
AP-LS Student Committee

Career Corner

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The Career Corner is intended to highlight the individuals who work at the intersection of law and psychology, where they come from, how they got there and how their experiences influence their research, teaching and/or practice. This edition of Career Corner profiles Elizabeth Cauffman, Ph.D. the Director of the University of California, Irvine Center for Psychology and Law and a Professor of Psychological Science, Education and Law. Dr. Cauffman's research focuses on the intersect between adolescent development and juvenile justice. Findings from Dr. Cauffman's research were incorporated into the APA amicus brief submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court in Roper v. Simmons, Graham v. Florida, and Miller v. Alabama to require juvenile sentencing consider adolescent development. Cortney Simmons, a 5th year Ph.D. student at the University of California, Irvine and the 2018-2019 Student Committee Experimental Liaison, interviewed Dr. Cauffman.

AP-LS Student Committee: Could you briefly describe your career trajectory, starting with your time as an undergraduate?

Dr. Cauffman: I completed my undergraduate degree at the University of California, Davis. I entered college expecting to become an engineer, but my first engineering course convinced me otherwise. I did not enjoy the subject, nor was I particularly good at it. The social science courses were much more palatable, however, so I decided to follow in my mother's footsteps by majoring in psychology and pursuing a career as a clinician. I knew that this would require graduate training, so I focused on making myself a strong candidate by working hard on my courses, volunteering as a lab assistant for Rebecca Eder, and serving on the Psychology Department's curriculum development committee. After two years of interviewing 3-5 year olds using puppets, and after being peed on a number of times, I knew that I was interested in developmental psychology but that this was not the age group for me. I completed my doctoral training in developmental psychology at the Temple University. Knowing the dangers of working with young children, I joined Laurence (Larry) Steinberg's adolescent development lab (adolescents, at least, are potty trained). Initially, I pursued a career in clinical psychology and worked a part-time job as a counselor at a teen shelter in New Jersey. When I was forced to relinquish an 8-year old girl to her alleged abuser because she recanted her story, I decided that I did not have the stamina to endure a lifetime of such frustration. I would become a researcher, and would work to help these kids that way.

After finishing my Ph.D., I was offered a postdoctoral position at the Center on Adolescence at Stanford University. With Hans Steiner, a child psychiatrist, and Shirley Feldman, a developmental psychologist, I began to explore the mental health and developmental issues of youths in the California Youth Authority. My next move was to the Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic 29 (WPIC) at the University of Pittsburgh to work in the Psychiatry and Law Program with Edward Mulvey. During my years at WPIC, I received a 5-year Career Development Award (K01) from NIMH, a 4-year grant on psychopathy from the William T. Grant Foundation, a 2 year grant from NIJ to analyze data on female offenders from the 1920s, and a 2-year grant from the State of Pennsylvania to study mental health issues among kids in detention. Despite this success, I missed having students and I missed the

feel of a more traditional academic department. In 2004, I accepted a position at the University of California, Irvine, in the Psychology and Social Behavior Department where I have remained since.

AP-LS Student Committee: How did you become interested in law and psychology?

Dr. Cauffman: While in graduate school, I volunteered to work with Larry on a paper about adolescent development and juvenile justice issues. We debated about the age at which adolescents become competent to stand trial, to be tried in adult court, or to be considered culpable for their actions. We pored through the research to see what developmental psychology could tell us about these questions. This was the most interesting and exciting project I had ever worked on, and led naturally to a dissertation topic. During my final year of graduate school, Larry was working to establish a MacArthur Foundation research network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice. As his assistant, I attended meetings with many of the leading psychologists, criminologists, sociologists, historians, economists, and practitioners (judges, attorneys, etc.) from across the country, all of whom were trying to understand various aspects of adolescence and the law. It was the best classroom in the world.

AP-LS Student Committee: Could you tell us a little bit about the research you are working on right now?

Dr. Cauffman: I am the primary investigator for the Crossroads Study, a longitudinal, multi-site study that examines the short- and long-term effects of processing decisions on adolescent development. For the past seven years, we have interviewed over 1,200 male youth from California, Pennsylvania, and Louisiana, gathering detailed information on several areas of development, including academic achievement, social relationships, and antisocial behavior. The overarching goal of this study is to identify what legal, environmental, and individual factors make youth more or less prone to benefit from justice system involvement.

I also recently launched a randomized control trial to evaluate the Orange County Young Adult Court (YAC). The YAC was created in collaboration with the Orange County Superior Court Judge Maria D. Hernandez, the Orange County District Attorney's Office, the Orange County Probation Department, defense counsel and the Orangewood Foundation. The YAC is focused specifically on people between the ages of 18 and 25, with the goal of addressing and preventing continued criminal behavior. Offenders participating in the YAC are paired with resource providers and follow individualized action plans in order to achieve personal and professional goals that support positive life outcomes and decrease recidivism. Successful completion of the program may result in an earlier end to probation or the reduction or dismissal of a felony conviction. This NIJ-funded study is the first randomized control trial in the country of a YAC.

AP-LS Student Committee: What part of your job is most challenging?

Dr. Cauffman: The most challenging aspect of my job is managing all of my responsibilities. I have to support my graduate students, teach undergraduate courses, run both the Center for Psychology and Law and the Masters in Legal and Forensic Psychology program, keep my research projects moving forward, and find time to write. At times it is overwhelming—there is just *so* much to do. In those moments, the most helpful and productive thing to do is to take a step back, re-evaluate the situation and your priorities, and make a plan to move forward.

AP-LS Student Committee: What do you find the most interesting and/or gratifying about your job?

Dr. Cauffman: I know a lot of graduate students and researchers look at the life of an academic and think that it is incredibly stressful, but I *love* my job. There are very few jobs that allow you to pursue your interests and get them done on your own timetable. There's also a lot of flexibility— I have the freedom to pursue topics that truly interest me and be creative in the pursuit of those interests. Another great aspect about my job is that every day is a different—today I am teaching, tomorrow I am writing, and the next day I am meeting with my students and people in the field. Yes, there are hard days. Working closely with people is challenging and dealing with bureaucracy is frustrating, but every job is plagued by the same issues. The people who are successful and happy are the ones who love their work enough to push through it.

AP-LS Student Committee: One of the most challenging things in academia is to maintain a healthy work-life balance. It is easy to let work/career take priority over family, friends, and other personal endeavors. Have you achieved balance between your professional and personal priorities?

Dr. Cauffman: I feel like I have achieved a good balance and for two reasons. First, I have a partner who is incredibly supportive. My husband and I share our responsibilities as parents and providers, and he does not guilt me for having to take time away from the family to finish my work. Second, I am creative with my time. As an academic, I am fortunate to be able to create my own schedule. For example, my daughter has a game this afternoon that I will attend. The work I would normally do during that time will be shifted to the evening after my kids are asleep. I also carve out time for my professional and personal responsibilities. The weekends are for my husband and kids— I do not work. Work takes priority during the week days. Having these boundaries and being very protective of my time has allowed me to focus on the task at hand, which in turn allows me to be a better academic and mother.

AP-LS Student Committee: What are the biggest challenges facing AP-LS and the field of law-psychology today?

Dr. Cauffman: As academics, we have a hard time translating our research and making it useful to those in the field. Practitioners and policymakers need concrete answers, but academics tend to focus on the small details and caveats of their research. If we want to improve the law and the justice system, then we need to figure out how to speak and interpret each other's language. If practitioners do not know how to use science and apply it to their work, then it is our responsibility to teach them and make the implications clear. Academics also need to improve our reputation among practitioners. Because of the unethical research methods used in the past, many people are wary of using science in legal settings. The field of psychology-law has made many advances, but science will not be used to inform laws if we can't get both sides to communicate. Bridging the gap between science, public policy and practice is why I formed the Center for Psychology and Law at UC Irvine. The Center hosts meetings, presentations, and networking events where UCI faculty and members of the surrounding community are encouraged to discuss research and its implications. Through these efforts, we have successfully fostered collaboration and communication between academics, legal professionals, and policy makers.

AP-LS Student Committee: What advice do you have for AP-LS student members seeking a career in academia or research?

Dr. Cauffman: Three things. First, it is important for students to learn how to build partnerships with policymakers and practitioners. While you may have the great ideas and research skills, you will need have connections with people in the field in order to access the populations needed to do this kind of

research. You cannot expect to have practitioners bang down your door offering data or asking for guidance. Importantly, you need to show those in the field that you value their time and are willing to meet them where they are at. This can be achieved by working closely with practitioners to ensure that the questions being asked are meaningful to them. It can also be achieved by sharing and discussing the findings with those who created the opportunity for you to conduct your studies. Sometimes those in the research community take more than they give back. This only makes practitioners and policymakers less open to collaborating with us and using research to inform their work. Remember, this is a two-way street—these relationships will improve the quality of your research as well. Many of the best questions do not come from reading journal articles, but from the conversations that we have with people outside academia. If we want science to make it off the shelf and be used, then academics need to work to build and maintain relationships with *everyone* around them (not just those inside academia).

Second, students tend to panic about their path because they think it does not look like their advisor's or other successful researchers, but they need to understand that no one follows a truly linear path. Academics and researchers tend to recount their personal histories as if the outcome was inevitable, or as if they had always been working toward their present situation. In reality, everyone stumbles. My path from the UC Davis psychology, PhD in developmental psychology, to the post-doctoral fellowship in development psychology all appears to be very linear, but it was actually haphazard and full of failures. After my post-doc at Stanford, I went on the job market and only got one interview and one job offer (despite applying to over 20+ jobs!). And, after being an Assistant Professor at the University of Pittsburgh for 5 years, I went on the job market again and it took me two years to get my position at UC Irvine (I didn't get any interviews the first year I applied!). Your career is not going to always go as planned. Students have to persevere and remain open to altering course if conditions change or unique opportunities arise.

Third, try not to take rejection personally. Most of us do not talk about our failures, but know that it is happening to everyone. I get rejected **ALL THE TIME**. Find a researcher in your field that you respect and ask them if they have ever been rejected— they will have endless examples of rejection from every stage of their career. Rejection means you are doing something right. If you are not being rejected, then you aren't trying hard enough. Keep going for it.
