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# AP-LS Student Committee

# Career Corner

**Issue Contributor:** Emma Marshall, 2019-2020 Student Committee Chair-Elect

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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 Jennifer L. Groscup, J.D., Ph.D., Professor and Associate Professor of Psychology at Scripps College in Claremont, California. Dr. Groscup's research focuses on legal decision making, expert evidence, scientific evidence, and the effect of attitudes and pre-existing knowledge on perceptions of players and procedures in the legal system. Dr. Groscup is serving as the 2019-2020 President of the APA Division 41 American Psychology-Law Society. Emma Marshall, a 4<sup>th</sup> year J.D./Ph.D. student at University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the 2019-2020 Student Committee Chair-Elect, interviewed Dr. Groscup*

**APLS Student Committee:** How did you first become interested in Psychology and Law?

**Dr. Groscup:** I was a Psychology major at Georgetown University but I really had absolutely no idea what I wanted to focus on until my sophomore year when I took a class in criminal behavior taught by [Father Anthony Pinizzotto](#). Father Pinizzotto was a Catholic priest and a former FBI agent. He brought in some great guest lecturers to that class including some active FBI agents who had worked on some high-profile cases like John Hinkley's assassination attempt on President Regan. It was truly one of the most amazing courses I ever took. Also, the movie [The Silence of the Lambs](#) had just come out that same year—so that was the first moment when Law and Psychology was sort of everywhere in my life.

Then during my senior year, I took a survey course in psychology and law with Professor Norm Finkel. Dr. Finkel was a leader in the field at the time but has since retired and at the end of his syllabus it said that if anyone was interested in doing research with him, they should just let him know. I thought that sounded interesting and decided to check it out. So, I started doing some jury decision-making research with Dr. Finkel. But I was also working on my undergrad thesis about serial killers with Father Pinizzotto. And at that time Father Pinizzotto did something very priestly for me—he forced me to look through a book that was filled with dead bodies at various states of decay. He did this essentially to let me know that—if you decide to go into criminal profiling, this is what your life is going to be like. The result was that I was simultaneously turned away from that more “bloody” part of psychology and law and towards the more social psychological areas of the field. I graduated and then continued to work with Dr. Finkel for the next 3 years as I decided exactly what I wanted to do for graduate school.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** How did you decide on a graduate school program? What led you to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln?

**Dr. Groscup:** Dr. Finkel was a very good mentor to have in terms of knowing where the good graduate programs were in the country and what faculty worked where. He helped me work through the whole graduate school process. At first, I was actually thinking about straight social psychology Ph.D. programs and then he suggested that I might want to consider applying to a joint degree program like at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I listened to him; I applied and ended up going there to work with Dr. Steve Penrod.

The first time I met Steve Penrod is actually kind of a funny story. I was still in the middle of applying to schools when I went to my first AP-LS conference which was in Hilton Head that year. I was in line to talk to someone after watching a panel when I turned around to see my former professor, Father Pinizzotto, standing there right behind me. I was surprised to see him and asked him if he remembered me. He said of course and we started chit-chatting about things. Then, unexpectedly, the man that had been standing in the line right in front of me turned around, looked at my nametag and pointed right at me as he said, "You! I need to talk to you!" Well that man was Steve Penrod, the director of the Nebraska program at the time, and my future advisor. And that is the story of how I met him for the first time. It really was the perfect introduction.

**APLS Student Committee:** If you could go back in time to that moment and give yourself one piece of advice about graduate school what would it be and why?

**Dr. Groscup:** Only one? I am struggling to give myself only one piece of advice. But I think it would be to enjoy it all more. Because graduate school really is a place where you can explore new ideas, learn things, and that's really your only job. As you proceed through your career, it really does become harder to have the opportunity to be inspired by lots of things and really follow those different paths. So, my advice would be to follow those paths and take the time to really enjoy it. Looking back, I wish I had just enjoyed that part of the process more.

**APLS Student Committee:** Can you briefly describe your career after Nebraska for me? Did you always know you wanted to go into academia?

**Dr. Groscup:** Well having gone to both law school and graduate school, there was a point when I was still at Nebraska where—and I think this is somewhat common for people who end up getting a J.D. in our field—I had to decide what exactly I wanted to do. I had initially gone into graduate school wanting to become an academic because I wanted to *be* Norman Finkel. That was my dream. But like I said before, in graduate school you get exposed to all these cool new things, and for me law school was one of those cool new things. So, there was a time during graduate school when I thought maybe I might want to do legal practice or a different kind of work other than academic work. But at some point—I just had to decide—and I choose to go back to what I originally wanted to do which was to be an academic.

Then when I was "All but Dissertation" (ABD) my advisor Dr. Penrod got the job at John Jay and told his students that he planned to leave Nebraska. He offered us the option to go with him and finish our dissertations there. A couple of us, myself included, took him up on that offer and I did my last year of graduate school there in New York. That year I worked on finishing my dissertation and taught as an adjunct at John Jay. They had a tenure track position that opened up there and I applied. I got the job and worked at John Jay for a while, helping to start up the doctoral program, and getting a chance to teach both undergraduates and graduate students. Then for personal reasons I needed to move to California and got a job at Scripps College in Claremont, California where I still am today.

**APLS Student Committee:** In light of those professional experiences, can you help provide people with some clarity as to which coast is in fact the best coast?

**Dr. Groscup:** Well, as a Jersey Girl, my heart is always on the east coast. *But* I love where I work and I have got to say, I love the weather.

**APLS Student Committee:** Well, case closed. But can you also talk more about what it is like to be a researcher at a primarily undergrad institution like Scripps College?

**Dr. Groscup:** The challenge of course is that undergrads do not have quite as much training as many of the graduate students that you would work with at a place like John Jay or Nebraska. You cannot just send them off with an idea and then expect them come back into your office with a draft of a manuscript ready to submit to Law and Human Behavior. But the exciting part about working with undergraduates is that—as I said before, I always wanted to be like Norm Finkel—I always wanted to be the person who first exposes people to the whole world of psychology and law. Here at Scripps I get to do just that. I teach Research Methods and Psychology and Law and what is exciting for me is getting to witness a student’s first exposure to this new, fresh understanding that that there is this whole world of research out there. I get to introduce them to the whole world of psychology and law and experience their excitement. And that’s fun for me. It is great to get to be in that role and to witness that phase.

**APLS Student Committee:** Can you describe your history in AP-LS? When did you first become involved in the organization and its leadership?

**Dr. Groscup:** As I mentioned before, I attended my first AP-LS conference when I was applying to graduate school in 1996 and then I stayed a student member all through my time at Nebraska. When I graduated, I took on my first leadership role as a member of the Dissertation Committee. I was the Chair of that committee for a little bit before I became the Newsletter editor in 2006. Then that same year I served as the Co-Chair of the conference in St. Petersburg, Florida. After that I served as a Member At-Large, then as the Secretary, and now am serving in the Presidential trio (President-Elect, President, and Past-President).

**APLS Student Committee:** What do you hope to bring to AP-LS during your term as president?

**Dr. Groscup:** My two-part presidential initiative relates to leadership both inside and outside of the field. To start, I am going to pilot a leadership training program for our membership that is going to be a combination of leadership training—related to actual practical skill development—and opportunities to build connections with the current AP-LS leadership. I am hoping that the program will give the participants skills and experiences that they can use within the division to promote their own leadership interests. The outside of the division part of the initiative is really focused on taking steps to establish our division’s role as leaders in the field of psychology and law by improving communication with legal practitioners such as judges. I want to more formally structure a pipeline of information exchange between our division and judges because not only are they practitioners in the field that could use the research knowledge that we generate, but they could also suggest to us what kinds of research areas would be helpful to them in their practice. I am hoping to get some back and forth communication going so that we then become the place that judges go to when they need to learn something about psychology that relates to their work.

**APLS Student Committee:** What can student members do to get more involved in AP-LS and in your presidential initiative?

**Dr. Groscup:** Well they can apply to the leadership pilot program. But I also think that both students and early career professionals are really well-positioned to think about ways to expand our field into new and interesting directions. That could help with the part of my initiative that focuses outside the division on establishing AP-LS's role as leaders in the field of psychology and law. We have a lot of scholars in our field who are excellent, but students are well-positioned to figure out where we need to be going next in terms of the content of our research. That is what we really need in the field. We have been talking about expanding the field for forever and students are the best hope for us to do that.

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