



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2005

116 Post-Doctoral Training in Criminal and Investigative Psychology: Developing a Structured Curriculum

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Attendees will learn about the unique training requirements for psychologists functioning primarily as consultants to law enforcement, and will be presented with a proposed curriculum for training criminal and investigative psychologists at the post-doctoral level.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by highlighting the emerging subspecialty of criminal and investigative psychology and the unique skills and experiences required to serve as psychological consultants to law enforcement. The outlined post-doctoral curriculum can serve as a springboard for further discussion and development of advanced training to prepare psychologists to serve as consultants to law enforcement.

Most forensic psychology programs, although providing excellent training, are focused on conducting research and preparing psychologists to function as expert witnesses in the courts. Increasingly, psychologists and other behavioral specialists are serving in a different forensic capacity - as consultants to law enforcement in the conduct of investigations. This consultation encompasses much more than the popularized notion of "criminal profiling," and includes advising on interview strategies, dealing with victims and families, and assisting in generation of leads for challenging cases. To distinguish this role from "traditional" forensic psychology, the terms "criminal psychologist" and/or "investigative psychologist" have been coined. To function adequately as a criminal and investigative psychologist requires understanding the roles, responsibilities, and limitations of law enforcement, the techniques and investigative strategies used by law enforcement agents, and the ways in which psychological techniques and research can be integrated into investigations. Furthermore, the psychologist needs to understand the specific culture of the law enforcement agency to which s/he is consulting, and must gain acceptance as a member of the law enforcement team.

The Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) is a military law enforcement agency with multiple missions, including felony-level criminal investigations. Historically, AFOSI has utilized criminal and investigative psychologists to consult on cases, provide agent training, and assist command with personnel issues. For a time, AFOSI policy provided for the selection of a few AFOSI agents to attend graduate programs in psychology and then return to the organization as criminal and investigative psychologists. The main advantages of this process consisted of having psychologists who were also experienced law enforcement agents and who were known and accepted by AFOSI agents in the field. The disadvantages, however, included large investments of time and money to send individuals through lengthy graduate programs, only to have them serve the organization for a few years before separating from service or moving to other assignments. In 2000, the Air Force and AFOSI instituted a new process: a two-year Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Forensic Psychology, aimed at training a few Air Force clinical psychologists to serve as consultants to AFOSI. The first post-doctoral fellow completed training in 2002 and continues to serve as a consultant to AFOSI; the second post-doctoral fellow began training in August 2004. This presentation will summarize the AFOSI post-doctoral training program, which seeks to combine selected courses from law enforcement training with supervised case consultation and grounding in theory and research drawn from forensic psychology and other forensic sciences. The challenges of creating an adequate curriculum will be discussed, including identifying the appropriate areas of emphasis and devising means to measure learning and performance to optimize the educational experience.

(Disclaimer: The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect official views or policy of the United States Air Force or the Department of Defense.)

Criminal/Investigative Psychology, Forensic Psychology, Post-Doctoral Training