Forensic Psychology Opportunities in Canadian Graduate Programs: An Update of Simourd and Wormith’s (1995) Survey

Leslie Helmus and Kelly M. Babchishin
Carleton University

Joseph A. Camilleri
Westfield State University

Mark E. Olver
University of Saskatchewan

Forensic psychology has gained momentum in North America in recent decades, and Canadian psychologists have made considerable contributions to the field. Strong student interest and a high demand for professionals, however, have not been sufficiently matched with the availability of formal forensic psychology graduate training, nor with sufficient scholarly discussion of this issue. The purpose of the current study was to update Simourd and Wormith’s (1995) survey of forensic psychology training available in Canadian psychology graduate programs. Of the 39 universities with psychology graduate programs, 36 (92%) responded to the survey. Twenty-four universities (67%) offered some forensic opportunities for students, although there was considerable variability in the number of courses, students, and faculty members in the forensic psychology programs. Since Simourd and Wormith’s (1995) survey, forensic training is available at 10 new universities. Of the 14 programs with forensic psychology content in 1995 and in the current study, however, more than half of them reported a decrease in the number of faculty and students working with forensic issues. Considering the continued demand for trained forensic psychologists in applied settings, further attention to the availability of both education and training in forensic psychology is therefore still needed.

Keywords: forensic psychology, criminal justice psychology, graduate training, education

Although it is a recent field, forensic psychology has undergone enormous growth in recent decades (Bersoff, Goodman-Delahunt, Grisso, Hans, Poythress, & Roesch, 1997; Grisso, Sales, & Bayless, 1982; Ogloff, 2000; Poythress, 1979; Watkins, 1992). In 1970 there were no formal graduate degree programs in this area (Ogloff, 2000), but now it is a legitimate and well-recognized field of psychology (Porter, 2004; Pozzulo, Bennell, & Forth, 2006). The growth of the field can be measured by marked increases in specialized textbooks (e.g., Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Bartol & Bartol, 2011; Pozzulo et al., 2006), journals (e.g., Criminal Justice and Behaviour, Law and Human Behaviour, etc.), professional associations (e.g., the American Psychology-Law Society; the Criminal Justice Section of the Canadian Psychological Association), as well as introductory psychology textbooks that incorporate criminal justice issues (Ogloff, 2000).

Before proceeding, some introductory comments on terminology are in order. Several terms (e.g., correctional psychology, criminal justice psychology, legal psychology, criminal forensic psychology) with varying definitions have been applied to this field. We use a relatively broad definition of forensic psychology, which includes any psychological research or practice that is related to criminal behaviour. Similar to Simourd and Wormith’s (1995) definition, it includes the application of psychology to the law or legal systems (e.g., assessments, eyewitness testimony, jury selection and decision-making, offender treatment) or within various criminal justice agencies (e.g., correctional facilities, courts, forensic hospitals, law enforcement, probation). Additionally, forensic psychology also includes basic psychological research on the causes of crime (e.g., evolutionary forensic psychology; Duntley & Shackelford, 2008). Although some definitions of forensic psychology have been restricted to clinical work (e.g., Committee on the Revision of the Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychology, 2010), ours includes both clinical and nonclinical activities.

James Ogloff (2000) has said that “there is absolutely no doubt that the future of legal psychology, whatever it holds, belongs to the students in training and those yet to come” (p. 469). What does the future hold for forensic psychology? Judging by student interest, the future should be promising. Likely related to the enormous popularity of TV shows (e.g., Criminal Minds, Crime Scene Investigation) and movies (e.g., Silence of the Lambs) featuring
criminal behaviour, anecdotal evidence suggests that students have never been more interested in this field. Undergraduate forensic psychology courses are frequently the most popular (Bersoff, 1999; Bersoff et al., 1997) and graduate students have also shown considerable interest in forensic psychology (Ogloff, 1990). A recent survey of 175 counselling/clinical psychology students, for example, found that about half (52%) were interested in forensic training opportunities and about one third (27%) were considering it as a career (although it was possible that those interested in forensic psychology were overrepresented among the survey respondents; Morgan, Beer, Fitzgerald, & Mandracchia, 2007). In another survey, 87 students who had completed internships in correctional settings generally expressed high satisfaction with the internship and greater interest in the correctional field than when they started (Pietz, DeMier, Dienst, Green, & Scully, 1998).

Despite the strong student interest, however, correctional psychology positions have been chronically understaffed (Olver, Preston, Camilleri, Helmus, & Starzomski, 2010; Watkins, 1992). In fact, many authors have noted that the training of students has been insufficient to meet the needs of the field (Bersoff et al., 1997; Grisso et al., 1982; Ogloff, 1990, 2004; Porter, 2004; Watkins, 1992). Proper specialized training is necessary for psychologists to make competent judgments regarding assessment and treatment with sufficient knowledge of legal standards (Ogloff, 1990; Porter, 2004; Poitry, 1979). Despite the clear need for more formal training opportunities in forensic psychology, little attention has been paid to this issue, particularly in Canada (Ogloff, 1990, 2000).

In the United States, an early survey found that 23% of graduate programs in psychology had a law-related course, although 40% of those courses focused on how legal regulations affect the practice of psychology (e.g., ethics courses; Grisso et al., 1982). In another survey of 103 forensic facilities, approximately 40% had opportunities for student internships and practicum, although postdoctoral opportunities were more limited (Heilbrun & Annis, 1988). Approximately one decade later, a survey of APA-accredited graduate training programs in clinical psychology found similar results—most universities (86%) identified forensic opportunities for their students (e.g., practicum), but only 10 sites provided postdoctoral opportunities (Bersoff et al., 1997). A more recent survey (Morgan et al., 2007) found that counselling and clinical students commonly received at least some exposure to forensic issues. One quarter of students completed a practicum in a correctional/forensic setting, one quarter took a course on forensic issues, and two thirds of students working in nonsecure settings reported having at least one client with a history of criminal behaviour.

A particularly noteworthy milestone for forensic psychology education and training issues was the 1995 Villanova Conference held at the Villanova Law School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Forty-eight invited guests participated, with the goals of identifying aspects of education and training that have worked well in the past, identifying ongoing problems in forensic psychology training, developing strategies to improve the situation, and making recommendations regarding possible model curricula (Bersoff et al., 1997). Since the Villanova Conference, the United States has made limited progress on some of these issues, although there have been some attempts to draw attention to forensic training opportunities. The American Psychology-Law Society has a website for students with listings of programs (clinical, nonclinical, and Master’s) and internships, and it also includes a guide on careers in psychology and law (http://www.ap-ls.org/education/ EducationTraining.php).

There has been comparatively less discussion of forensic psychology educational opportunities in Canada, which is surprising given that Canadian researchers have been at the forefront in this field (Ogloff, 2004; Porter, 2004). Ogloff (1990) reported data from 26 universities with psychology graduate programs (87% response rate) and found that 16 of them (62%) reported having some faculty members engaged in research and/or practice related to the criminal justice system. Through the Criminal Justice Section of the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), Simourd and Wormith (1995) conducted a survey to examine the availability of forensic psychology opportunities in Canadian universities with psychology graduate programs. Of the 28 universities that responded (82% response rate), just over half (n = 15) reported having some form of forensic training (typically informal opportunities as opposed to a structured forensic program).

Overall, forensic psychology has gained momentum in North America, and Canadian forensic psychologists have made considerable contributions to the field. Strong student interest and high demand for professionals, however, have not been sufficiently matched with the availability of formal forensic graduate training, nor with sufficient scholarly discussion of this issue in Canada. The 1990s witnessed significant growth in forensic psychology opportunities at Canadian universities (Ogloff, 2004), but the development of formal law and psychology programs has lagged, particularly when compared to the United States (Ogloff, 1990).

The purpose of the current study was to investigate whether opportunities for forensic psychology graduate training in Canada have changed since Simourd and Wormith’s (1995) survey and to provide students with a potential resource for identifying forensic training and education opportunities.

**Method**

**Measure**

We used the same survey as Simourd and Wormith (1995), with minor changes in the wording, order, and number of questions for clarity (a copy of the survey is available upon request). The survey was translated into French by the second author for the benefit of including eight universities that were primarily francophone. The survey included questions about what types of graduate programs were offered (e.g., clinical, experimental, neuropsychology), the number of graduate students enrolled in the program, the number of faculty, opportunities for forensic research, whether the forensic psychology training was structured or self-directed, and the availability of courses, research, and internships or practicum in forensic psychology.

**Procedure**

The 2007 edition of the Directory of Canadian Universities (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2007) was used to compile a list of all Canadian universities with a graduate program (Master's or Ph.D.) in psychology (the same methodology used by Simourd & Wormith, 1995). The directory listed 42 universities with graduate psychology programs, but 3 universities
subsequently indicated that they did not have such a program (e.g., it was in progress but not yet operational). This resulted in the identification of 39 universities with active psychology graduate programs.

An e-mail was sent to each psychology department (typically to the Chair or Graduate Chair identified on the university’s website) inviting the recipient to participate in a survey on the availability of forensic psychology content at Canadian universities. The e-mail specified that the results of the survey would not be anonymous, but the information would be used for descriptive purposes only and that no attempt would be made to rank universities according to quality. The survey was posted online on a secure server and departments were given the link as well as an electronic copy should they prefer to send it via e-mail or regular mail. The copy was sent as an e-mail attachment to the eight primarily francophone universities.

Soliciting responses occurred in three stages. First, e-mail requests were sent approximately every four weeks. Next, personalized e-mails were sent every three weeks to universities that had not responded. Lastly, one round of phone calls was made. In total, universities were contacted between 1 and 6 times. In some cases, the initial contact person referred us to another department member. Additional faculty in the department were contacted if the initial contact person did not reply. Responses were received between January and July, 2008, representing the 2007/2008 academic year.

Results

Overall, 36 out of 39 universities participated in the survey (92% response rate). Twenty-five completed the online survey (69%), five completed the electronic copy and sent it back (14%), and six responded via e-mail or telephone (17%; in most cases, they responded to indicate that there were no forensic psychology opportunities at their university). One university had several items missing; this information was completed by the first author from publicly available information and from follow-up e-mails sent to forensic faculty members. Of the 36 universities that responded, 24 (67%) reported at least one forensic opportunity, defined as any faculty member or student involved in forensic research or any forensic courses/internships/practicum available (these universities are listed in Table 1). Four universities (17% of the 24 with forensic content) indicated that they had a structured forensic psychology program with core requirements (Carleton, Dalhousie, Québec à Trois-Rivières, and Simon Fraser). The remaining universities would therefore be considered self-directed (i.e., students could independently pursue forensic content).

Table 1 provides basic descriptive information for the universities with forensic psychology content. Most universities (n = 11) offered both M.A. and Ph.D. programs; five only offered Ph.D. programs, and one only offered an M.A. program (the remaining seven universities did not provide this information). Ten universities indicated that students could obtain forensic training as part of the clinical program (Acadia, Dalhousie, Montréal, New Brunswick (NB), Ph.D. No 2 No 160 15 9% 1 — 18 12 ↑

Quebec à Trois-Rivières (QC) — Yes 8 No 45 10 22% 7 0 25 — —

Queen’s (ON) — No 1 No 88 0 0% 1 0 2 27 ↓

Regina (SK) Ph.D. No 0 No 60 1 2% 1 0 2 3 ↓

Saint-Mary’s (NS) — No 4 No 33 0 0% 4 0 8 7 ↑

Saskatchewan (SK) Both Yes 3 Yes 65 18 28% 9 3 31 10 ↑

Sherbrooke (QC) Ph.D. No 0 Yes 136 3 2% 3 0 7 — —

Simon Fraser (BC) Both Yes 8 Yes 96 25 26% 6 0 40 27 ↑

Toronto (ON) Ph.D. No 0 No 127 1 1% 2 0 3 6 ↓

Victoria (BC) — Yes 0 No 70 0 0% 4 0 4 9 ↓

Western (ON) — Yes 0 No 111 0 0% 1 0 1 — —

Wilfrid Laurier (ON) Both No 0 No 25 3 12% 2 0 5 — —

Windsor (ON) — Yes 0 No 113 3 3% — 4 0 1 — —

York (ON) Both No 0 No 204 5 2% 2 0 7 — —

Total — — — — 2,214 147 5.5% 78 11 268 191.5 —

Table 1 Descriptive Information for Canadian Universities With Forensic Psychology Graduate Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Clinical Courses</th>
<th>Internship?</th>
<th>Total students</th>
<th>FP students</th>
<th>% FP students</th>
<th>All FP faculty</th>
<th>FP adjunct faculty</th>
<th>Size index 1995</th>
<th>Size Change?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acadia (NS)</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia (BC)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14 ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carleton (ON)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>24 ↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalhousie (NS)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3 ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guelph (ON)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>— —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakehead (ON)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.5 ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lethbridge (AB)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>— —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorial (NF)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>— —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montréal (QC)</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18 ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick (NB)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>— —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa (ON)</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12 — — — — —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec à Trois-Rivières (QC)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25 — — — —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen’s (ON)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27 ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regina (SK)</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 ↓ — — — — —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Mary’s (NS)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7 ↑ — — — — —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan (SK)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10 ↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherbrooke (QC)</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>— — — — — — —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Fraser (BC)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27 ↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto (ON)</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6 ↓ — — — — —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria (BC)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9 ↓ — — — — —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western (ON)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>— — — — — — —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilfrid Laurier (ON)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>— — — — — — —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor (ON)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>— — — — — — —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York (ON)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>— — — — — — —</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. FP = Forensic Psychology. Students include those enrolled full-time or part-time. Size index was calculated by summing the number of forensic students, forensic faculty (including adjunct), forensic courses, and whether there was an internship available (worth 1 point). The same variable was summed from Table 1 in Simourd & Wormith (1995) to allow comparisons.
Brunswick, Québec à Trois-Rivières, Saskatchewan, Simon Fraser, Victoria, Western, and Windsor). No additional information about the clinical programs (e.g., accreditation) was obtained. Forensic internships were available at six universities (Acadia, Dalhousie, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Sherbrooke, and Simon Fraser). Nine programs (39%) offered at least one course in the area of forensic psychology, with the total number of courses ranging between 0 and 8 ($M = 1.6$, $SD = 2.6$, $Md = 0$; one university did not respond).

The size of the graduate programs varied considerably across universities. Cumulatively, 23 universities reported having a total of 2,214 psychology graduate students enrolled (full-time or part-time), with the number of students per university ranging between 10 and 290 ($M = 96.3$, $SD = 65.0$, $Md = 88$). In these universities, 147 (5.5%) graduate students were involved in some type of forensic psychology training. The number of forensic students ranged from 0 to 30, with a mean of 6.1 ($SD = 8.1$, $Md = 3$), which represented between 0% and 28% of all psychology graduate students within that university. For five universities, at least 15% of their graduate students were involved in forensic psychology (Carleton, New Brunswick, Québec à Trois-Rivières, Saskatchewan, and Simon Fraser). The number of faculty members (including adjunct) involved in forensic psychology also varied considerably, ranging between 1 and 14 ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 3.3$, $Md = 2$). Only four universities reported having forensic adjunct faculty; we suspect some of the other universities had forensic adjuncts but did not report them on the survey.

To describe the overall size of the forensic psychology programs, we calculated a size index by summing the number of faculty and students involved in forensic psychology, the number of courses available, and whether a forensic internship was available (one point for “yes”). Though this index may not be an optimal global indicator of forensic psychology programs (an optimal index would likely give more weight to the number of faculty members than the number of students, for example), it provides a simple but useful approximation of program size and is similar to the method used in the previous survey (Simourd & Wormith, 1995). The size index ranged from 1 to 49, with a mean of 11.2 ($SD = 12.8$, $Md = 6$). Using a similar index, Simourd and Wormith (1995) divided programs into two groups based on their size. They identified what they called “Group 1” programs, which consisted of the five universities scoring in the top third. Instead, we categorised the top quarter (six universities) as having “bigger” programs because there was a noticeable gap in the size score between the sixth largest program (size index = 18) and the seventh largest (size index = 9).

The six universities with the largest forensic psychology programs were Carleton, New Brunswick, Ottawa, Québec à Trois-Rivières, Saskatchewan, and Simon Fraser. Three of the four universities with structured forensic programs or concentrations were among the six largest forensic universities (Carleton, Québec à Trois-Rivières, and Simon Fraser). The fourth university with a structured program, Dalhousie, was the eighth largest program, tied with Saint-Mary’s. Comparing the five largest programs from Simourd and Wormith (1995) to the six largest in the current study, Carleton and Simon Fraser are the only programs that appeared on both lists. New Brunswick, Ottawa, Québec à Trois-Rivières, and Saskatchewan were new to the list of larger programs. Guelph, Queen’s, and the Ontario Institute of Secondary Education (OISE; part of the University of Toronto) were no longer among the largest programs.

Table 1 also summarizes the size index from Simourd and Wormith’s (1995) survey to assess changes in the availability of forensic psychology content at Canadian universities. In the 1995 survey, 15 universities were identified as having some forensic content. One of those institutions (OISE) was not identified by the 2007 Directory of Canadian Universities as having a graduate psychology program and was not surveyed in the current study. The remaining 14 universities with forensic psychology content in 1995 responded to the current survey and were identified as still having forensic content for their students. Additionally, the current study identified 10 new universities with forensic opportunities.

Although the number of universities with forensic psychology content increased since 1995, the size of the programs within universities did not consistently increase. Examining the size index for the 14 universities with forensic content both in 1995 and 2008, the size of the forensic psychology program decreased for eight of the universities, and increased for only six. The most dramatic decline was at Queen’s University, which went from a size score of 27 to 2. Queen’s had five forensic faculty members in 1995, but only one in 2008. Guelph also experienced a dramatic decrease in their program (from a score of 26 to 4). The sum of the size index across the 14 universities was 191.5 in 1995 and 187 in 2008, indicating an overall decrease (although modest) in forensic psychology content at those 14 universities. Nevertheless, including the size index from the 10 new universities with forensic psychology content, the overall sum of forensic availability in Canada is now 268, which is a notable increase from what was available in 1995 (191.5).

**Discussion**

All 14 universities with forensic psychology training opportunities in 1995 still offered some forensic content when they were surveyed in 2008. The majority of these programs, however, were self-directed and actually decreased in size since 1995. Additionally, 10 new universities have started offering forensic content. Consequently, there has been an overall increase in forensic training opportunities in Canada since 1995. Increases in the number of faculty and students involved in forensic psychology have been matched by an increase in the proportion of Canadian universities offering forensic training (54% of respondents in 1995, compared to 67% in the current study). Only three universities did not respond to the survey; assuming they do not offer any forensic opportunities, forensic content is available in 62% of psychology graduate programs in Canada.

Despite the overall increase in forensic psychology content, it is surprising that 8 of 14 universities decreased their forensic program since 1995 given the high student interest and the demands in applied settings previously identified (Bersoff et al., 1997; Morgan et al., 2007; Ogloff, 1990). This finding might suggest that calls for more formal forensic psychology educational opportunities in Canada have not been sufficiently addressed (Bersoff et al., 1997; Ogloff, 2004; Porter, 2004).

The current study updates and expands upon Simourd and Wormith (1995) by providing more recent data with a higher response rate (92% compared to 82%). The higher response rate was likely due to the numerous follow-ups (up to six contacts) and
the greater ease of completing the survey (e.g., online or via e-mail). Additionally, the survey was translated into French, facilitating accessibility for francophone universities.

It is important to note that the current study is descriptive and therefore cannot be used to judge the quality of forensic psychology training across universities. Four universities reported having a structured forensic program (i.e., with core requirements) but the content that distinguishes structured and self-directed programs is unclear. For example, at Carleton University, students concentrating in forensic psychology are expected to produce a thesis in that area and are encouraged to take courses related to forensic psychology, but no other requirements are needed for the concentration. Students graduating from Carleton with a concentration in forensic psychology may therefore be similar to students in self-directed programs in terms of their exposure to forensic training.

Though we used an index to measure the overall size of programs in order to compare our results to Simourd and Wormith’s (1995) survey, the index did not capture other important program details. For example, both Ottawa University and the University of New Brunswick received a score of 18 on our size index, but had very different profiles. New Brunswick reported eight forensic faculty and nine forensic graduate students, whereas Ottawa reported only one forensic faculty member and 15 graduate students. Thus, New Brunswick could provide more course opportunities, more supervision opportunities, and better teacher-to-student ratios than Ottawa. Future research should use alternative indices in order to identify these differences.

Another limitation of the current study is the methodology used (relying on individuals within each department to respond). Such an approach likely resulted in variability in the reliability of information provided by individuals completing the survey, and may result in differential levels of accuracy. For example, very few universities reported having adjunct forensic faculty members. Based on our knowledge of some of the programs, we believe that some universities with adjunct forensic faculty did not report them. This inconsistency of including or excluding adjunct faculty makes it difficult to compare the size of the programs and further demonstrates that our size index (which included the total number of faculty) is an approximation. To facilitate comparisons across programs, Table 1 specifies the number of adjunct faculty that were reported.

As a final caveat, the results of the survey should be interpreted in light of the definition of forensic psychology that we adopted. The survey asked respondents to report content that was related to forensic training and education issues (Bersoff et al., 1997; Ogloff, 2004; Porter, 2004). For forensic psychology to thrive, specialized training is needed (Ogloff, 1990; Porter, 2004; Poythress, 1979). The current survey adds to previous research on the availability of forensic psychology training opportunities in Canada (Ogloff, 1990; Simourd & Wormith, 1995) and the United States (Bersoff et al., 1997; Griss et al., 1992; Heilbrun & Annis, 1988; Morgan et al., 2007). More discussion, however, should focus on the nature of training that is needed by the next generation of forensic psychologists (e.g., establishing training standards and/or model curricula; Bersoff et al., 1997; Watkins, 1992). For example, there is an important difference in the qualifications and competence of graduate students receiving limited exposure to forensic psychology (e.g., taking a single course and possibly writing a thesis on an offender sample) versus receiving extensive and specialized training through a comprehensive and structured forensic program (e.g., multiple forensic courses, clinical training in forensic settings, and multiple opportunities to conduct research on forensic topics). The results of this survey suggest that most forensic graduate students are not receiving comprehensive forensic training (or at least that it is not mandated by their university).

It is our hope that this survey provides a useful resource about the availability of graduate opportunities in forensic psychology at Canadian universities. Students should keep in mind, however, that these responses were current as of 2008 and some fluctuations since the time of the survey would be expected (e.g., faculty retiring or relocating, new faculty hires). Nonetheless, this survey should assist students who are contemplating graduate training in forensic psychology. Although many students may be aware of the universities with larger forensic programs, this study highlights the diverse forensic training opportunities throughout the country, hopefully illuminating options that some students may not have considered. One next step in establishing resources for students would be to create a list of each faculty member involved in forensic research or practice and to specify what are their research/clinical interests. Such a list is currently being developed by the student representatives of the Criminal Justice Psychology Section of CPA and should hopefully be posted on the CPA Criminal Justice Psychology Section website in the near future.

Résumé

Au cours des dernières décennies, la psychologie judiciaire a gagné du terrain en Amérique du Nord, et les psychologues canadiens ont grandement contribué à son évolution. Malgré l’intérêt manifeste des étudiants et la demande importante de professionnels, la formation officielle offerte dans ce domaine, comme les discussions savantes sur ce sujet, est insuffisante. La présente étude avait pour objectif de mettre à jour l’enquête de Simourd et Wormith (1995) portant sur la formation en psychologie judiciaire offerte dans les programmes d’études supérieures de psychologie au Canada. Sur les 39 universités offrant ce niveau d’études, 36 (92 %) ont répondu à l’enquête. Parmi elles, 24 (67 %) ont offert quelques ouvertures en psychologie judiciaire aux étudiants, mais le nombre de cours, d’étudiants et de professeurs varient suivant l’institution. Depuis l’enquête de Simourd et Wormith, une formation médicolégale est offerte dans 10 nouvelles universités. Dans l’enquête de 1995 et la récente étude, sur les 14 programmes comprenant un volet de psychologie légale, plus de la moitié...
d’entre eux ont déclaré une diminution du nombre de professeurs et d’étudiants travaillant dans le domaine médicolégal. Compte tenu de la demande de psychologues judiciaires, il faut maintenir un enseignement et une formation accrus dans cette spécialisation.

Mots-clés : psychologie judiciaire, psychologie de justice pénale, études supérieures, enseignement

References


Received July 1, 2010
Revision received January 31, 2011
Accepted February 1, 2011