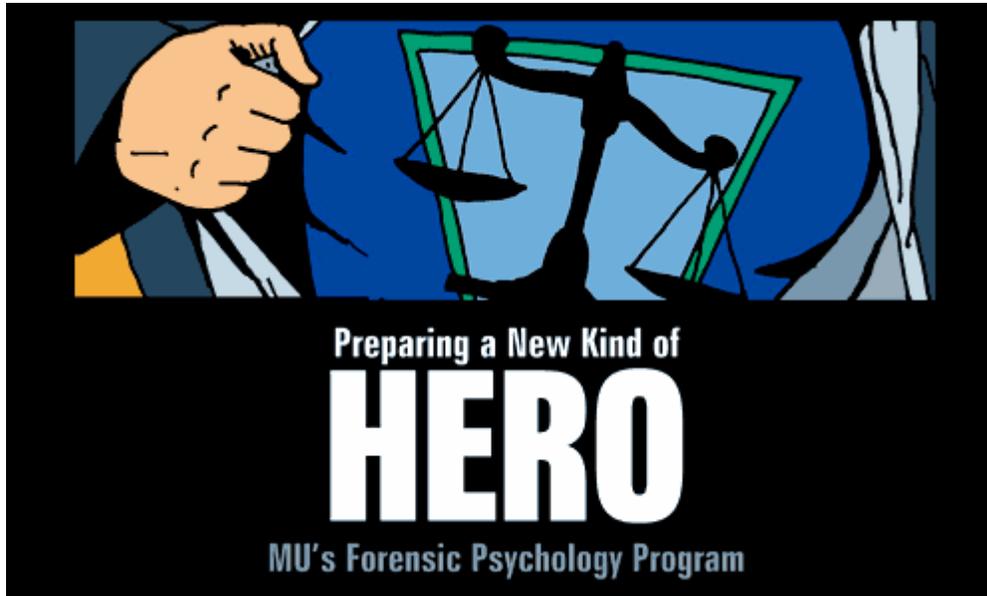


Who wants to be a champion for those shunned by society? Who will strive to understand, and speak for, the victims of violent crime, the mentally ill, the homeless...even criminals themselves? The answer lies in Marymount University classrooms where graduate students are being readied for professional roles in the burgeoning field of forensic psychology. Like so many others at Marymount, these students are preparing to make a positive difference in the world.



By Terry Lowe-Edwards

Rozanna Nishimoto's ambition might make some feel squeamish; it may frankly outrage others. A student in Marymount's Master of Arts program in Forensic Psychology, Nishimoto aims to better understand those who commit sex crimes. She is quick to explain that sex offenders are often released back into society and "if they receive proper treatment, maybe we can prevent them from becoming repeat offenders."

Through her connections at Marymount, Nishimoto recently landed a job with a clinical practice engaged in the evaluation and treatment of sex offenders. She says, "I have an interest in exploring the backgrounds of these offenders to learn more about what would lead them to their choices and actions."

Specifically, Nishimoto is interested in "broadening the spectrum of research into juvenile sexual deviance." She explains, "Early intervention is the key to prevention and the protection of the

community. But the research on juveniles is so sparse right now. We have an idea about why juveniles begin to commit sex crimes, but we don't know for sure. ...I'd like to contribute to our knowledge of these offenders, get a better understanding of warning signs, and help improve intervention tools so that we can ultimately decrease the rate of recidivism.”

But how do individuals like Nishimoto get trained to aid in the rehabilitation process? Where can they learn to conduct the kind of cutting-edge research necessary to achieve their goals? Marymount's Master of Arts program in Forensic Psychology has the answer.



Society's ills have necessitated the molding of new heroes — individuals who serve by unselfishly facing some of life's darkest elements in an objective manner. Marymount's Forensic Psychology program prepares students to do just that. The program's graduates work in a variety of settings, including probation and parole; local and state law enforcement; prisons, jails, and juvenile detention facilities; social service agencies; hospitals and mental health facilities; public policy organizations; and federal agencies like the FBI and Department of Justice.

History of the Program

In the mid 1990s, MU School of Education and Human Services Dean Wayne Lesko was doing an internship site-visit for one of his Psychology students at the FBI Academy's Behavioral Science Unit in Quantico, Virginia. He met the unit's director, John Douglas, who has since retired. The legendary Douglas, known globally for using psychological profiling to catch serial killers, spoke with Lesko about the lack of graduate training directly related to the needs of his FBI agents. Lesko recalls, "I started thinking about how things we already did well—Counseling and Criminal Justice—might be combined into a new degree program called Forensic Psychology. We did some research and determined that this was a feasible program idea, and one that would meet a real need."

When Marymount initiated its graduate degree program in Forensic Psychology in 1999, there were only five others like it in the world, and

none in the Washington, DC, area. Lesko notes that several doctoral-level programs did exist at that time; these generally combined the law degree Juris Doctor with a Ph.D. in Psychology. Today, the American Psychology-Law Society's Web site lists just 20 universities across the nation that offer Forensic Psychology graduate-degree programs.

Interest in Marymount's program has skyrocketed since its inception. Seven students enrolled in the first semester; one year later, in fall 2000, the program had 30 applicants. More than 100 have applied so far this year. Seventy-five students are now enrolled in the program.

While matter-of-fact in their demeanor, many of these students have great conviction and zeal for the profession they plan to undertake. Words like "passion," "fascination," and "dedication" are not uncommon in the essays prospective students submit with their applications.

Television may have had something to do with the burgeoning interest in forensic psychology, according to Dr. Mary Lindahl, the program's coordinator. She observes, "You have shows like *The Profiler*, *The Practice*, *Law and Order*. People are fascinated with these issues."

Lindahl believes that the intrigue is heightened because "in a way, law and psychology are incompatible. ...You are wedding two very different disciplines. Psychology assumes determinism—meaning, 'We're going to find out why you did this.' That leaves little room for free will. The legal system generally assumes free will. It doesn't matter what your past was, or whether you were abused as a child. So, in a number of areas the two disciplines clash. That's part of the reason people are so intrigued by this field."

Academically speaking, the field is very new, and the curriculum is constantly evolving. Dr. Lindahl explains, "My generation trained ourselves. There simply weren't any programs in this field."

Yet those working in America's prisons, juvenile courts, and federal and local law enforcement agencies—as well as those working with the mentally ill and the homeless—struggle every day with issues arising from the gray area where law and the human mind intersect. Lindahl believes the Forensic Psychology degree will "greatly increase the skills of the men and women employed in these systems." For instance, she notes, "We now have people working in prisons with little training, doing work that has enormous implications for the future of the prisoners themselves."

Andrew Pecher, an officer with the U.S. Capitol Police and a student in Marymount's program, notes, "Any law enforcement officer deals with

such a diversity of people. Understanding the psychology of why people do what they do makes the job easier—whether you’re talking to a criminal suspect, or trying to reason with someone threatening to commit suicide.” Pecher, whose goal is to work in the area of risk assessment, yearns for the skill and knowledge to determine whether an offender will repeat a crime. Unfortunately, he observes, “the prediction of criminality is not an exact science.”

The Civil Applications

The need for forensic psychology professionals extends beyond the law enforcement community and criminal justice system. One of the program’s first graduates, Kathy Teeple ’01, says she spends a lot of time explaining what her degree means: “Almost everyone I encounter assumes ‘forensic’ means dealing with the dead, as in forensic pathology. But ‘forensic’ actually means something that relates to, or is used in, legal proceedings.”

So you want to be a criminal profiler?

“At first, everybody who came into, or inquired about, this program wanted to work with the FBI and be a profiler,” School of Education and Human Services Dean Wayne Lesko explains of the initial prospect pool for Marymount’s Master of Arts in Forensic Psychology. Dr. Michael Bolton, MU associate professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice and a former police officer, laughs, “You could probably fill Yankee Stadium three times with all the people who want to be profilers.” Bolton believes that a lot of this interest is media-driven. He observes, “We see serial killers

featured in so many movies and novels. But in reality, most serious crime that involves wounding or killing people is not of a serial nature. This 'everyday' violent crime demands a great deal of law-enforcement attention and, in many cases, it deserves more effort than is currently given. I tell students who are genuinely interested in fighting crime not to focus on what's sensational, but to look at the real needs of society and of the law enforcement profession."

Realistically, says Gregg McCrary '92, "the odds of becoming a profiler are slim." A retired FBI profiler who earned his Master of Arts in Psychological Services from Marymount, McCrary speaks from experience. He says, "Of the approximately 13,000 FBI agents, fewer than 40 are full-time profilers."

While not wishing to discourage anyone from pursuing his or her dream, McCrary points out that there are other equally exciting and worthwhile opportunities. "Many large police departments have their own behavioral science units. These police profilers are now training other officers to become profilers as the demand for

Teeple is a paralegal with the law firm of Donald Caruthers, PC, in Leesburg, Virginia, which handles family law and divorce mediation. In a divorce situation, Teeple explains, “Mediation is a nice way to begin a not-very-nice process.” Of her role, she says, “I assess the psychological reasons behind certain positions taken by our clients. In mediation, the parties are encouraged to talk openly to each other and to listen. I hear all the time how the parties really learned to communicate through mediation. Mediation often lessens the overall damage done by divorce. People leave here feeling like each side has won something. In court, somebody always loses.”

the service grows. This may offer a more realistic opportunity for direct involvement with that kind of work.”

McCrary, a crime consultant for NBC’s Today Show and the NBC Nightly News, heads his own firm, Behavioral Criminology International. The firm is a consultancy that provides expert opinions and analysis on violent crime, premise liability, assessments of dangerousness, and related issues.

Teeple is in the process of completing work to become a certified mediator through the Supreme Court of Virginia. Once certified, she will be involved with an effort to create a system that encourages Loudoun County to work more closely with the courts to refer cases to mediation. She explains, “In Prince William County there is an Office of Dispute Resolution. When a case comes in, the appropriateness of mediation is assessed, and many are referred out to mediators.” Teeple says that a similar system could be created in Loudoun County, and this would ease the burden on the courts while offering individuals an opportunity to resolve their differences in less hostile fashion.

Other Dimensions

As Kathy Teeple’s work shows, professionals with training in forensic psychology are not limited to dealing with criminals or the mentally ill. Student Dave Mykel says, “I was attracted to this profession because I like interaction with people—everyday, normal people.” Mykel goes on to say that he is fascinated with the idea of becoming a trial consultant. Trial consultants, he explains, help create questionnaires used in voir dire, the process of selecting jury members for a particular case. Trial consultants also assist with mock trials to help attorneys craft effective opening statements and closing arguments.

Mykel moved to the Washington, DC, area to attend Marymount after

earning his bachelor's degree in Psychology from the State University of New York at Albany. He says, "I originally wanted to be an FBI agent, but I found trial consulting to be more up my alley." To maximize his understanding of the profession and chances for future success, Mykel began volunteering in the office of Marjorie Fargo, considered one of the leading trial consultants on the East Coast.

Mykel's decision to relocate to the Washington area to enroll in MU's Forensic Psychology program is not unique. Graduate Admissions Counselor Cheryl Nichols notes, "This program is attracting prospective students from the four corners of the nation. We have applicants coming from Florida, Arizona, Washington state, and Michigan."

Capitalizing on DC Connections

Dean Lesko believes that "there's no better place in the world for a program like this. We're in Washington, DC. You have the FBI, the Department of Justice, federal agencies. All of these provide great internship opportunities for our students."

Stephen Furr is one such student. He says, "The tragic events of September 11 had a deep impact on my professional goals. I want to apply the skills I've learned at Marymount in a job related to counter-terrorism."

Furr is already in a good position to begin that career. In his internship with the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Foreign Visits, Assignments, and Travel, he serves as a program analyst, helping to analyze and maintain the various systems used to track foreign nationals who visit any facility owned and/or operated by the Department of Energy. Given the heightened need to protect America's utilities in a post-September 11 world, Furr's career dream may well come true. He is hopeful that his internship will evolve into a permanent full-time position once he has his degree in hand. Marymount students also benefit from the real-life experiences of faculty and world-class guest speakers.

Psychology Department Chair Dr. Carolyn Oxenford explains, "We bring in full-time and adjunct faculty, and guest lecturers, who are actually doing the work. They tell it like it is. But they also have a commitment to the theoretical side and an interest in where the field is going." Mary Lindahl, for instance, brings extensive expertise to the program. She says, "I have testified in court in a great many child abuse cases. My specific area of research is in law and society, and the interaction between psychology and the legal system." Dr. Lindahl and the adjunct faculty members in her program are well connected to the

professional community; guest lecturers they have brought to Marymount include attorneys handling capital murder cases, a polygraph technician, and crisis intervention counselors.

Student Alexis Fooshé values the fact that classroom discussion and learning in the Forensic Psychology program are literally ripped from the headlines. Fooshé, who is fascinated with psychological testing, explains eagerly, “I’m reading a story right now on the front page of The Washington Post about a mentally retarded man who has admitted to sexually assaulting a five-year-old boy, and he’s being released. These are the exact issues we are discussing in class this semester.” Under DC law, suspects with mental retardation who are found incompetent to stand trial are released back into the community. “How should our society handle cases like this?” Fooshé wonders. Her ambition is to develop the expertise to provide much-needed testing services so that the courts can better evaluate offenders and determine appropriate treatment options.

Fooshé reflects, “There are so many misconceptions about forensic psychology—that it’s all about violent offender profiling, or that it’s about the misuse of the insanity plea. Educating individuals about the discipline will help dispel those misconceptions. Our society needs a workforce of professionals who specialize in the unique niche where psychology and the legal system intersect.”

Mark Olshaker, a voice from the professional community, agrees. A novelist, filmmaker, and journalist who has co-authored several books with John Douglas, Olshaker observes, “The great challenge we all face is to understand each other. I can think of no better way to explore this than through a program where you see examples of people at the extremes of society. Then, of course, there are the moral issues: What do we do with criminals? How do we treat them? So this program is an



extremely valuable opportunity for students. It will put them in a good position to make a positive difference.”

As for his own observations of the justice system, having studied and written about a great number of criminals, Olshaker says, “It’s easy for

people in general to be ‘for’ this or ‘against’ that. But you really have to look at the facts before you form an opinion. Everybody’s entitled to an opinion, but it should be based on reality and an understanding of the facts.” Recently, Olshaker shared his experiences with students in the Forensic Psychology program.

Gregg McCrary ’92 is a retired FBI profiler who holds a Master of Arts in Psychological Services from Marymount. He, too, has shared his expertise with MU students. McCrary reflects, “We’re just beginning to understand the nuances of the human mind, and being able to determine those who can be successfully treated and those who cannot. More and more, mental health issues are being litigated in court. There is a pressing need for practitioners who have an understanding not only of the psychological ramifications of these cases, but also of their fit into the criminal justice system.”

Dean Lesko concurs: “We are providing a needed degree. The Forensic Psychology program is a valuable resource for the community and for society at large.”

As for the future of the program, Marymount may again break new ground. Discussion is underway to introduce a joint master’s degree in Counseling and Forensic Psychology. Lesko explains, “The advantage is this: With the counseling degree, the graduate would be eligible for state licensure. I think that would be an extremely marketable degree, one which would uniquely serve a growing societal need.”

Persons interested in obtaining more information about the field of Forensic Psychology, and career opportunities in the discipline, can consult a number of online sources. These include:

**[Psychwatch.com](http://www.psychwatch.com), the online resource for professionals in Psychology and Psychiatry. This site lists links to numerous associations as well as journals, articles, and job listings:
www.psychwatch.com/forensic_page.htm.**

[The American Academy of Forensic Psychology and the American Board of Forensic Psychology](#). Their site offers

information on law and psychology, as well as continuing education programs.

[The American Psychological Association-Division 41](#): American Psychology-Law Society. This site includes information on careers and conferences.

For more information on Marymount's Master of Arts program in Forensic Psychology, contact Dr. Mary Lindahl at (703) 526-6825.