

# Lab in Focus: An Insight to the Lab of Dr. Vivian Ta

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As psychology becomes a growing area of interest throughout Lake Forest College, more and more talented professors come to the forefront of our faculty. This year's Lab in Focus: the Ta lab, led by Assistant Professor of Psychology Vivian Ta. Professor Ta specializes in experimental psychology, natural language processing, and social psychology among many other fields of study. The Ta lab specializes in improving tools for measuring police performance as well as examining the role of expertise in police use-of-force decision-making.

Professor Ta's interest in the analysis of use-of-force tactics used by police officers came as a bit of a surprise. While she has always loved all areas of Psychology, her interest in use-of-force tactics began when she realized an external group of researchers in this domain would benefit from a psychologist's perspective and ability to make sense of verbal behaviors. Although it was a bit of a learning curve to understand policing and its literature, she knew immediately this was what she wanted to research for future projects.

Professor Ta attended graduate school at the University of Texas at Arlington, where she studied psychology. At this time, however, her mind was set on becoming a psychiatrist. This plan changed when she was invited to a summer seminar covering personality and social psychology. It was a two-week course to which only the top 75 grad students in the area were invited. While there, she met others who were interested in becoming professors and conducting their own research on topics of their choosing, which captured Dr. Ta's attention immediately.

These events have ultimately led Dr. Ta to Lake Forest College, where she has been teaching for 6 years. In her lab at the college, she conducted her own project in collaboration with the sociology, criminology, social justice, and human factors departments. Dr. Ta's most recent project observed and analyzed the difference in use-of-force tactics in novice police officers when compared to experienced officers. She did so by showing police officers real bodycam footage, surveying their possible responses to the situation, and analyzing their de-escalation tactics.

The main goal of Dr. Ta's study was to answer why some officers use a certain level of brute force to de-escalate a situation in comparison to other officers. It concluded that more experienced officers were less likely to use brute force in a potentially dangerous situation than novice officers were. The rationale behind these findings is that veterans justify and interpret civilian actions/ reactions differently than novice officers. This may be due to their greater experience seeing the negative consequences of aggression and escalation against civilians.

These findings are beneficial because they highlight a need within the judicial system for more de-escalation training for novice officers. Increased de-escalation training, potentially using Dr. Ta's bodycam footage analysis, could lead to less police brutality, fewer civilian injuries, and an overall more friendly and empathetic police force. The Ta lab is making large strides not only at Lake Forest College, but also in the real world. And Professor Ta and her group of student lab assistants are only getting started.

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