

INTRODUCTION

WHY YOU SHOULD USE THIS BOOK

You should use this book. Whether you are teaching a forensic psychology class for the first time, have been doing so for years, or are looking for ways to incorporate psychology and law material into a separate, yet related, course, you should use this book. Why? Because a body of empirical research supports the use of experiential and active learning techniques in the classroom. Specifically, the incorporation of these types of activities increases students' understanding of course material, their critical thinking skills, as well as their reported interest and motivation to learn content (e.g., Balch, 2012; Banyard & Fernald, 2002; Fass, 1999; Schwarzmüller, 2011).

As the number of courses offered in psychology and law and forensic psychology continues to rise, so does our understanding of what works in classrooms focused on psycholegal topics (Najdowski, Bottoms, Stevenson, & Veilleux, 2015). Several years ago, when we set out to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of incorporating experiential learning activities in undergraduate psychology and law courses, we were not sure what we would find. We knew that we, and many of our colleagues, enjoyed creating and implementing experiential learning opportunities in our courses and that our students seemed to thrive when presented with real-world simulations and tasks. But does it actually work? Does it improve learning in psychology and law courses?

As you may have guessed, it did (why else would we spend so much time writing this book?). In our study of just under 300 students across four universities, we found that including experiential activities increased exam performance for certain topics; it also consistently and significantly increased students' ratings of their interest and engagement in the course. Students rated the course and instructor higher when experiential activities were used and rated the coursework as more manageable (Zelechowski, Riggs

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0000080-001>

Activities for Teaching Psychology and Law: A Guide for Instructors, by A. D. Zelechowski, M. Wolbransky, and C. L. Riggs Romaine

Copyright © 2018 by the American Psychological Association. All rights reserved.

Romaine, & Wolbransky, 2017). Altogether, students in courses that used experiential activities were more engaged in the course and their learning. This is exactly what theory tells us should happen. Experiential learning engages students in an active learning process in which they are required to go beyond mere memorization, requiring a deeper level of evaluation, analysis, and application of course-related concepts. It demands students engage with the material, organizing it into meaningful concepts, and further comprehending under what conditions this information is useful (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Incorporating experiential activities in the classroom deepens student knowledge of core psycholegal concepts and improves student understanding of how to best apply this knowledge when faced with complex, real-world scenarios.

Accordingly, our goal was to create a collection of activities that apply to a wide range of topics typically covered in psychology and law, forensic psychology, and related courses. This book offers 17 experiential activities to enhance students' learning, understanding, and enjoyment of the related course content. The activities included in this book are not intended to serve as comprehensive coverage of all relevant topics or applications in the field of psychology and law. On the contrary, there are likely many more activities that can be considered, depending on the particular focus and scope of your course, the level of your students, and the logistical constraints you face in your setting. If you encounter topics you think are worth incorporating in experiential formats, please let us know.

AUDIENCE

The audience for this book is instructors who teach psychology and law-related topics in a wide variety of courses at various academic levels. For any activity, the depth and nuance introduced and required by the instructor can be varied to fit the course level. Our intent is that undergraduate faculty, law and graduate school professors, and even high school psychology teachers can find activities and ideas in this book to enhance their students' mastery and enjoyment of various content areas. We purposefully included activities related to a diverse array of topics that can be incorporated into a wide variety of psychology courses (e.g., forensic psychology, social psychology, cognitive psychology, introductory psychology, trauma psychology, developmental psychology, testing and assessment), as well as other disciplines (e.g., law, criminal justice, sociology, criminology, political science, social justice). This book does not assume you have particular expertise or experience as a forensic psychologist or attorney. Rather, every activity includes information about specific concepts and topics you will need to have covered in the course before facilitating the activity, as well as suggested print and electronic resources for you and your students to gain additional background knowledge, if needed or desired.

Many of the activities in this book have been tested in a variety of settings, including traditional, online, and hybrid class formats; small, medium, and large enrollment classes; and in high school, undergraduate, and graduate-level courses. Every activity includes suggested modifications for tailoring the activity to suit your particular class structure.

COMPANION WEBSITE

As you'll soon see, the activities in this book incorporate numerous class handouts. Some of the handouts are assignment sheets, and others are tools to assist in facilitating the activity. Each of these handouts can be modified depending on your course needs and logistics. Readers can download free electronic, modifiable versions of all handouts and grading rubrics from the book's companion website, <http://pubs.apa.org/books/supp/zelechowski/>. You are encouraged to modify these materials to best suit your class goals,

content, structure, and practicalities. In addition, several activities require the use of visual or electronic media components (e.g., videos, pictures), which can also be accessed for free on the website.

CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF ACTIVITIES

Some of the activities focus on one specific topic in psychology and law (e.g., jury selection), and therefore, it would make sense to use them in class when that topic is being covered. However, other activities could be incorporated at various times throughout a psychology and law or forensic psychology course. Table 1 provides a quick overview of various topics for which each activity could apply, as well as the activity format(s) for traditional face-to-face courses. Each activity also includes modifications for online and hybrid courses, as well as classes of various sizes and lengths.

Each activity description is designed to provide all of the information you will need to effectively implement the activity within your course. Thus, each activity uses the following structure:

- *Overview*: This italicized section at the beginning of each activity gives a brief snapshot of the activity and how it might fit into your overall course format. We do not provide specific time lengths because each activity will vary with class size and depth of discussion and can be modified depending on the time you set aside for the activity.
- *Learning objectives*: This section provides specific learning goals you can modify depending on the extent to which you incorporate various elements of each activity.
- *Preparation*: This section explains what preparation is required before an activity can be effectively implemented. We offer a list of topics students should have learned, or, at a minimum, been introduced to, before engaging in the exercise. We also list the necessary materials for the activity, including handouts for you and/or the students (which can be accessed on the book's companion website).
- *Facilitation*: Step-by-step instructions are provided to help you smoothly implement the activity. These include tips for setting up the classroom, instructions to give to students, and suggestions for using the activity handouts.
- *Debriefing*: Once an activity has concluded, use the debriefing questions in this section to guide your class discussion after the activity is completed. This allows students to share their experiences, further apply the activity content to relevant course topics, and discuss any issues that arose during the exercise. Many consider this debriefing and reflection a central part of experiential learning (e.g., Kolb & Kolb, 2005) and you may find your students both enjoy and benefit from this reflection on what they experienced.
- *Grading*: Not every exercise needs to be formally evaluated or included in students' class grade calculations. However, many activities offer the opportunity to create a class requirement around that particular exercise and may serve as major course components (e.g., a final paper or group presentation). Specific grading rubrics have been included in Activities 10 and 16 because these are specialized writing assignments. Additionally, more general grading rubrics for participation, writing assignments, and class presentation are included in Appendixes A, B, and C and can be applied and modified for any activity depending on how you are using it within your course. Rubrics, like other activity materials, can also be found on the book's companion website.

Table 1. Overview of Activity Topics and Formats

Activity	Topic areas	Format(s)
1. Fact or Fiction: Psychology and Law in the Media	Course introduction/overview	In-class activity
2. Legality Versus Morality Debate	Course introduction/overview Legal system Philosophies of justice and the basis for laws	In-class activity
3. A Brief Trial	Court process Legal system	In-class activity
4. Who Do You Want? The <i>Voir Dire</i> Process	Juries Jury selection research and evidence (Can be used as the start of a term-long mock-trial)	In-class activity
5. Psychological Profile of a Murder Suspect	Psychological component of criminal profiling Psychology of crime Theories of crime	In-class activity
6. Voices for Victims	Psychology of victimization Trauma in the justice system	Small-group presentations
7. To Protect and Serve: Training Law Enforcement	Police psychology Training and collaboration across disciplines and systems	Small-group presentations
8. Do You See What I See? Eyewitness Identification	Eyewitness memory False identification	In-class activity Writing assignment (optional)
9. To Waive or Not to Waive? <i>Miranda</i> Rights and Due Process	Interrogations <i>Miranda</i> rights and waivers Application of legal precedents	In-class activity
10. Evaluating Juvenile Competency to Stand Trial	Criminal forensic mental health assessment Juvenile justice Forensic report-writing	Writing assignment
11. A Journey Through Civil Commitment	Civil forensic mental health assessment Civil commitment	In-class activity Small-group presentations
12. Do You Swear to Tell the Truth? Expert Testimony	Expert witnesses/testimony Child custody	In-class activity
13. Can We Predict? Appraising and Reducing Risk	Sentencing Criminal forensic mental health assessment Risk assessment	Small-group presentations
14. Freeze! What's a Juvenile Justice Facility to Do?	Juvenile justice Forensic and clinical consulting	In-class activity
15. Problem Solved? Creating a Problem-Solving Court	Legal system Adult corrections	Small-group presentations
16. May It Please the Court: Amicus Curiae Brief	Public policy Legal system Court process	Writing assignment
17. What Would SCOTUS Do?	Trial process Judicial decision-making	In-class activity

- *Modifications*: Courses differ depending on the type of academic institution, student makeup (including varying majors), the term length (e.g., quarter, semester), or even the time of year. We offer suggestions on how the activity can fit into your class, regardless of how many students are enrolled, how many weeks are in a term, or how many hours per week your class meets. Furthermore, given the increase in hybrid and online courses being offered across the country, we include modifications for these class formats as well.
- *Content notes (for select activities)*: Knowing that instructors will vary in their familiarity with any given topic, we include content notes for some activities. These provide basic background information about a topic when such information would be useful to you and your students.
- *Resources (for select activities)*: For some activities, we also include references to other sources for more information. Although the resource lists are not intended to be exhaustive, we believe they will help novice instructors or even students gain a better understanding of the topic.

How to Use This Book

Choosing and Implementing Activities

It is probably not realistic to implement all of these activities in a semester-long course. Many of the activities require more than one class session, involve students working for a period of time in groups outside of the classroom, and demand different amounts of preparatory work. For these reasons, choose activities that best fit within your course. We suggest making this decision based on your individual teaching style, specific course goals, and a realistic evaluation of how much time you will need to effectively prepare, facilitate, and grade the activity (or activities). For each activity, we include information on the preparation required and the time students will need to reasonably complete the assignment. For example, Activity 16: May It Please the Court: Amicus Curiae Brief requires students to complete an independent review of the relevant literature and, as such, requires a period of several weeks between assignment and completion. It is important to note that these activities can be used in any class structure and with any relevant textbook. To help you decide when during the course an activity would be most beneficial, consult Table 1, which outlines the psychology and law topic(s) highlighted within each activity and lists the activity format. If you are incorporating more than one activity, varying the activity formats (e.g., in-class small-group discussions, out-of-class presentation preparation, a short writing assignment) may increase student interest and engagement.

We encourage you to read an activity all the way through (i.e., read the entire activity and take a look at the accompanying materials on the companion website) before deciding whether to implement it. This will ensure the smoothest implementation process. For each activity, you will want to set aside adequate time to cover the necessary didactic information beforehand. Some activities may only need part of a class; others take place over multiple class periods, requiring that you build in time for those sessions in your overall course schedule. Implementing these activities may also change your course grading structure, which is best decided before the start of a term (or as early as possible) so that it can be conveyed to students and any related questions or concerns addressed in a timely manner. We also encourage you to visit the book's companion website as you plan. For most of the activities, the resources posted there are key components for facilitation.

Creating Small Groups

Many of the activities consist of work undertaken in small groups (e.g., Activity 7: To Protect and Serve: Training Law Enforcement). There are differing opinions regarding how many students should work together for small-group activities. Some education scholars consider a small group as a minimum of three students because two students (otherwise referred to as a dyad) may not provide the diversity and creativity expected from small-group work (Beebe & Masterson, 2003). Others have cited six as the ideal number for small-group work (Booth, 1996), although a range from five to eight is viewed as acceptable (Exley & Dennick, 2004). That being said, as group size increases, the opportunity for each group member to actively participate decreases. It follows that the less time available for group work, the smaller the groups should be. There are also different benefits depending on the number of students in a small group. Smaller groups allow each member the opportunity to participate, provide more opportunity for physical proximity (increasing eye contact and other nonverbal communication), and greater feelings of responsibility to the group and other group members. At the upper range (five or six students), such groups provide a more diverse experience and more diverse viewpoints among members.

With regard to how to assign small groups, there are various options. You could choose to have students form their own groups. Typically, students will work together with those peers with whom they have a previous relationship (or friendship). This can result in groups in which students feel comfortable working with one another and implement effective communication styles. Conversely, students with prior friendships may not use time effectively. Other options for assigning groups include random selection (e.g., go around the room having students say “a,” “b,” “c,” etc., and group accordingly) or creating groups based on known student characteristics. The last thing to consider is whether you will have students work in the same group throughout the term. This will depend on how many small-group activities you plan to include in a semester and on the class format. For example, we recommend that online classes keep small groups the same because it takes time for groups to develop effective communication strategies and learn each group member’s role. Having the same group work together, therefore, allows for the best use of time.

Given this background, we suggest the following guidelines when implementing small-group work:

- Small groups should generally include between three and six students.
- Adjust the number of students in each group depending on your class size and goals for the group activity, attempting to make small groups of equal size.
- Be sure sufficient time is available for each group member to actively participate in the group (i.e., the less time available, the smaller the group size).
- Decide the method for choosing groups ahead of time, and consider using different methods if groups will change members between activities.

Setting the Stage

The last component to consider when implementing these experiential activities into your course is how to create the most realistic (i.e., “real-world”) environment. In

each activity, we offer practical considerations, such as how to set up your classroom furniture and what should be written on the whiteboard. There are also many activities in which you, as the instructor, may take on different roles and will want to portray that role accordingly (e.g., take a hard stance as a judge, ask challenging and confrontational questions as an attorney). As instructors using these activities, we have found it helpful to sometimes dress the part or otherwise visually demonstrate our changing roles to students. This can be as simple as standing on one side of the room when asking questions as the prosecuting attorney and on the other side when serving as the defense attorney, or as silly as holding a sign or image over one's head while serving in that role. Students have responded positively to these attempts and noted that they helped them understand the perspective and agenda of those in various roles.

Another easy way to increase an activity's ecological validity, or generalization to real-world settings, is to incorporate people who are actually involved in the focus of the activity. Collaborating with community partners provides numerous benefits to your students, the course, and possibly your work overall. We suggest you seek out the assistance of local attorneys, judges, police officers, or even high school students. Community members can play their respective roles in an activity. For example, an attorney can cross-examine students in Activity 12: Do You Swear to Tell the Truth? Expert Testimony. Alternatively, you could have high school students assume acting roles within an activity, such as playing the witnesses in Activity 5: Psychological Profile of a Murder Suspect. Even if they are not actively involved in the activity facilitation, asking a local police officer, campus security officer, or judge to attend a class on a relevant topic will provide students with a different and important perspective on how the exercise affects daily life and actual decision-making in various professions and roles. (For further discussion of these suggestions, see Zelechowski, 2016.)

Most important, have fun with these activities! As we have found, students who enjoy class are more motivated to learn the course content. The same is true for professors and instructors. We want to remain interested in the material we teach, including the methods we use to convey that information. In this way, we stay motivated and model for our students, through our creativity and enthusiasm, the importance of actively applying their knowledge throughout their academic and professional careers. We have found these activities to be effective in our classrooms and have had lots of fun writing, testing, and using them. We hope you will too. We are extremely interested in your implementation of these activities into your classrooms. We encourage you to tell us about your experiences, and are open, and excited, to hear your feedback (whatever that feedback might be!). We are always on the lookout for ways to further improve and empirically evaluate these activities or modifications thereof. We look forward to hearing from you.

RESOURCES

- Baepler, P., Walker, J. D., Brooks, D. C., Saichaie, K., & Petersen, C. I. (2016). Managing student groups. In *A guide to teaching in the active learning classroom: History, Research, and Practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Jaques, D., & Salmon, G. (2008). *Learning in groups: A handbook for face-to-face and online environments* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Roberts, T. S., & McInnerney, J. M. (2007). Seven problems of online group learning (and their solutions). *Educational Technology & Society, 10*, 257–268. Retrieved from http://www.ifets.info/journals/10_4/22.pdf

REFERENCES

- Balch, W. R. (2012). A free-recall demonstration versus a lecture-only control: Learning benefits. *Teaching of Psychology, 39*, 34–37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0098628311430170>
- Banyard, V. L., & Fernald, P. S. (2002). Simulated family therapy: A classroom demonstration. *Teaching of Psychology, 29*, 223–226. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S15328023TOP2903_10
- Beebe, S. A., & Masterson, J. T. (2003). *Communicating in small groups*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Booth, A. (1996). Assessing group work. In A. Booth & P. Hyland (Eds.), *History in higher education* (pp. 276–297). Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.). (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Exley, K., & Dennick, R. (2004). *Small group teaching: Tutorials, seminars and beyond*. New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Fass, M. E. (1999). A forensic psychology exercise: Role-playing and the insanity defense. *Teaching of Psychology, 26*, 201–203. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S15328023TOP260309>
- Kolb, A., & Kolb, D. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 4*, 193–212. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/AMLE.2005.17268566>
- Najdowski, C. J., Bottoms, B. L., Stevenson, M. C., & Veilleux, J. C. (2015). A historical review and resource guide to the scholarship of teaching and training in psychology and law and forensic psychology. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 9*, 217–228. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tep0000095>
- Schwarzmueller, A. (2011). A multi-model active learning experience for teaching social categorization. *Teaching of Psychology, 38*, 158–161. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0098628311411783>
- Zelechowski, A. D. (2016, Summer). Experiential learning in psychology and law. *American Psychology–Law Society Newsletter: Teaching Tips*, 10–12. Retrieved from <http://www.apadivisions.org/division-41/publications/newsletters/news/2016/07/issue.pdf>
- Zelechowski, A. D., Riggs Romaine, C., & Wolbransky, M. (2017). Teaching psychology and law: An empirical evaluation of experiential learning. *Teaching of Psychology, 44*, 222–231. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0098628317711316>