APA Amicus Briefs
The APA recently filed amicus briefs in two cases that may go before the United States Supreme Court. In Dassey v. Dittman, the Court has been asked to revisit the case of Brendan Dassey (you may remember him from Making a Murderer) and determine whether a confession made by a juvenile with significant intellectual deficits and social limitations was voluntary. APA’s amicus brief presents information on the social sciences related to risk factors for false confessions and the attributes of juveniles and individuals with intellectual disability that should be considered in terms of criminal justice involvement.

In Madison v. Alabama, the Court has been asked to consider whether it is constitutional to execute a prisoner whose mental disability prevents him from remembering his commission of a capital offense. For this case, APA filed an amicus brief that addressed competency determinations, the nature of dementia, and the impact dementia may have on a prisoner’s ability to understand why he is being punished.

More Racial Disparity in the Courtroom
New evidence demonstrates bias among judges that is correlated with the political party affiliation of the official who appointed them. This new Harvard study shows that Republican-nominated judges give harsher sentences to black defendants than Democrat-nominated judges.

Potential Bias Against Gay Capital Defendant
In a recent South Dakota capital case, the defendant argued that the jury’s decision to sentence him to death was based in part on bias due to the defendant’s homosexuality. The United States Supreme Court declined to hear the case, so the appellate court decision to uphold the defendant’s death sentence will stand.

Gun Law Update
“Red flag” laws permit courts and law enforcement to temporarily remove guns from individuals that may pose a threat to others. A new study reveals that these laws may be working because they seem to correlate with a reduction in suicides. See the Judicial Notebook column in the September 2018 issue of the APA Monitor for a full review of gun restriction policies for individuals with mental illness.

Migrant Crisis & Family Separation
As many of you are likely aware, DOJ recently announced a “zero tolerance” policy for anyone who illegally crosses the border into the United States. Initially, this policy separated thousands of children from their families. Trump then signed an Executive Order designed to keep migrant families together, however countless families remain separated. This separation poses serious mental health risks for both children and families. Read more here and here.
**Innovative Programming in Prison**
A new program launched last year in Connecticut seeks to provide specialized services for young adult offenders. The **TRUE Program** (Truthfulness, Respectfulness, Understanding, and Elevating) draws on neuroscience research to take advantage of the potential of young adults to be rehabilitated. A recent story by the Marshall Project reviews the program approximately 1 year after its inception and discusses anecdotal outcome data.

**Reducing Restrictive Housing in U.S. Prisons**
A recently published report by the Vera Institute identified five sites across the country and evaluated their use of restrictive housing to develop recommendations to reduce the practice. See here for the full report, and here for another recent report by the Vera Institute highlighting the changing landscape of mass incarceration.

**Evolving Standards and Best Practices in FMHA**
Two recently published articles highlight innovative practices in forensic mental health assessment. A newly published study by Siegel and Kinscherff considers the use of digital recording as a standard practice in forensic assessment, and highlights the role forensic evaluators hold in influencing the implementation of this practice. Gardner and colleagues conducted a state-wide study of legal sanity evaluations and noted many trends consistent with best practices guidelines and a few areas in need of improvement.

**Technology & Cold Cases**
Recent advances in DNA technology have led to major strides in identification of suspects and the exoneration of the wrongly convicted. However, of recent interest is the privacy of DNA information, specifically as DNA and ancestry tracking services skyrocket in popularity. Most recently, DNA from a public genealogy database was used to identify the Golden State Killer, which has led to a divided reaction. Read more here.

**Hear the Stories of Psych-Law Experts**
In a recently-published book, *The Roots of Modern Psychology and Law*, just in time for APLS’s 50th anniversary this year, 12 authors who became leaders in the field tell their stories about how they began their careers in the 1970s, just after APLS was born and before there was a cohesive field. Their personal narratives dramatically reveal how they came to study the psychology-law problems that occupied their careers and shaped the field. Edited by Tom Grisso and Stan Brodsky, these first-person presentations reveal early challenges, disappointments, and successes, as well as the enthusiasm of these researchers to be doing research to change law and society.

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**Media Roundup**

Speaking of the Golden State Killer... If you’re looking to dive into a haunting serial killer story, you won’t be able to put this book down.

A recent episode of This American Life discusses educational programming in prisons and the implicit-bias training Starbucks implemented in response to recent backlash.

Are you a fan of criminal justice podcasts? Check out this podcast called Criminal Injustice where experts engage in a weekly discussion about current issues in the criminal justice system. And if you prefer videos, see We Are Witnesses, a series of short films highlighting impact of the criminal justice system on individuals, families, law enforcement officials, parolees and probationers, crime victims, judges, and attorneys.
Final Thoughts

And lastly, on a positive note....
Do you remember our link to the new wave of defense-friendly prosecutors from our last update? Check out Fair and Just Prosecution, a bipartisan nonprofit organization that provides trainings and networking opportunities to prosecutors seeking to depart from incarceration-based criminal justice system to one that is more based on rehabilitation, equality, and accountability.

Until Next time!
If you have any questions, or see or read something that you would like to be included in future updates, please feel free to contact us! Alice Thornwell (alice.thornewill@gmail.com) and Shelby Arnold (shelby.a.arnold@gmail.com).