Review

Psychology and Law Courses

Content and Materials*

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During the past decade the field of psychology of law has changed considerably. Accompanying the growth of research and practice, there has been an increase in offerings of courses in this field. The courses are offered at both undergraduate and graduate levels and cover a wide spectrum of interests. The types of courses currently being offered and the student samples enrolling in the courses are examined. In addition, a review of the major textbooks used in the courses is provided.

According to Loh (1981), the psychology of law field came of age in the 1970s. Since that time, the field of psychology and law has flourished in both applied settings (evaluations for and consultations to courts and legislative bodies) and academia. The broad range of titles of articles published in this journal are evidence of the breadth of the growing field. In addition to the work of individual psychologists, there are other indicia of the emergence of psychology and law as a discipline. In 1976, Tapp noted that the publication of new journals, including Law and Human Behavior, and the growth of the American Psychology–Law Society (APLS) showed the emergence of the psychology and law discipline. More recently, Monahan and Loftus (1982) measured growth by the establishment of Division 41 of the American Psychological Association and the marked increase in scholarly publications focusing on psychology and law. In his review of the

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The developmental history of APLS, Grisso (1991) outlines the stages of growth from the 1960s until the present day citing the initial identity issues for the field, the creation of a newsletter, the formation of Division 41 of the American Psychological Association, and eventual merger of the two groups in 1984. Membership in the Society/Division continues to increase each year; the number of nonpsychologist members highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the field. The growth of the organization also prompted the creation of a student division to actively involve students in psychology and law experiences.

During the 1980s, education and training in psychology and law expanded in terms of programs, courses, and workshops. Joint degree programs have flourished, producing students who are employed in a wide variety of psychology and law academic and applied settings (Hafemeister, Ogloff, & Small, 1990). The reader is directed to several publications (cf. Grisso, Sales, & Bayless, 1982; Hafemeister, Ogloff, & Small, 1990; Melton, 1987; Roesch, Grisso, & Poythress, 1986) for detailed descriptions of the development and content of these programs.

In conjunction with the research, scholarly writings, and practice considerations, there has been growth in the number of universities offering courses on this topic at both the undergraduate and graduate level. In their survey of psychology graduate programs, Grisso et al. (1982) found that 85 (23%) offered at least one course in psychology and law. Approximately one third of these concentrated on the legal regulations of the practice of psychology; the remainder were defined as psychology applied to law. Grisso et al. (1982) expressed concern that the courses were too broadly based while Roesch et al. (1986) suggested that students might enroll specifically for an introduction to the discipline and its application to career interests. A more detailed description of an undergraduate psychology and law general course can be found in Greene (1987).

In 1983, to assist instructors in developing courses in psychology and law, APLS printed the first edition of Psychology and Law syllabi under the direction of Ronald Roesch. The first edition included 28 syllabi, 25 of which were undergraduate courses. The second edition of the series, which was printed in 1988 under the direction of this author, featured 35 offerings, supporting Melton's (1987) prediction that involvement in offering courses in psychology and law would continue to increase. At least 25% of the copies of this project were requested by nonpsychologists; some of these were requested by law schools and libraries, providing further evidence of the field's broad acceptance. Though the offerings outlined in both editions are by no means exhaustive of the courses taught around the country as described by Grisso et al. (1982), they are likely to be representative of the courses taught by members of APLS and those actively involved in either research or applications of the field. The reader should also be aware that a similar syllabus compilation project was undertaken by the Law and Society Association in 1989 on a broad range of interdisciplinary topics.

This essay will examine the motivations of students for enrolling in these psychology/law courses and review a sampling of the course offerings, the assigned reading materials, and books. Material for the review was drawn from the syllabi found in the second edition of the APLS project.