

## Psychiatry Service Spotlight

### Law & Psychiatry Program



The UMMS Law & Psychiatry Program began in 1986 with funding from the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (MA DMH) and has promoted training, research and clinical activities throughout its 33 years in operation. In 2006, the Program expanded to providing technical assistance to justice and forensic agencies through its specialty technical assistance centers. The

Law and Psychiatry Program is co-directed by Ira Packer, PhD, Professor, and Gina Vincent, PhD, Associate Professor who work with an additional 13 faculty members, postdoctoral fellows, project directors, research coordinators, and administrative support staff. Many faculty members affiliated with the Law & Psychiatry Program are contractually accountable to one or more Division Heads or Center Directors within the Psychiatry Department. Thus, the Program serves an active organizing and coordinating function for the Department that spans its Divisions and Centers, assuring systematic productivity and growth of faculty activities focused on law & psychiatry-related and justice research, policy and forensic practice.

The mission of the UMMS Law and Psychiatry Program is to train and maintain a highly competent cadre of forensic clinicians and researchers to provide **technical assistance/training, research, and clinical practice** that promotes best practice in the application of psychiatry and psychology to **public policy**. The program has the following components:

1. **Forensic Clinical** – the Program holds a contract with the MA DMH to provide clinical forensic services at DMH facilities, serving courts throughout the state. We produce over 900 forensic reports a year, and also consult to DMH facilities regarding forensic patients.
2. **Forensic Training** – the Program holds additional contracts with the MA DMH to maintain both a Psychology and a Psychiatry Postdoctoral Fellowship programs. Our Forensic Psychology Postdoctoral (Residency) program is considered the premier training site in the nation for Forensic Psychologists.
3. **Justice and Forensic Research and Technical Assistance:** Over the past 30 plus years, we have maintained a mixed portfolio of research grants and contracts, including federal (e.g., NIDA, NIMH, OJJDP, SAMHSA, NSF), state (locally and nationally), and private (e.g., MacArthur, William T Grant, Sidney Baer, Jr.) funding. All grants and contracts focus on a single objective: To perform research that advances best practices in the application of Psychiatry and Psychology to public policy, and to assist public agencies through technical assistance and policy development to implement evidence-based practices. Our research grants and technical assistance contracts focus on adolescents and adults with psychosocial, mental health and substance-related needs who are in contact with the justice system, advancing their development and welfare while promoting public safety. This includes the following primary activities:
  - **Applied and Implementation Science Justice-Related Research** – We maintain a strong program of research in juvenile and criminal justice, development and implementation of validated behavioral health screening and risk assessment instruments, forensic issues, ethics, and other areas where the justice system interfaces with mental health and substance abuse. Our research portfolio sits within the UMMS Implementation Science & Practice Advances Research Center (iSPARC), has a 60% grant hit rate and has brought over \$24 million in research funding into the Department.
  - **The Massachusetts Center of Excellence for Specialty Courts** – a training, technical assistance, and research center for drug, mental health, and veteran's courts in the

Commonwealth of MA funded by the Executive Office of the Trial Court. Over the past five years, the Center of Excellence has obtained over \$9 million in external grant funding.

- **The Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI-2) Helpdesk** - a 'fee for service' technical assistance support that assists juvenile justice agencies, nationally and internationally, in training and implementation of the MAYSI-2 behavioral health screen. Our Helpdesk was previously part of our other technical assistance center, the National Youth Screening and Assessment Project (NYSAP), which assisted juvenile justice agencies with implementing screening and assessment instruments to conduct research-informed decisions regarding risk management with youth. Our work has led to significant increases in rates of youth being diverted away from the system across the country and significant reductions in youth confinement.