

---

## AP-LS Student Committee

### Career Corner

**Content Editor:** Kimia Lavasani, 2023-2024 Student Committee Experimental Liaison;

Cecilia Allan, 2023-2024 Student Committee Chair

---

*The Career Corner intends 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 Career Corner profiles Dr. Nicholas Scurich. Dr. Scurich holds a joint appointment in the Department of Psychological Science, and the Department of Criminology, Law, & Society at University of California, Irvine. Dr. Scurich has published over 75 peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and law review articles on various topics related to judgment and decision-making in law and violence risk assessment. The Supreme Court of the United States has cited his research, in addition to numerous state supreme courts. His research has been funded by state and federal agencies, and he has received numerous scholarly awards, including the Saleem Shah Award for early career excellence from Division 41 of the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Forensic Psychology, as well as the distinction of “Rising Star” by the Association for Psychological Science. Dr. Scurich teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in Psychology and Law, Forensic Psychology, and Advanced Research Methods.*

**AP-LS Student Committee:** What sparked your interest in Psychology and Law?

**Dr. Scurich:** I took an elective course entitled Law and Psychology taught by law professor Tom Lyon. I really did not know what to expect when I signed up for it; I did not have much experience with social science or law at the time. I was hooked by the second or third week of the course. The content, of course, was fascinating, but in hindsight, I think much of my interest in this area had to do with Tom’s extraordinary teaching ability. He taught the course at such a high level, and yet everything was comprehensible and incredibly engaging. I am really fortunate Tom happened to teach Law 402 that semester.

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

**Dr. Scurich:** Once I switched my major to psychology, I got into the psychology honors program and worked with Professor Richard John. Through this program, I received important experience conducting behavioral research and presenting it at academic conferences. This confirmed my passion for conducting empirical research. I applied to a bevy of PhD programs, but none clearly fit my interests. I decided to stay at USC and work with Richard, Tom, and Dan Simon. Although I was in the quantitative area and had to complete all the quantitative area requirements, the program was sufficiently flexible to allow me to take courses in the Law School. Taking courses in the Law School not only helped me understand legal culture and thinking but also gave me ideas of legal issues that could be investigated empirically. I remember scribbling notes in the margins of my evidence treatise about potential studies to conduct. The

interdisciplinary nature of my graduate school training was a great experience. I was planning to go to law school after completing the PhD program. Bill Thompson emailed me about a job at UC Irvine. “You should apply; I think you would be a great fit. Applications are due on Wednesday,” he said. It was the Sunday before the application deadline. I scrambled to complete the application, write the personal statements, and plead with my advisors to write a letter of recommendation on such short notice. Much to my surprise, I was invited to interview for the position. And even more to my surprise, I got the position. I have been at UC Irvine ever since.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** Did you always know you wanted to go into academia?

**Dr. Scurich:** No! I had a lucrative job offer from a large trial consulting firm when I was finishing up my PhD. That job seemed very attractive to a poor PhD student: traveling the country and being involved in high-stakes, high-dollar litigation. At the same time, I got a job offer from UC Irvine, which is where I always dreamed of ending up. So, I had to weigh the costs and benefits of each position. The allure of tenure and the great people at UC Irvine ultimately convinced me to go the academic route.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** What part of your job is the most challenging?

**Dr. Scurich:** There are so many facets to being a professor: teaching, mentoring PhD students, service, writing grant proposals, conducting research, etc. Balancing all these duties is very challenging, and I often feel I am neglecting at least one of them. I recently took over as chair of the Department, which has made it even more difficult. All of this says nothing about the work/life balance.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** What makes your job fulfilling?

**Dr. Scurich:** I am most pleased when I see decision-makers (e.g., judges, jurors, lawyers, policymakers) make decisions informed by research. This is especially pleasing if the research is my own. It is also quite fulfilling to work with students, see their intellectual development, and then see their diverse and exciting careers at the end.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** From your perspective, what are the biggest challenges facing the field of forensic psychology today? How can students address those challenges?

**Dr. Scurich:** The challenges seem to change and evolve constantly. My advice for students is to get the best training you can in conducting research and always follow the science wherever that may lead you.

**AP-LS 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. Scurich:** A few things: First, coffee. I did not discover this magical key to productivity until the end of my second year of graduate school. Second, get used to rejection. The first few journal/conference rejections are a blow to one's confidence and demoralizing, but they are a part of this profession and will ultimately make you a better researcher. Fun fact: I was rejected from UCI's PhD program; I joined the faculty there five years later. Sometimes rejections lead to better opportunities in the future! Third, as Jack McArdle used to say, enjoy graduate school! You will never have more time to read and ponder things

than you do now. Do not be overly stressed about classes and what comes next. Do your best, and things will work out in the end.