
AP-LS Student Committee

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Career Corner

Content Editor: *Cecilia Allan, 3rd-year Clinical Psychology PhD student at the Fairleigh Dickinson University and 2022-2023 Student Committee Chair-Elect*

The Career Corner is intended to highlight 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 the Career Corner profiles Dr. Barry Rosenfeld, PhD, a professor of psychology at Fordham University. Dr. Rosenfeld is currently serving as the 2022-2023 President of the American Psychology-Law Society (APA Division 41). Dr. Rosenfeld has research interests in several domains, including violence risk triage, cross-cultural applications of forensic assessment techniques, assessment and interventions strategies to reduce psychological distress, and evaluations of distress among immigrants and refugees.

Cecilia Allan, a 3rd-year Clinical Psychology PhD student at the Fairleigh Dickinson University and 2022-2023 Student Committee Chair-Elect, interviewed Dr. Rosenfeld.

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

When I was in college, I was interested in psychology and law, but more so law. I started working in a psychiatric hospital in college and became interested in the mechanisms and relationship between violence and mental illness.

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

My undergraduate didn't help me a whole lot. I was a psychology major, but it never crossed my mind that I would go on to a PhD program. I took the job at the psychiatric hospital and started to get interested in violence and mental illness. The hospital happened to be a top teaching facility, and one of the leading forensic psychiatrists there ran a research lab. When I started working the day shift after graduation, I was introduced to him, and he let me sit in on his lab meetings. I did a little never-published project with him on seclusion and restraint, and he wrote my letters of recommendation for graduate school. This job was my introduction to both forensic mental health and violence, and psychology research. I continued to work for about four years in hospitals and a shelter for homeless mentally ill people.

When I was applying to graduate school, I only looked at a handful of schools. There weren't many forensic psychology programs at the time, so it was a pretty selective process. I went to the University of Virginia and did my dissertation on the competence of psychotic psychiatric patients to make treatment decisions. I came to New York and did my internship at Bellevue, post-doc in medical ethics, and worked in a court clinic at Bellevue doing evaluations for about six years. I've been in New York ever since.

While working at the court clinic, I was doing research on the side and was also able to teach. I was an adjunct at John Jay for a year and worked full-time at LIU for three years. My first tenure track job was at LIU, but I decided to go to Fordham in 2000 and that is when I stopped working at Bellevue to focus on academia.

I was also establishing my private practice during this time. The practice started out as a range of forensic evaluations. At first, it was primarily competency, but I was able to branch out by working with psychiatrists on evaluations in several other areas like vocational disability. Currently, my private practice includes cross-cultural work, consulting and evaluations for reality television, civil work in different domains, and a fair amount of criminal work including competency evaluations.

AP-LS Student Committee: *How did you get involved in such a diverse range of evaluations and assessments?*

Part of it is that my standard response is either “yes” or “huh – that sounds interesting, let’s talk about it.” A lot of the work I end up doing, both clinically and in research, is because I am willing to stretch out of my comfort zone. Saying yes does come at a cost; I am often doing far more than I should do. If something is interesting and I’m comfortable with, I usually do it.

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

Yes – I loved grad school! Enjoy it while you can! In hindsight, I was doing much less then. I do feel like there is a longer arch outside of graduate school because projects can linger for far longer. My dissertation was a nightmare but in retrospect, it didn’t take long. Academia is like being a permanent student – I always have homework, and always have things hanging over my head. There are other areas of forensic psychology where this happens, but its not quite as varied or as intense outside of academia.

AP-LS Student Committee: *What is most rewarding about your line of research?*

The most rewarding aspect is doing research that turns out to be really useful for the field like the cross-cultural research I’ve been involved in. Having even a little paper that turns out to be incredibly useful - that is cited by people or referred to in their work - it’s nice to see that when that happens.

AP-LS Student Committee: *From your perspective, what are the biggest challenges in psycho-legal research?*

Everything! Recently I’ve been doing intervention research, which in itself is really hard, but part of what makes it difficult is the lack of available funding. I am currently working on a treatment program for high-risk offenders, and we don’t get funding for it.

Generally speaking, things that I think are important in forensic psychology are not the things that the big funding agencies are interested in. They tend to lean very heavily to experimental work. There is a lot of important psycho-legal research, especially clinical psycho-legal research, that we look at and say, “that needs to be done,” but to do right we need resources.

AP-LS Student Committee: *Have you faced any major obstacles in your career? If so, what were they and how did you overcome them?*

Initially, the obstacles I encountered were largely related to the fact that there were no programs that had graduate training in clinical psychology in New York (apart from John Jay's master's program). PhD programs in the city in the 1990s were largely training psychoanalysts. I interviewed for a bunch of jobs around the city and what I was doing wasn't what they were teaching their students, so that was a challenge for me. The notion of moving somewhere like Nebraska crossed my mind. I was in New York eight years after my internship before I landed the job I am currently in. I ended up at Fordham; they really wanted to have a forensic psychology program and were the most research-oriented program in the city at that time.

Another area that has been somewhat challenging has to do with the fact that I have three seemingly distinct research interests. In some ways, I feel like if I had picked one of the three, I would be far more well-known in that area. I have always felt like a jack of all trades, master of none – but it's worked out for me. I don't recommend my students take this approach, but in my case, it has worked out very well.

AP-LS Student Committee: *Tell me about how you came to be so involved in AP-LS.*

I started going to the conference and reading *Law and Human Behavior* in graduate school. I didn't get that involved as a student, but I was at a university that was deeply tied to the psych-law community. I started meeting people in the field and establishing relationships at the conferences.

My first formal involvement with AP-LS was as the newsletter editor in the early 1990s. I looked at other newsletters and brought in things like the research briefs. That gave me an opportunity to be in the executive committee meetings and network. I stayed in that role for about 5 years.

I'm still attending the conference and networking. Your network will spread quickly if you take advantage of it and say "yes" to opportunities. When people are thinking of who to nominate for president, they often think "who has been out there for a while? Who could do the role well?" This was my 3rd nomination; I lost to some great people in the past. I'm glad I was elected this time around.

AP-LS Student Committee: *Are there other large projects you are working on in your role as president?*

My initiative is about broadening how we think about forensic psychology beyond just risk assessment and competency – what about immigration court, civil work, child custody? There are areas that we just don't touch, and there are a lot of ways we could be more creative in what we study. As a field, we need to be more accepting. Sometimes methodologically weak studies end up being incredibly important. Maybe they won't replicate, but at least they are opening our eyes to an area or a problem and exposing some flaws that others can address.

One of the things I am hoping we can expand on is the REID program. I really want to see more diversity in the form of creativity, and I think the REID grants are a great opportunity to do that. If we expand that pool of funding, it might encourage more people.

AP-LS Student Committee: *What can current graduate students and early career professionals do to be more involved in AP-LS and the field more generally?*

Volunteer for things and introduce yourself to people. The Student Committee is a perfect entrée. If you aren't going to school somewhere with a forensic mentor or connection, go introduce yourself to someone. See if they would be willing to mentor you. Try and make those connections.

When volunteer opportunities come up, throw your name in. A lot of people think everyone is going to be applying and are discouraged from submitting something, but this is often not the case.

See if you can get involved in reviewing manuscripts. It is valuable experience as a researcher and clinician to see what people are doing and what publishing requires.

AP-LS Student Committee: *Any general advice for graduate students?*

Don't say yes to everything but say yes to the things that will help you. If it is going to be interesting and give you something beneficial, find the extra time.

Don't let defeat set you back. Students often get feedback on submissions and if it isn't positive become discouraged. Don't be dissuaded. There is a lot of randomness in how things get responded to. Take defeat as part of the process. Same with clinical work - you might do an evaluation and have the judge rule against you. There are always setbacks and defeats – take them as learning experiences and move forward.

AP-LS Student Committee: *Do you have any hobbies outside of your career?*

Apart from family related stuff, I am an obsessive cyclist. I ride a couple 100 miles a week. And I go to see a lot of music.