure it is truly a study of a reasonably circumscribed area of forensic assessment, I would like each student to discuss their topic with me prior to Sept. 28th. The final paper is due Nov.
19th; half a letter grade will be deducted for late papers; papers will not be accepted after Nov. 26th.

2. 30% of your grade will be based on the final examination. It will be essay and will be designed to determine if you have processed the major issues.

3. 30% of your grade will be based upon three reports you will be required to construct based upon video tapes and information provided in class. You will have one week to complete each of these reports.

4. 10% of your grade will be based upon class participation. Class attendance is required and you are expected to come prepared to discuss materials in the assigned reading.

5. Every effort will be made to allow each of you the opportunity to participate in a forensic assessment during the semester. This will prepare you for future practicum work and provide material for future mock trial exercises.

**Professionalism**

Attendance, punctuality, adherence to ethical standards, and the quality of your interactions with colleagues and supervisors all determine your level of professionalism, which in turn signals your readiness to advance to greater participation in forensic evaluations.

**Instructor Evaluations**

Each student will be asked to complete two course/instructor evaluation forms toward the end of the semester. One is the IDEA form required by the university; the other is a form created specifically to evaluate classes in the doctoral program. This instructor takes these evaluations very seriously and constructive criticism is appreciated. Changes in class format and techniques are regularly made in response to student comments.

**Academic Dishonesty**

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism collusion, or abuse of resources. During this course you will be involved in forensic evaluations and be privy to very sensitive material. Careful compliance with all ethical standards pertaining to confidentiality is essential. Substantiation of any unethical
conduct would result in a failing grade.

**Americans with Disabilities Act**

It is the policy of SHSU that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with the instructor so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may adversely affect your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I may best help you. All disclosures of disabilities are kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center.

**Religious Holidays**

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a)(2) defines religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code. . . .” A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after that absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and the instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to the instructor a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will negotiate with the student how any missed work can be achieved.

**Visitors in the Classroom**

Given the highly confidential and sensitive materials discussed in class, visitors not assigned to the Psychological Services Center and/or registered for the class will not be allowed.

**Required Supplies**

Students are required to purchase the course text book.
Classroom Rules of Conduct

To avoid disruption, all students are expected to appear for class in a timely manner. All cell phones, pagers, etc. should be turned off during class.