
AP-LS Student Committee July, 2022

Career Corner

Content Editor: Cecilia Allan, 2nd year Ph.D. student at Fairleigh Dickinson University and the 2021-2022 Student Committee Communications Officer

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 Jeglic, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. Her research focuses on sexual violence prevention and evidence based public policy.

Cecilia Allan, 2nd year Ph.D. student at Fairleigh Dickinson University and the 2021-2022 Student Committee Communications Officer, interviewed Dr. Jeglic.

Can you briefly describe your career trajectory, starting with your time as an undergraduate?

I started out in biochemistry. I was thinking I wanted to go to medical school but decided that was not for me. I took a psychology course in undergrad, and I fell in love with it. So, when I finished my undergraduate degree, I only needed to do two more years to get an honors in psychology, and that's what I did.

Because I was more interested in practicing, I thought clinical psychology would be a good match for me. I applied broadly to doctoral programs. I'm from Canada and thought I would stay there, but I applied to Binghamton in Buffalo and got a full scholarship, so I ended up there. I started studying depression and suicide. I also got a job in the summer of my first year through the federal work experience program at Correctional Services of Canada. I was placed in the sex offender treatment program where I worked with the manager who was developing a national sex offender treatment program. She brought me back every summer throughout my graduate career, and I developed somewhat of a specialization in the area.

When I was on internship, I met Michelle Galietta who said that John Jay was hiring; I was looking for a job in the city, so I applied. I simultaneously got a postdoc at Penn with Dr. Beck. The chair at John Jay at the time, Maureen O'Connor, worked it out so I could do both. I initially thought I was going to do suicide and depression research at John Jay, but the students were more interested in the sex offender work, and, as they became interested, so did I. That continued, and I have done a lot of prevention work over the last few years.

Can you tell us about the research you are working on right now?

I started with studying those who perpetrated sex crimes but soon came to realize that only 5% are committed by someone that is already known to the authorities [i.e., those on the registry] and 95% are committed by first time offenders. I took a step back and was like, "Okay, what does this mean?" At the same time, I had my kids, and I was talking to mothers and recognizing that people held a lot of myths and misconceptions about sexual offending in general. That brought my focus onto prevention and what we can do to stop this problem. I think that, while we can legislate it away and identify those who commit these crimes, that's only a small part of it. Identifying it on a global scale – what's causing [sexual violence] and how to prevent it – is going to do a lot more good; that has been my focus for the past 7-8 years.

Since meeting my doctoral student Georgia Winters who was interested in sexual grooming, I have become interested in the topic as well. I think it's very useful, especially for parents to understand, because more children are offended against by somebody who is known to them. I think most people don't know that, so identifying those behaviors can be really helpful in prevention.

What is most rewarding about your line of research?

Lately, I've been asked to give presentations about policy, talking to groups that are doing prevention work and getting involved with prevention efforts. I think it is very rewarding to have a seat at the table and be able to influence policy and change the way people do things. I am really enjoying that. While it's great to publish articles and books, I feel like we talk to the ivory tower so much, and it's nice for me to get my research out there to the public. I've also been doing some media work, so when I see that people are learning from this, and hopefully will be applying this in the near future to prevent sexual violence, it is very rewarding.

What do you find the most challenging about this work?

When you are working with people who have experienced trauma, to see the pain they have endured, I think that can be very challenging. At the same time, I know the work we are doing is very important, and I've had a lot of people thank me. While it is hard for them to share their experiences and it can be emotionally draining, I think they recognize, as do I, that it is very important to better understand [sexual violence] so that we can prevent it from happening again.

Have you faced any major obstacles in your career? If so, what were they and how did you overcome them?

When I initially started, my plan was not to be an academic. When I left my PhD program, one of my committee members said, "Why don't you consider academia?" and I kind of laughed at it and went off to my clinical internship. The whole "publish or perish" thing didn't appeal to me. While I was involved in research in graduate school, it was not something that I was thinking I would do. I kind of fell into it.

When I initially started as an academic, I didn't really know what to do or how to do it, so I wasn't sure if this was for me or what direction to take. I didn't have a strong mentor. Then, Maureen O'Connor kind of took me under her wing and mentored me; she showed me the way. But I was floundering at first. I've seen it similarly with other academics because there are so many different responsibilities. If you don't really know how to go about doing things, it can be a challenge.

How do you create work-life balance?

I never really created a work-life balance. I think one of the wonderful things about being an academic is the flexibility. I work at different times; I've had three children along the way, and it's enabled me to be at home with them. I try to work when they're at school and then sometimes in the evening. You work it out. I think it enables me to be flexible. Sometimes you work too much, but I can take vacations and be there for the kids.

You are often cited by news sources and other media outlets. How did you get into this role?

I wrote a book for parents, *Protecting Your Children from Sexual Abuse*, and got a blog on *Psychology Today* to promote the book and started blogging on a monthly basis. That's sort of for a general public audience, so I think people find some of my work through that when they need an expert. John Jay also has a media relations department, so sometimes people go through there, and I get called.

What advice do you have for students who are seeking a career in academia or research?

I honestly love it; I find it very rewarding. I never thought I was going to love research and I really do – especially now that I see the more practical application of it. I feel like I'm contributing, and I feel very good about that.

I think it's a great career, especially for parents, because it enables flexibility with childcare and things like that, so I thought it was particularly good for me. I wouldn't have done really well in a job that required me to be there 9-5.

You also get to do what you want. You are your own boss; there is the chair and the dean but really there isn't a lot of oversight, so if I find something interesting, I can study it. As you can see from my publications, I've studied a lot of different things under the larger umbrella of sexual violence, and I think that is very fun.