

FAQs for the Master of Arts in Forensic Psychology Program

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What do students learn in an MA in Forensic Psychology program? Forensic psychology is a field of specialization that focuses on the interaction between psychology and the law and court system. Practitioners working in these systems serve the clients and organizations that make up the criminal and civil justice system, as well as law enforcement and public safety. The program mission is as follows: “To educate and train individuals who are currently employed or wish to be trained to work in fields that utilize the study and practice of forensic psychology. The curriculum provides theoretical, experiential and skill based experiences in the practice of forensic psychology, and emphasizes the development of students who are committed to the ethical provision of quality services to diverse clients and organizations.”

The learning objectives and curriculum balance psychological knowledge and skills with a specialized understanding of the criminal justice and legal systems. The program focuses on the evaluation and treatment of adult and juvenile offenders, as well as the impact on victims of crime including domestic violence. The curriculum places the traditional skills and knowledge of the psychologist-- including diagnosis, interviewing, assessment and treatment, research and program evaluation, communicating results, consultation-- in the context of the role of the psychology in the court system.

What type of students might select an MA in Forensic Psychology? Students seeking an MA in Forensic Psychology are often seeking specialized information to launch them on a career or to enhance the skills and knowledge they bring to their job and already selected career field. Some are college graduates who have majored in psychology or criminal justice as undergraduates. These students do not have prior related job experience and want to find work in a setting related to forensic psychology, such as corrections, probation, law enforcement, public safety, or the court system. These students choose this program for background knowledge and additional academic credentials in order to enhance their chances of gaining admission into highly selective doctoral or law school programs. Although most credits do not transfer from a Master's program to a doctoral level program, students gain research and applied skills that help establish readiness for ongoing graduate study.

Another group of students are in-service professionals who work in police, corrections, law enforcement, probation, parole, court or other criminal justice agencies. These students seek an MA in Forensic Psychology in an effort to advance their careers within their state, county or federal agency; perhaps, they are seeking a position as a researcher, supervisor, or program manager for which a master's degree is a required or desired qualification. Many workers in these agencies participate in collateral duties, such as serving on a Hostage Negotiation Team or Mobile Crisis Unit; some provide training to peers in areas such as working with the mentally ill in criminal justice systems, crisis management and intervention, or profiling or risk assessment and are seeking specialized knowledge and contact with experts in the mental health field.

Where might graduates seek employment after completing an MA in Forensic Psychology? Students who complete an MA in Forensic Psychology can pursue master's level psychology positions in agencies and institutions, including correctional facilities (jails or prisons), juvenile facilities, community corrections, human or social service agencies, police departments, child care/welfare agencies, probation/parole, court systems, chemical dependency treatment settings, forensic hospitals, sex offender treatment programs and community mental health centers. Students with a research interest seek jobs as behavior or risk analysts or work on program evaluations, grant writing or research projects completing research on forensic populations and the programs that serve them. Argosy graduates from this program have obtained employment at federal law enforcement agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation or have worked as polygraph examiners for government or law enforcement agencies.

How is an MA in Forensic Psychology different from a Doctoral degree? Does a Master's Degree in psychology allow for a license to practice psychology? No. The coursework in an MA in Forensic Psychology program is designed to give students the theoretical and practical foundation that can be applied to the specialization of their choice-- law enforcement, legal or organizational consulting or program analysis. Graduates will be prepared to work with forensic populations and systems and to supervise staff working in these areas. The Master of Arts program in Forensic Psychology offered at Argosy University does not lead to a license to practice to psychology.

Doctoral programs in clinical psychology train more broadly in the science and practice of psychology. Doctoral programs allow for licensure as a psychologist which allows a psychologist to work independently in settings that can range from independent practice and mental health centers all the way to hospitals, medical centers and managed care systems. Doctoral applicants with a master's level specialization in forensic psychology have special experiences and skills which might be attractive to doctoral programs. Of course, doctoral programs look at a wide variety of attributes and a master's degree in psychology is not a guarantee that an applicant would be granted admission. As noted earlier, successful completion of a master's degree indicates that students have gained research and applied skills that help establish readiness for ongoing graduate study.

What are the professional requirements of faculty who in an MA in Forensic Psychology program? Faculty are recruited to teach in the program based on their experience working with forensic psychology populations in a variety of settings. Several have extensive experience as clinicians in court and correctional settings, as well as experience consulting with police departments and the military. Many have publications related to their area of interest, including involvement in divisions within APA that work with professional development, advocacy for patients, and training for psychology students.