
AP-LS Student Committee

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Career Corner

Content Editor: *Lili Ramos, second-year Clinical Psychology PhD student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and 2021-2022 Student Committee Secretary*

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 Anthony Perillo, PhD. Dr. Perillo serves as Associate Professor and Clinic Director at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. This month, he moves into a new role as Associate Professor and Director of the Forensic Psychology Postdoctoral Fellowship program at the University of New Mexico.

Lili Ramos, a second-year Clinical Psychology PhD student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the 2021-2022 Student Committee Secretary, interviewed Dr. Perillo.

How did you become interested in psychology and law?

I was a criminology major in undergraduate work, thinking about going more of a judge/legal policy route. At the end of my junior year, I realized I did not want to go to law school and needed to find a new path. In all honesty, I got lucky that I was taking a lot of psychology courses at the same time and enjoyed them but hadn't really thought of a connection or balance between the two. I did have two professors that taught in both the criminology and psychology programs – Eve Brank, who is now at Nebraska-Lincoln, and Mark Fondacaro at John Jay. They both taught in psychology and criminology and broadly talked about the world of forensic psychology, and both of them had an open-door mentorship policy. I talked to them more and got an understanding of what the field was about by talking to people that were in the field. It was one of those things that just made sense to me as being a good fit once I heard what the merger was and understood that what I really wanted to do wasn't necessarily legal policy analysis. It was more about understanding human behavior for justice-involved individuals in order to improve lives and better the justice system more broadly.

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

I started as an undergraduate in criminology and found out a little late to the game what I wanted to do in terms of forensic psychology. I had taken a few psychology courses, but not many, so I did go ahead and apply to some PhD programs in clinical forensic work straight out of undergraduate. I didn't get into any. I was not prepared and had not taken many psych courses. So, I took Master's courses at another university in clinical work to get those core psychology and clinical requirements that would make me more competitive to PhD programs, and I applied again. I got into the John Jay program and then at John Jay, I constantly yo-yoed between how much I wanted to do in terms of clinical work versus research. When I started the program, I thought I wanted to be primarily a clinician. Then, second year, I decided I only wanted to do research. On externships, I started to look at where is the balance. I did my internship and thought, I don't want to teach, so I did private practice. After I finished my residency, I missed the academic setting, teaching, and doing research within an academic institution. After two years of private practice in the community, I went heavily on the academic market looking for academic jobs.

That's where I landed the position that I'm in right now, which is in a clinical doctoral program at a teaching university. It's a sprinkle of a little bit of everything, where I'm doing a lot of clinical supervision, teaching, research, and administrative work. The last two years, I've been much more in that clinical supervisory role. Right now I direct the assessment clinic in our doctoral program, as well as direct our Center for Applied Psychology, which houses our assessment clinic, treatment clinic, and family clinic – so I'm doing broader administrative work there. What all of this has really highlighted to me as I'm advancing in my career is that I do enjoy the administrative part and my primary passion is in the mentorship aspect and with research. So, August is when I start my new position. I will be Associate Professor and the Director of the Forensic Psychology postdoc fellowship at the University of New Mexico. I'll get to do mentorship with forensic psychology postdocs that do both clinical work and forensic mental health policy, while also running forensic mental health research within the New Mexico forensic mental health system.

What drew you to an academic/research career?

One of the things that I found most rewarding about clinical work was the immediate, direct impact that I could see. When it came down to it, with research, I've always seen the broader potential for longer term impact over a wider scope, and it all comes back to impact - why am I in this field? To address and improve issues within mental health and legal systems. For me, the longer-term broader impact is what I found the most rewarding, so that's why I've gravitated to it more than my own direct clinical experience. I still love clinical work, but I found it gets back to that with the supervisory aspect of it too. By supervising students and postdocs, I can make a broader impact by supervising more people doing the direct work than I can individually as a psychologist, at least in the way that I find the most rewarding. With research and the academic career, I have found that long term with informing policy and practice.

Within the academic setting, I also like being able to move around my work hours. I don't say the flexibility, because I think academia does not have nearly as much flexibility as we like to think – it's from a broader scope. You can't really set your own hours because you have so many different demands, but when I need to take time off there's not really someone I have to necessarily report that to. If I need more time on a certain day to work on a personal or professional affair, I can do that. I've really liked the big picture and also immediate flexibility of adapting when and how I do my work. I'd say too with research, it's the constant learning and discovering. I've always liked being continually involved in understanding issues around forensic mental health and being able to discover things and share those with other people.

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

A lot of my research these days focuses on understanding clinical judgment and forensic evaluations. It's almost, in a sense, an evaluation of forensic evaluations. It's looking at factors and opinions and perceptions of clinicians in the field as they conduct forensic evaluations, what influences their opinions and their judgments, and in particular, what may unduly influence them in terms of bias. Some of my earlier work on this, particularly with my spouse Jen Perillo, was looking at adversarial allegiance and a process that Australia used to address adversarial allegiance called concurrent expert testimony. Our article in LHB with Margaret Kovera and Nikoleta Despodova (John Jay represent!) looked at clinicians doing forensic evaluations, learning whether they were going to do it in the traditional adversarial process versus getting together with an expert that's working with the other side and collaborating on a joint report, to see how that influenced their judgment. It was thought that if you're going to do a forensic evaluation with the other side and collaborate on the joint report, this is going to reduce adversarial allegiance. In fact, you saw the bias immediately. Defense experts favored the defense; prosecution experts favored the prosecution – it didn't matter whether they were going to collaborate. You saw the effect immediately, and it stayed. That made my wife and I take a step back and look at all these different efforts to reduce bias in forensic evaluations. We think part of the issue is: we are putting the cart before the horse. We know that bias affects forensic evaluations, but we don't actually understand

how or why. That's what some of our work has been lately. We've been doing ongoing work using social psych principles to understand when and why forensic evaluators make certain decisions, so we can actually see their decision making in time and better understand what leads to adversarial allegiance.

I've also been really interested in looking at forensic evaluators' perceptions of things that are relevant to a forensic evaluation. Part of this gets back at that idea of understanding bias because part of the idea of reducing bias in forensic evaluations is – well, you don't need to look at something that's irrelevant to your question, so you should only look at stuff that is relevant, otherwise it could bias you. Well, we might not agree what is relevant in certain forensic evaluations. I've had a student that for her undergraduate thesis, we've been looking at police psychologists and how they consider issues of race and racism in police suitability evaluations – do they ask questions and how do they ask them? We also throw out different types of questions that people ask that could inform unsuitability and say, do you think this is relevant to a police psychology evaluation and do you think it's important to ask these questions? Our research is not at the point where we're trying to get at what exactly is relevant, but more looking at what are people actually doing and thinking in the field, seeing if we have some consensus on practices, where people differ, and getting conversations going about what we do in these legal evaluations. Basically, starting these dialogues so that we can really consider at its core when we're doing a legal evaluation, what should we be focusing on, what kinds of questions should we be asking, and what are other people doing in the field right now.

Could you tell us a bit about your experiences being involved with AP-LS and any advice you have for students interested in becoming more involved?

I've been going to AP-LS since 2008 in a graduate program and right now I am chair of the dissertation committee. Before that, I served on the dissertation committee, I've been part of BRIDGE, and I was the co-chair for their Access Path program. I've been involved in AP-LS for 14 years now, and I've been in the committees since 2015. I think when it comes down to it, AP-LS is a great group with a lot of common focuses. AP-LS continues to consider different ways that we can make an impact on our knowledge of psychology and law and increasingly, in ways that we can use that knowledge to make community impact. That is what has kept me going, in addition to it just being a supportive group and feeling supported there overall.

As far as advice for students, it is to go to the conference or be involved in the conference in some way. But, at the same time, also be patient with networking and collaboration. Networking does not happen through one five-minute conversation – it can be a very gradual process. Sometimes it can take several meetings or continued discussion through email with people that you meet. Make sure to meet people of all different developmental stages. Other current graduate students are the people that are going along the ride with you, so it's really important to get to know your fellow graduate students, and people at different stages. Here is one thing that really helped me, and I've tried to do for my students. Before I would go to the conference, my advisor Cynthia Calkins would say, “Look through the program and see if there's anybody in particular that you want to meet or talk to based on some of the work they've done. If I know them, I'll be happy to do that introduction.” It can be intimidating for students to do that themselves and so she was a great help with that, being willing to be the introducer and get us talking. A lot of us got into this field just by a chance encounter or being exposed to something and it's the same way for your career tracks. Somebody might be doing something in an organization or have a job description that you might not even know about or might not even realize is a fit. Just getting to know people, what they do, what they like about it, and how they do it really exposes you to all different worlds and can really expand different possibilities that you might have down the road.

How do you create work-life balance?

The timing of this question leaves a lot to be desired in my own life right now given that I'm packing up, doing a full-time job, trying to start a new job, my baby just started crawling a few weeks ago, so all of this

makes that a little bit more of a challenge. In terms of work-life balance, there are a couple of things that have been really important to me. One big lesson for me in thinking about scheduling meetings or different work-related things is that there is a difference between what time you have available versus what time you don't have booked in your calendar. Just because somebody asks me if I am available at 2pm on Thursday, I might not have something booked at 2pm on Thursday, but if I've planned that Thursday afternoon is a personal day for my childcare or whatever it is, even if I have nothing booked that day, I'm not available for that meeting. Even if you don't have it booked on the calendar, it doesn't mean that you can't protect it. It's okay to say you're not available. That has been a big help in making sure I honor and protect time outside of work.

The other part of it has been both hobbies and getting to know people outside of work – doing things that get you outside of psych and legal system issues. It doesn't have to be pricey stuff or interesting to anybody else. If it's something that either relaxes or energizes you, prioritizing that just like you would studying and any other kind of work. Similarly, I really have appreciated getting to know people outside of the field, so that we don't always fall on the common thread that we all have of talking about work-related things. Getting to know different types of people, keeping my friend connections from pre-grad school or pre-work – this is something that I did a lot during internship and in grad school. For a long time, I've prioritized a couple of friendships that have been long lasting. We don't talk every day or even every week like we used to, but a couple of times a year, there is the same group of people that I will check in with that don't do psychology or legal system work at all. What I noticed, and what I told myself in grad school and internship in particular, was in those conversations we are naturally going to ask each other for updates about how things are going. If after months of not talking to this person, they ask how things are going and I can't think of anything interesting to say other than just work, school, and all that, that is a sign to me that I haven't been enjoying life as much as I had in the past. I use that as a check in – if I have no stories from this half of the year, I'd like to have a story for the second half of the year, so the next time we talk, I have something to talk about other than school and work. By checking in with my friends, it was also an opportunity for me to check in with myself on how I've been doing with things outside of school.

Do you have any advice to give students who are considering careers as researchers/clinicians in forensic psychology?

Some of it comes back to the networking. I would say talk to people, but, just as importantly, be patient with networking – it's not going to happen overnight. Also, although there are so many people to meet, psychology and law is a small community when you really compare it to other fields. This is a small group so be the kind of person that you'd want to work with. Think about the people that you want to know, why you want to know them, and what kind of person you want them to be. Are you that kind of person to others? Are you supportive, are you kind, are you thoughtful and considerate, are you reliable? If those are things that you expect of other people and the people that you want in this field, well, you're in this field. Be the person that you want other people to be. I also think for the people that are interested in clinical forensic psychology work, I just always say, no matter how interested you are in forensic evaluation or forensic mental health in general, you can't be a good forensic psychologist without being a good clinical psychologist. It comes down to that solid clinical background, first and foremost, and embrace setting a strong foundation for what you want to do.