

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. Christian Meissner, PhD, Professor of Psychology at Iowa State University. Dr. Meissner is currently serving as the 2024-2025 President of the American Psychology-Law Society (APA Division 41). Dr. Meissner holds a Ph.D. in Cognitive & Behavioral Science from Florida State University and conducts empirical studies in applied cognition, including the role of memory, attention, perception, and decision processes in real world tasks. Cassidy White, a 4th-year Clinical Psychology PhD student at The University of Alabama and 2024-2025 Student Committee Chair-Elect, interviewed Dr. Meissner.

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

Dr. Meissner: I went to a small liberal arts college where classes were anywhere from 3-15 students. We had a faculty member join the department in my sophomore year, and it turns out she had been a post-doc with a renowned scholar in the deception detection area. She learned of mine and others' interests in law. She said, would you be interested in taking a psychology and law course and I said, "what is that?" I had never heard of this area, but I had been on a pre-law track as I originally wanted to go to law school. She offered the psychology and law course the next semester and there were five of us who enrolled. It was awesome, I just loved it! Really, that is what inspired me to go to graduate school.

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

Dr. Meissner: I completed my undergrad in Psychology at Pfeiffer University, which is a small, liberal arts college in North Carolina. I finished high school in Charlotte, NC and applied to a number of schools, but I was given a Presidential Scholarship (full ride). As a kid growing up from a blue-collar family that really didn't have much money, that was important, and it paid for everything in college. It was the perfect college for me. I started as a criminal justice major but wasn't happy with that, so I went to sociology and still wasn't quite happy with that. I was then thinking about political science and philosophy which I have minors in, but ultimately took an introduction to psychology course and really fell in love with the subject. I went on to do my PhD at Florida State University. I worked with Dr. Jack Brigham who is a social psychologist and contributed to the psych and law community via research on eyewitness identification.

After I graduated, I started my career at Florida International University where I was an assistant professor in the legal psychology PhD program there. I was a part of that program for four years. Then, I was recruited to the University of Texas in El Paso and I joined the legal psych PhD program. I was at UTEP for about eight years – I went from assistant professor to full professor and also served as Director of the Center for Law & Human Behavior and as Associate Vice President for Research. About a decade ago I was recruited to Iowa State University where I've been ever since. We have three PhD programs in cognitive, social, and counseling psychology. Across those programs we also have a psych law interest area. I am currently serving as the Director of Graduate Education for our department. I really enjoy doing service; I think it's important to contribute to service opportunities that you find passionate. Across my career, I've

particularly enjoyed helping faculty and graduate students with obtaining extramural grants, and I served as Program Director for the National Science Foundation's Law & Social Science program from 2010-2012.

AP-LS Student Committee: Can you tell us a bit about the research you are working on right now?

Dr. Meissner: The research I conduct these days is primarily focused on developing best practices for interviews and interrogations. A lot of our work is focused on science-based techniques for developing rapport and trust. We are also particularly interested in how those techniques influence perceptions of procedural justice and the morality/ethicality of the techniques themselves. We are also conducting on tactics for administering Miranda in an ethical and science-based manner and have recently completed a meta-analysis of the Miranda waiver research literature. We have also begun to examine how language fluency (first vs. second language) influence the way that people (mis)remember and how much information they provide in investigative interviews (including the role of interpreters). More recently, we have a grant to further develop a tool for credibility assessment that we published previously – the Psychologically-Based Credibility Assessment Tool (PBCAT). The grant takes a heuristic tool-based approach to reducing the number of cues that we might ask people to consider, identifying and focusing on the very best cues.

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

Dr. Meissner: First of all, I love working with our graduate students and post-docs. It's fun to generate new ideas and test things out. I have a great team to work with. I also love that the work we do has direct application. We have opportunities to share our findings with practitioners and sometimes train practitioners on the use of techniques we develop. It's really motivating when you can see a direct line from the research you're doing in the lab to application in the field.

AP-LS Student Committee: What drew you to an academia/research career?

Dr. Meissner: I love research, and I was really motivated to do applied/theoretical, translational work. When I was in graduate school, I noted the enjoyment and satisfaction that our faculty and my advisor had and I thought, you know this is a good life. I really enjoy doing research and teaching students in the classroom, so it all added up to the right career path for me. Today, I see a lot more career path options for our graduate students, including non-academic routes in government or industry for those pursuing cognitive, social psych, or quantitative degrees.

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

Dr. Meissner: As with any area of psychology (or science, in general), over time certain research areas become rather saturated. While certain topics continue to attract attention, identifying new research avenues and new lines of inquiry can be challenging. Over the years, the AP-LS conference and our flagship journal (Law & Human Behavior) have done a great job of highlighting emerging areas of research. The other challenge I see is improving the translation

of our science to practice. In my lab, we've worked really hard to develop relationships with law enforcement and to offer our research as a productive way forward. Building those relationships takes considerable time and effort, but it's critical that we move beyond the ivory tower and academic journals and that we find ways to "give away" our science.

AP-LS Student Committee: What psycho-legal research areas do you feel as if our field could research more or is most needed?

Dr. Meissner: I don't know that I have an answer for that! But from a translational perspective, I think it's critical that we engage productive collaborations across sub-areas of psychology and even across disciplines. Our focus for the Puerto Rico conference is "encouraging collaboration". We're working to highlight research that has successfully engaged collaboration and invite our membership to identify new avenues of research collaboration. One of our plenaries will focus on bringing legal scholars and psychologists together again. There are some fascinating and important topic areas that have received less attention from scholars, and topics such as privacy and intellectual property could benefit greatly from collaborations between legal scholars and psychologists.

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

Dr. Meissner: As I mentioned previously, my advisor, Jack Brigham, did psych and law research and when I was a grad student, he was elected President of AP-LS. Division 41 was our "home" conference, we went every year. Because Jack was president and very active in the society, I became very active in the society. I was on the student caucus as a graduate student, and I enjoyed attending and presenting at the conference. When I became an assistant professor, I sought additional opportunities for committee work. I think it was my second or third year as an assistant professor that I was invited to serve as the conference co-organizer with Patty Zapf. Together we organized the AP-LS conference in Scottsdale, Arizona. It was a wonderful experience and a great way to immerse yourself in the variety of research perspectives and contributions of our membership. From there, I continued to participate on (and chair) various committees, including Dissertation Award, Saleem Shah Award, Book Award, Research, Professional Development of Women, and the Nominations & Awards Committees. Along the way, I was elected a Member-at-Large to the Executive Committee and I'm very grateful to have been considered for the role of President ... proudly following in the footsteps of my advisor.

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

Dr. Meissner: It's been ten years since the last time AP-LS engaged in a strategic planning initiative, so I will be working with the Executive Committee and committee chairs to conduct a strategic planning process over the next few years. We'll initiate some preliminary work over the next six months, and the membership will learn more about our efforts and our process in Puerto Rico and via the AP-LS Newsletter.

Our most significant challenge is that, although we are a thriving society, the costs associated with our conference programming and other activities have increased significantly. As a result,

we have been running a rather substantial budget deficit the past few years. The strategic planning initiative will not only help us fine tune our mission, vision, and purpose as a society, but also allow us to identify new revenue streams and adjust our programming in ways that get us back to a balanced budget.

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?

Dr. Meissner: We love getting our graduate students and early career professionals involved in the society's committees and conference. If they haven't already, graduate students should engage with the student caucus and learn more about opportunities to promote scholarship and practice in psychology and law. The society also works hard to ensure that our committees include representation from early career professionals. I want to encourage all of our membership to respond to the annual membership drive and let us know what you are passionate about and how you want to become involved in AP-LS! Members are also welcome to email me directly, or to contact our past-president Dan Murrie or president-elect Randy Salekin.

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

Dr. Meissner: I'm in that time of life where my hobby is my kid and my family! My daughter plays volleyball in high school and has a beautiful voice which she exercises in her school's select choir. Her activities keep us rather busy! I also enjoy reading, playing golf or tennis, and watching college sports.

AP-LS Student Committee: How do you create a work-life balance?

Dr. Meissner: When I was a graduate student, I often noticed faculty who were incredibly successful but also took significant time and pride in their families. In a number of cases, I would ask them how they managed their time and were able to do both so well. They would often note that when you start a family, your priorities change, and you become rather motivated to identify efficiencies in your work. In part, it's about understanding what to say "no" to (something I've struggled with!) and how to improve the planning and execution of work tasks. Scheduling, being more organized, and thinking ahead about the week can all contribute to maximizing your efficiency and allowing you to spend more time outside of work.

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

Dr. Meissner: Enjoy your time in grad school! Some of my fondest memories were not only working on projects and collaborating with others in graduate school but taking the time to socialize and build life-long friendships. I always tell my students that it is important to be successful in your academic/research pursuits, but also to be successful in life. Find the balance!

AP-LS Student Committee: Any general advice for undergraduate students interested in applying to graduate schools in this field?

Dr. Meissner: I would encourage them to get to know the faculty at their institutions and identify opportunities for research or professional internships. At my undergraduate institution we didn't have research labs, so I talked to my professors and asked for those opportunities. I learned so much from working and volunteering with researchers at a local VA medical center. It was a formative experience that paved the way to graduate school. I others too can find ways to gain such experiences, even if they attend a small college like I did. There are always opportunities, but they sometimes require effort - seek them out!