
AP-LS Student Committee Career Corner

Issue Contributor: Haley Potts, 2020-2021 Student Committee Chair-Elect

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 Allison D. Redlich, PhD, a professor in the Department of Criminology, Law, and Society at George Mason University, where she also serves as the graduate director and associate chair. Dr. Redlich's research focuses on guilty pleas, interrogations and confessions, wrongful convictions, mental health courts, and experimental criminology. Dr. Redlich is serving as the 2020-2021 President of the APA Division 41 American Psychology-Law Society. Haley Potts, a 3rd-year PhD student at The University of Alabama and the 2020-2021 Student Committee Chair-Elect, interviewed Dr. Redlich.

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

Dr. Redlich: When I was a senior in college, I thought I wanted to go into child clinical psychology. I didn't know what I was doing, and I applied to around 15 graduate programs. But I didn't get into any of them. I was thinking, "Uh oh, what am I going to do now?" Well, I was fortunate to get a position at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) working with Michael Lamb, who was studying disclosures by alleged child abuse victims. From then on, I was hooked; I had found my passion. It was the first time I had learned about the field of psychology and law, and it combined my interests in child psychology and legal policy. That was also the time when I first learned about the American Psychology-Law Society (AP-LS). I also worked at the NICHD for two years where I was able to talk to and learn about different people in the field. That is how I ended up at UC Davis working with Gail Goodman.

AP-LS Student Committee: Were there any other considerations that led you to choosing UC Davis for graduate school?

Dr. Redlich: I was much more focused than when I applied to graduate school the first time. I think I applied to seven schools that second time, and one of the things that I learned by talking with knowledgeable folks was that you apply to who you want to work with rather than what school you want to go to. It might not even be in the same discipline, depending on what department the person is in. So, I had gone to visit two people at those seven schools. One was Gail Goodman, and the other was Peter Ornstein at UNC-Chapel Hill. I visited both schools, and I think that really helped, because those were the only two schools that I got into. I had a choice between working with Gail or with Peter, and obviously I ended up working with Gail. I'm sure it would have been wonderful working with Peter, but I liked that Gail's work was more applied (at least that's how I perceived it). I was definitely interested in court processes and things like that. And certainly, based on the direction I've gone in over the years, I think that Gail was a perfect fit for me.

AP-LS Student Committee: Is there anything you miss about graduate school?

Dr. Redlich: I don't know if it's something I necessarily miss, but I feel like I made really close friends in graduate school. One of my former fellow graduate students, Jodi Quas, was two years ahead of me, and she was really my mentor in graduate school along with Gail Goodman. I love that model where senior graduate students work with junior graduate students; it's something I try to emulate in my lab. Jodi and I went off in different directions over the years, but, recently, we've been doing a whole bunch of things together again. We are currently editing a book together, and just wrapped up working on a National Science Foundation (NSF) funded study. Now, we have another funded project to do something else together. So, we are taking our relative strengths and combining them. That's been really fun. There are other graduate students from that time that I see less often because we went off in different directions. But I still feel like if I were to see them today, it would be as if no time had passed. Those friendships are some of my favorite memories of graduate school.

AP-LS Student Committee: You mentioned learning about AP-LS while working with Michael Lamb. When did you first become involved in the organization and its leadership?

Dr. Redlich: I think my very first conference was 1996 in Hilton Head, South Carolina. We've never gone back there, and I think there is a good reason for that. It was so logistically awkward. We had to take a shuttle from the hotel anytime we wanted to go anywhere. I think the first committee I started on was the Teaching, Training, and Careers committee, and that was a lot of fun. That was a great committee to be on. You start as a committee member first and eventually you take over as committee chair. After that, I was elected member-at-large on the Executive Committee (2008 to 2010). I actually serve on the Scientific Review Paper Committee now. I was on it before I ran for President, and I just remained on the committee. I really like that committee and think that it does a lot of good work. I've always felt very much at home at AP-LS; it's a wonderful organization.

AP-LS Student Committee: I'm curious what it's like to research wrongful convictions. It seems like such an emotional topic, and the implications are huge. Are there any particularly rewarding or difficult parts?

Dr. Redlich: You're right, it is emotional. But I'm not sure that word even fully captures it. I often teach about wrongful convictions and still use the same book written by Peter Neufeld, Barry Scheck, and Jim Dwyer. I just love that book. Jim Dwyer is a New York Times journalist, so he has a very engaging way about writing about people's lives. There are so many instances of wrongfully convicted people who are treated as if they don't matter. But, obviously, as a scientist I try to remain objective when I'm conducting research.

A challenging aspect of wrongful conviction research is that it is hard to get access to many of the people involved. Based on the research question you want to ask, you also need to be prepared to consider how you will get access to exonerees. Another thing that's hard to deal with in this area is that we still don't know the number of people who are still incarcerated based on a wrongful conviction. We know there are so many incarcerated people out there who haven't yet been identified as wrongfully convicted, and there's a reason for that. If there were a litmus test where we could identify who is guilty and who is innocent, then hopefully we wouldn't have wrongful convictions in the first place. The challenge is that we don't have a good sense of the population of the wrongfully convicted. We also have to recognize there's a strong possibility that, in the cases of wrongful conviction that we know about, we know about them for a reason. I still think it's useful to do that, don't get me wrong, but it is important to keep in mind when interpreting your results.

AP-LS Student Committee: From your perspective, what are the biggest challenges facing the field of forensic psychology today?

Dr. Redlich: My presidential initiative is about social justice and racial justice, what the whole nation is going through. We are fighting more than one pandemic in this nation right now. We have COVID-19 going on, but we also have an enduring pandemic of racial violence that is primarily directed at black people and is carried out by the police and by citizens acting like the police. I think that's a challenge for psychology as a whole and especially for psychology and law. So much of what we deal with in our field relates to the criminal justice system. As we know, people of color are overrepresented and face disparities in our criminal justice system.

Recently, in investigating this issue, we looked at our membership stats. Like all areas of psychology, we are an overwhelmingly white organization. It's a constant struggle of "how can we attract people of color to our profession?" Again, I think it's widespread across all disciplines. I'm in a department of criminology, law, and society which is multidisciplinary in nature. We are dealing with these issues in those fields as well. It's widespread. Knowing how to deal with it is challenging. We need to elevate the perspectives of people of color on these issues. It can't just be white people publishing on race-related issues. In fact, I think that in and of itself is a problem: In psychology and law, we don't have a huge emphasis on race issues. Speaking as someone with a foot in the field of criminology, there is definitely a larger focus on race issues in criminology than in psychology and law. I think we are trying to change that. I've seen it more prevalent over the years. As I've mentioned, I'm on the scientific review paper committee, and one of our goals is to solicit a scientific consensus paper on these issues. I think there is a sufficient body of research. It may not be done by AP-LS or by psychology and law folks (some of it is, of course), but the time has come for a scientific review paper on this topic. We are even thinking of a shorter policy piece because, rightfully so, a scientific review paper takes a lot of time from start to finish. They are a large undertaking, as they should be. But, we'd love to be able to get something out sooner that's useful to the field.

AP-LS Student Committee: What do you think others, especially the student section of AP-LS, could be doing that might be helpful to work towards this initiative?

Dr. Redlich: My leadership style is to try and involve as many groups and opinions as I can. I'm not one to take a top down approach, coming up with just my ideas and delegating those. I really should give credit to Jen Groscup, the previous president of AP-LS. One of the things Jen Groscup and I did right after the murder of George Floyd was reach out to each of the committees, including the Student Committee, with a series of questions about what each committee is doing to address these issues. There were a lot of really great ideas generated. A lot of the ideas focused on the conference itself, which is understandable. People tend to equate AP-LS with the conference because that's when we are all together. We aren't having a conference in person this year but that doesn't mean we can't be doing things. Some of the ideas were about the conference in terms of bringing in speakers in or having thematic sessions about race and social justice issues. Another idea was having a track in the submission process where you have to consider these issues in the scoring process. These are just some ideas.

The Early Career Professionals Committee and the Teaching, Training, and Careers Committee are working together on a series of videos. The Student Committee could be doing similar things along those lines. You guys put together some great programming at the conference. I know you put on the 5k fundraiser; maybe it makes sense to identify an agency that you could give a portion of the money to. If we have a virtual poster session this year, maybe there could be a certain set of posters to acknowledge race-related research.

AP-LS Student Committee: Is there anything you would like to add that I haven't asked?

Dr. Redlich: I think that the Student Committee is doing an amazing job. I've been so very impressed over the years. I just see the presence of the Student Committee growing and growing, with having your own website and all of the activities you guys are doing. At its heart, AP-LS is so grad student oriented. That's where so many people "grow up." I know that's where I earned my stripes. I learned so much by going to the conferences. Like I told you, my first conference was in 1996. Larry Wrightsman was the discussant in the session where I gave a talk and I was so nervous. He was so, so nice. For years, whenever I saw him, we would talk about that. I think it's wonderful what you guys are doing. Keep up the good work!
