

ACJS *today*

Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Newsletter



ACJS President Closing Remarks

Closing Remarks from ACJS President Bitna Kim

Serving as the 62nd president of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) has been an extraordinary honor and a deeply meaningful experience. Over the past year, I have witnessed the strength of this organization—its commitment to scholarship, its dedication to mentorship, and its unwavering pursuit of justice. ACJS is more than an academic society; it is a community that brings together scholars, educators, practitioners, and policymakers, all united by a common goal: advancing knowledge and shaping the future of criminal justice.

As I reflect on this journey, I am profoundly grateful for the support and encouragement I have received. ACJS thrives because of its members—those who contribute through research, teaching, service, and leadership. I extend my deepest appreciation to Sam Houston State University for its steadfast encouragement, to my family and friends for their unwavering support, and to God for His grace and guidance throughout this journey.

A Year of Growth: Through Inclusion, Interaction, and Internationalization

From the moment I took office, my vision was shaped by three guiding principles: inclusion, interaction, and internationalization. These principles have defined my presidency and reinforced ACJS's role as a hub for meaningful collaboration among

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researchers, educators, practitioners, and policymakers. I have emphasized the importance of translational efforts, ensuring that academic research informs real-world policies and practices, and transnational engagement, expanding ACJS's global reach through stronger partnerships and the inclusion of diverse voices in our academic community.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my presidency has been the opportunity to engage with ACJS members across the country and beyond. Traveling to regional meetings allowed me to hear firsthand the concerns and aspirations of our members. These conversations reaffirmed the importance of strengthening ties between ACJS's national leadership and regional organizations, ensuring that we work collaboratively to support our members at every level.

Beyond the regional scope, I had the privilege of representing ACJS on the global stage, engaging with international scholarly communities at the Korean Criminological Association, the Asian Family Summit in Hong Kong, and the Asian Criminological Society in the Philippines. These experiences reinforced ACJS's role as a truly global organization that benefits from international dialogue and cross-border collaborations.

I also had the opportunity to introduce ACJS to practitioners and policy-focused organizations, such as the American Correctional Association, the Thailand Institute of Justice, and the Korean Institute of Criminology and Justice. These connections have further positioned ACJS as a bridge between research, practice, and policy.

Challenges and Opportunities: ACJS Annual Meeting

Before introducing the 2025 ACJS Annual Meeting, I want to highlight a study that Denise Boots and I

published in the Journal of Criminal Justice Education, in which we surveyed ACJS members in leadership roles to identify major challenges facing the criminal justice discipline today and in the near future. The findings revealed pressing concerns, including the politicization of higher education policies and curricula, the impact of artificial intelligence and technological advances on teaching, and the negative societal perceptions of criminal justice careers (Boots & Kim, 2024).

Despite these challenges, our study also highlighted solutions. One of the most significant takeaways was the importance of ACJS Annual Meeting workshops, panels, and roundtables, which respondents overwhelmingly identified as crucial spaces for knowledge sharing, mentorship, and professional development. This reaffirmed the ACJS Annual Meeting as a vital hub for intellectual exchange and career growth, strengthening the connections between research, education, and practice.

As I prepare to transition from my role as president, I take immense pride in introducing the **2025 ACJS Annual Meeting**, which will be held in Denver, Colorado, from March 11 to 15. This meeting will be more than just an academic gathering—it will be a space for scholars, educators, and practitioners to come together to address challenges, explore new research, and foster meaningful professional relationships.

This year's program features a distinguished lineup of keynote and plenary speakers, including John Laub, Alex Piquero, Cassia Spohn, Doug Dretke, Jianhong Liu, and Carol Peebles. Their insights will provide critical perspectives on inclusion, interaction, and internationalization in criminal justice and criminology. Additionally, two open forums will allow attendees to engage directly with these experts, fostering deeper discussions on the pressing issues shaping our discipline.

The conference will also feature workshops and summits designed to support professional growth at all career stages, including the Academic Leadership Development Summit and the Doctoral Summit, both of which are intended to cultivate the next generation of leaders in criminal justice research, education, and practice. Alongside these sessions, the meeting will offer a wide array of panels, roundtables, and training sessions, reinforcing ACJS’s dedication to scholarly collaboration, mentorship, and global engagement.

ACJS: Our Mission

As I look ahead, I am confident that ACJS’s role in shaping the future of criminology and criminal justice will continue to grow. ACJS is more than just a professional association; it is a community, a platform, and a movement that brings together scholars, educators, policymakers, and practitioners to address some of the most pressing issues of our time.

For this mission to succeed, we must continue to cultivate mentorship, engagement, and collaboration across generations and sectors. The contributions of senior scholars and past ACJS leaders are invaluable in guiding us forward, while the energy and innovation of students, junior faculty, international scholars, and practitioners will drive the evolution of our field. Regional leadership will remain essential in ensuring that ACJS remains connected to its members, providing support and opportunities at every level.

I take great pride in the progress we have made, but with that pride comes a shared responsibility. By working together, we can ensure that ACJS remains **a leader in advancing justice through research, education, and practice**, both now and for generations to come.

A Final Reflection: See You in Denver

Following the Denver Annual Meeting, I will transition into the role of immediate past president, but before that, I will have one final opportunity to address ACJS members—my presidential address on March 12 in Denver.

It will be a moment to reflect on our journey, express my deepest gratitude, and reaffirm the mission we share. I hope to continue the message of this closing remark—to remind us all to be **translational, transnational, and transdisciplinary**. These are not just words; they are a call to action for all of us to bridge research and practice, expand our reach beyond borders, and embrace diverse perspectives in our collective pursuit of justice.

As I step into my next role, I do so with confidence that ACJS will continue to thrive, innovate, and lead. This organization is built upon the passion and dedication of its members, and I know that its future is bright. Thank you for allowing me to serve as your president—it has been an honor beyond words.

I look forward to seeing you in Denver as we continue this journey together.

Bitna Kim, PhD
62nd ACJS president

Reference

Boots, D., & Kim, B. (2024). Shaping the future of criminal justice education: Insights from ACJS leadership survey analysis. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 35(2), 397–422.





Nancy La Vigne Reflects on Her Time as NIJ Director

By: Delainey Muscato

As Donald Trump takes office for a second time, former National Institute of Justice (NIJ) director Nancy La Vigne urged people in the field of criminal justice not to back down on the priorities and principles they know to be true.

President Joe Biden appointed La Vigne to the position in 2022. La Vigne said she felt excited and honored to be appointed. She emphasized the importance of the agency because it funds research and has the ability to identify gaps in research knowledge and disseminate research findings in ways that impact safety and justice. La Vigne said she does not know what NIJ's future will look like under the new administration, but she is proud of what she accomplished in the role.

La Vigne did not start at NIJ as the director. She first worked there while finishing her doctoral studies at Rutgers University–Newark. She helped found the Crime Mapping Research Center at the NIJ. When Donald Trump took office in 2016, La Vigne said she wanted to do more hands-on research and found a home for herself at the Urban Institute.

At the Urban Institute, a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C., La Vigne built a diverse portfolio of research, including criminal justice technologies, federal criminal justice reform, and reentry from prison. Halfway into her time there she became the director of the Justice Policy Center. "I spent a lot of time at Urban because I kept learning new things," La Vigne said of all the research she completed there.

In the wake of the 2020 death of George Floyd, a



black man murdered by a white police officer, La Vigne left her post at the Urban Institute to head the Council on Criminal Justice's Task Force on Policing. She served there for two years before becoming director of NIJ. "I really felt that everything I had done previously professionally had set me up to be as successful as possible as NIJ director. It really felt like the stars had aligned," La Vigne said.

Though she had a lot of ideas for NIJ, La Vigne knew she would not be able to do everything, so she made a list of priorities. Chief among those priorities was something she called inclusive research. "That's research that takes the time to hear from the people who are most involved with or affected by the issue under study," she said.

In addition to engaging with people who are closest to the problems being researched, La Vigne encouraged practitioners and experts in the field to view research through an equity lens, keeping bias and discrimination out of their work. She also said she spent time looking at NIJ processes that allocate funding and grants to ensure they are mindful of racial and other forms of discrimination.

With DEI programs under attack by the Trump administration, La Vigne said researchers should continue viewing their research through that equity lens. "I still think that the best research is research that engages with people who are experts on the ground and combines both qualitative and quantitative data," she said. "The best research scrutinizes our data and our methods to ensure that both are sound and not infusing new biases."

Though President Trump has yet to make his selection for a new NIJ director, La Vigne said the NIJ does a lot of good work that transcends political ideology. "So many topics the NIJ supports are not left or right topics," she said. "They're just public safety topics." La Vigne added that the NIJ supports forensic research that can help improve technologies that solve crimes, support prosecutions, and bring justice to victims and their loved ones. She hopes the importance of this work will be realized by the new leadership and said she will continue advocating for the importance of the field as she did as director.

La Vigne's proudest accomplishments doubled as some of her greatest challenges. Restructuring staff and the public face of the NIJ, La Vigne said, posed challenges, but completing them made her proud. "When I joined NIJ, the agency had been pretty gutted by the first Trump administration, and working in partnership with the career staff we were able to really rebuild the organization in a very positive way," she said. By supporting her staff's skill and professional developments, La Vigne helped boost staff morale. She said she had to learn what strategies worked best to inspire her staff.

La Vigne also reintroduced the NIJ to the criminal justice field, though it presented challenges after the COVID-19 pandemic. "It became clear to me early on that a lot of stakeholders in the field weren't really as aware of NIJ as I'd hoped they were," she said. "The public face of NIJ has been lost, and so I

set out to change that." La Vigne began speaking to all manners of audiences, making them aware of all NIJ had to offer. "I am hopeful that those efforts created a community of people who will advocate for NIJ and its work," she said.

La Vigne will continue to advocate for the field's importance and teach others to do the same. As the new dean of the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University–Newark, she has an excellent platform to continue promoting the priorities set in place at the NIJ and supporting emerging scholars in the field. As dean, La Vigne said, she wants young scholars to learn how to lobby on behalf of the research in the field. Though they might not be comfortable with it, she said it is important given the threat the field faces with the Trump administration wiping out staff in federal agencies. "[Scholars] need to educate their representatives not on how cool their research methods are, but rather how impactful the research is in informing safety and justice," she said.

Most of all, in the wake of all the work she did at NIJ, La Vigne calls on those in her field to be brave and encourages criminologists to educate their members of Congress on the importance of the NIJ and other science fields.

Nancy La Vigne, PhD is an American criminologist and criminal justice policy expert and whose knowledge spans policing reform, federal corrections reform, reentry from prison, and evidence-based criminal justice practices. She is best known for bridging the divide between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, serving in a translational role to promote data-driven and research-informed improvements to policy and practice. La Vigne is also an outspoken supporter of research that honors the expertise of the practitioners and community members who are closest to the safety and justice problems society aspires to solve.

La Vigne currently serves as dean of the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University-Newark. Previously she was a presidential appointee in the Biden-Harris administration, serving as director of the National Institute of Justice, the U.S. Department of Justice's research, technology, and evaluation agency. La Vigne oversaw the competitive review and allocation of ~\$90M in research grants, cooperative agreements, and contracts annually, covering topics such as policing, forensics, corrections, victimization, violence reduction, juvenile justice, and criminal justice technologies. Prior to her appointment as NIJ director, La Vigne was a senior fellow with the Council on Criminal Justice, where she served as executive director of the Council's Task Force on Policing.

From 2009 to 2020, La Vigne was vice president of justice policy at the Urban Institute (Urban), a nonprofit social policy research organization based in Washington, DC. Over the course of a decade at Urban, she directed the Institute's Justice Policy Center, leading a staff of over 50 researchers and managing an annual departmental budget of ~\$10 million. From 2014-2016, she was also executive director of the congressionally mandated bipartisan Charles Colson Task Force on Federal Corrections Reform. Before becoming director of the Justice Policy Center in 2009, La Vigne served for eight years as a senior research associate at Urban, leading groundbreaking research on prison reentry.

Before joining Urban, La Vigne was the founding director of the Crime Mapping Research Center at the National Institute of Justice. She later served as special assistant to the acting assistant attorney general for the Office of Justice Programs within the Department of Justice, leading strategic initiatives and serving as liaison to the Office of the Attorney General under Janet Reno. She earlier served as research director for the Texas sentencing commission.

La Vigne has delivered invited testimony before Congress on evidence-based criminal justice interventions, reentry from prison and jail, and state and federal criminal justice reform. A seasoned spokesperson, she has been featured in major media outlets such as NPR's Morning Edition, All Things Considered, and Marketplace, as well as Atlantic Monthly, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Chicago Tribune.

La Vigne holds a PhD in Criminal Justice from Rutgers University-Newark, a MA in Public Affairs from the LBJ School at the University of Texas-Austin, and a BA in Government and Economics from Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts.



Delaineey Muscato, originally from Canandaigua, New York, is a senior journalism major at St. Bonaventure University with minors in sociology and philosophy. She's been writing for the TAPinto Greater Olean site for two years. She also spent two years writing for The Villager Newspaper in Ellicottville, NY.

Since 2022, Delaineey has been a member, the brand deal coordinator and senior editor for the SBU chapter of the online college magazine Her Campus. She's also the office administrator for the Jandoli Women in Communications club and a PolitiFact NY reporter. She's also a member of her school's student chapter of American Advertising Federation and helped her team win their district competition in 2024.

This past summer, Delaineey spent six weeks writing for The Lake Placid News and Adirondack Daily Enterprise in Saranac Lake, NY. The previous summer, she studied abroad in Sorrento, Italy and attended the Sant'Anna Institute. In the future, she hopes to be a foreign correspondent for CNN.

2025 ACJS Award Winners

Bruce Smith, Sr. Award:

Recognizes outstanding contributions to criminal justice and demonstrated leadership in the administration of criminal justice as an academic and professional discipline in a manner that reflects the highest standards of integrity and performance.

Winner: Nancy Rodriguez

University of California, Irvine



Dr. Rodriguez is a Criminology, Law, and Society professor at the University of California, Irvine. Before moving to UC-Irvine, she served from 2015 to 2017 as director of the National Institute of Justice within the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs. She was nominated for this appointment by President Barack Obama in 2014 and sworn in by Congress in early 2015.

Dr. Rodriguez's research focuses broadly on inequality and the collateral consequences of mass incarceration. More specifically, her studies have significantly advanced our knowledge of the effects of parental incarceration on children and their caregivers, disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system, and the criminal and juvenile justice systems' responses to drug offenders, among other topics. She has developed strong collaborations with law enforcement, courts, and correctional agencies in her research. She has received more than \$10 million in extramural funds from federal agencies, state and local government, and foundations. In recognition of her extensive research on this subject, Dr. Rodriguez was invited to serve on the National Academies' Committee on Reducing Racial Inequalities in the Criminal Justice System.

Dr. Rodriguez's contributions to scholarship, teaching/mentoring, and service are remarkable. She has earned numerous awards for her scholarship, including the Donal MacNamara Award for outstanding journal publication from the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences and the W.E.B. DuBois Award from the Western Society of Criminology for significant contributions to the field of racial and ethnic issues in criminology. The ASC Division on People of Color and Crime bestowed pretty much every award the division has on her, including the Lifetime Achievement Award; the Julius Debro Award for outstanding contributions in service to professional organizations, academic institutions, and the advancement of criminal justice; the Community Service Award for outstanding contributions to improve the quality of life for underserved populations and communities affected by crime; and the Coramae Richey Mann Award for outstanding contributions of scholarship on race, ethnicity, crime, and justice. In 2023, she was named a fellow of the American Society of Criminology.

2025 ACJS Award Winners



Academy Fellow Award:

Recognizes distinguished contributions to justice education in terms of scholarly achievements and professional contributions to the Academy through active participation and leadership.

Winner: Ligu Cao

Ontario Tech University

Dr. Cao is a distinguished scholar with an international reputation. He is an expert in police legitimacy, racial and ethnic relationships in criminal justice, and criminological theory. He is the author of nearly 200 scholarly publications including 99 peer-reviewed articles, 8 books, 25 book chapters, and numerous additional academic publications. In a recent publication,

he was ranked as one of the most-cited criminologists in the world. In addition to his scholarly publications, Professor Cao has substantial service to the field of criminal justice. Along with being an active member of ACJS, he is the founding president of the Association of Chinese Criminology and Criminal Justice in the United States. Dr. Cao has also served as a mentor and role model to countless students and faculty across the globe. On this role, nominators wrote, "Professor Cao's caring, respectful, and constructive mentoring style has profoundly influenced those who had the fortune to have him as a mentor and colleague."

Dr. Reichel is professor emeritus of sociology and criminal justice at the University of Northern Colorado, where he served from 1983 to 2013. Throughout his career, Dr. Reichel has held several academic and leadership positions, including adjunct professor at the University of New Hampshire Franklin Pierce School of Law and the California University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Reichel's expertise spans comparative criminology, transnational crime, human trafficking, and corrections. His publications include *Comparative Criminal Justice Systems: A Topical Approach* (7 editions); *Global Crime: An Encyclopedia of Cyber Theft, Weapons Sales, and Other Illegal Activities*; and numerous chapters and peer-reviewed journal articles.

Recognized for his outstanding contributions, Dr. Reichel has been honored with prestigious awards such as the ACJS Gerhard O.W. Mueller Award for Distinguished Contributions to International Criminal Justice (2023) and the ACJS Outstanding Mentor Award (2017). He is a recipient of the University of Northern Colorado Distinguished Scholar Award (2003) and has delivered keynote lectures globally, including the Beto Chair Lecture at Sam Houston State University in 2023 and invited talks at Sigmund Freud University in Vienna.



Academy Founder's Award:

Recognizes outstanding service to the ACJS community and to the profession.

Winner: Philip Reichel

University of Northern Colorado

2025 ACJS Award Winners



Academy New Scholar Award:

Recognizes outstanding scholarly contributions to the study of crime and justice by someone who has received their doctoral degree within the past six years.

Winner: Jin R. Lee

George Mason University

Dr. Lee is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University. His research examines a broad range of topics within cybercrime and cybersecurity. Dr. Lee is a research partner at several esteemed research organizations, including Michigan State University's International Interdisciplinary Research Consortium on Cybercrime (IIRCC), George Mason University's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP), Boston University's Center for Cybercrime Investigation and Cybersecurity (CIC), and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology's Digital Life Research Group (DLRG). In 2024, he was appointed by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) to serve as a consensus committee member on the Committee on Cybercrime Classification and Measurement.

Dr. Lee's contributions to the field have been recognized with several national awards, including the American Society of Criminology (ASC) Division of Cybercrime Early Career Award in 2022 and the American Society of Criminology (ASC) Division of Cybercrime Best Peer-Reviewed Publication Award in 2024.

Bracey/Joseph Minority and Women New Scholar Award:

Recognizes outstanding academic contributions by new minority and female scholars in honor of the first female and racial minority ACJS presidents.

Winner: Lindsay Kahle Semprevivo

Radford University



Dr. Semprevivo is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminal Justice. Most recently, she has published work that includes a co-authored edited volume and several solo and co-authored journal articles and book chapters centering LGBTQ+ experiences in victimization, system involvement, and justice. Dr. Semprevivo is committed to translational teaching, research, and service within her community and beyond.

2025 ACJS Award Winners

Donal MacNamara Award:

for the outstanding journal publication was created by a donation to ACJS from one of the founding scholars of ACJS, Dr. Donal MacNamara. This award recognizes outstanding scholarship published in *Justice Quarterly*, the *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, *Justice Evaluation Journal*, or *ACJS Today*.

Winner: Kolbeck, S., Lopez, S., & Bellair, P. (2024). Does stable employment after prison reduce recidivism irrespective of prior employment and offending? *Justice Quarterly*, 41(1), 38-61.



Simon Kolbeck
Ohio State University



Steven Lopez
Ohio State University



Paul Bellair
Ohio State University

This paper makes important theoretical and practical contributions to the literature, adding to our knowledge of the impacts of employment on recidivism. It brings empirical knowledge to debates about how impactful pre-prison employment patterns are in shaping the role of post-incarceration employment. Findings suggest that employment is a key contributor to successful reentry, regardless of pre-prison employment and even for individuals with lengthy criminal histories.

2025 ACJS Award Winners



Braswell/Routledge Outstanding Dissertation Award:

Recognizes the outstanding criminal justice–related dissertation completed within two years of nomination.

Winner: Daniela Oramas Mora

George Mason University

Dissertation: "Case Processing and Sentencing Outcomes in Drug Offenses in Florida: Examining the Effect of Bail, Pretrial Detention, Race, Ethnicity, Immigration Status, and the Progressive Prosecution Movement" (2024). [Arizona State University].

Dr. Oramas Mora's dissertation thoroughly examined outcomes of felony drug offense cases in Florida from 2017 to 2020.

In their nomination of Dr. Oramas Mora's dissertation, Professors Cassia Spohn and Ojmarrh Mitchell noted that it was "three separate theoretically informed and methodologically sophisticated studies on three issues—the ways in which bail decisions influence subsequent case outcomes and lead to cumulative disadvantage for racial minorities; whether race, ethnicity, and immigration status affect pretrial and sentencing outcomes; and whether progressive chief prosecutors handle drug cases differently than traditional prosecutors." Dr. Oramas Mora advanced the research on drug offending "by investigating the ways in which the type of drug offense and the type of drug substance moderate both case outcomes and racial/ethnic disparities in these outcomes." Dr. Oramas Mora's dissertation contributes to our knowledge in these areas. Additionally, she provides important policy implications for Florida and other states.

Outstanding Book Award:

Recognizes the book published in the last three years that has made an extraordinary contribution to the study of criminal justice.

Winner: Michaela Soyer

Hunter College

Title: "The Price of Freedom: Criminalization and the Management of Outsiders in Germany and the United States" (2023).

University of California Press



Dr. Soyer's book was noted as "a truly eye-opening book that delves into incarceration in two very different contexts. By contrasting USA and Germany, Soyer demonstrates that despite the differences in approaches, both systems produce prisons filled with socially marginalized men. This book can really influence the way scholars think about the interaction between historical cultural context and contemporary links between incarceration and marginalization. The Price of Freedom offers something quite different and is very thought provoking. It has a potential to influence how scholars think about 'good' and 'bad' systems of incarceration by highlighting the consistencies and similarities between seemingly more severe and more lenient contexts."

2025 ACJS Award Winners

Outstanding Mentor Award:

Honors outstanding mentors in recognition of their excellence in the role as mentor for students and faculty, as evidenced by their dedication, willingness, and commitment to go above and beyond to foster professional growth and achievement of their students and faculty colleagues.



Henry Pontell

John Jay College of Criminal Justice and University of California, Irvine

Dr. Pontell has an extensive history of mentoring at the University of California, Irvine and at John Jay College, at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. In addition to his contributions to teaching and service on many thesis and dissertation committees, Dr. Pontell has regularly involved his students in funded research opportunities resulting in collaborations on conference presentations and peer-reviewed publications. Nominees mentioned Dr. Pontell's passion for creating memorable learning experiences outside of the classroom, through study abroad programs and connections to academic organizations such as ACJS.

Delores Jones-Brown

John Jay College and Fayetteville State University

Dr. Jones-Brown shows considerable dedication to mentoring students and junior colleagues both at John Jay College and within the broader field of academic criminology and criminal justice, especially members of historically marginalized groups. Particularly noteworthy is her commitment to connecting her mentees to ACJS and other professional organizations, where she has provided advice and guidance that helped them attain elected leadership positions. Her nominators note that she continues to be a leader and career role model.



Dr. Ngo has a longstanding commitment to mentoring at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Her work goes beyond traditional settings, such as classroom, thesis, and dissertation committees, to include numerous independent studies that facilitate learning. Her mentoring continues once her students leave the University of South Florida. The committee was especially touched by Dr. Ngo's work to go above and beyond standard accommodations to ensure that classroom experiences are accessible to all.

Agency or Nonprofit Organization Leadership and Innovation Award:

Is given in recognition of a criminal justice agency or nonprofit organization whose work has had a direct, positive, and significant effect on the criminal justice system, with a commitment to improving the criminal justice system.

Winner: *The Teen and Police Service Academy (TAPS)*



The TAPS Academy was founded in 2011 by Dr. Everette Penn and the late Chief Brian Lumpkin. Supported by more than \$4 million in funding, the TAPS Academy's evidence-based programs include the foundational 11-week TAPS curriculum, TEA-accredited courses, TAPS Clubs, Summer Leadership Workshops, and the SB-30 Community Safety Course. These programs bring officers and youth together on equal footing, facilitating the exchange of skills in conflict resolution, mental health, and community service. This collaborative approach has reshaped relationships between law enforcement and communities across the country.

With programs in seven cities, the TAPS Academy has made a lasting impact by bridging the gap between law enforcement and youth, fostering mutual respect, and empowering high-risk youth with essential life skills. The awards committee noted that the TAPS Academy demonstrates the leadership and innovation in criminal justice reform that this award celebrates.



Ken Peak Innovations in Teaching Award:

Recognizes and honors criminal justice and criminology faculty members for innovative teaching methods. This award identifies and recognizes innovation in relation to learning and teaching.

Winner: *Katelyn Hancock*

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Dr. Hancock's project, "Pouring for Purpose," required tremendous creativity, planning, and execution. As part of the project, 32 criminal justice students served as mentors to 55 local high school students, solving ethical dilemmas and then creating paintings to represent their reasoning. Cash donations were accepted from the public in exchange for a painting. Proceeds were donated to a local family justice center. Student feedback was effusive in praise. Evidence of success of the program was provided from multiple sources including a YouTube documentary and a university publication.

Simon/Routledge Outstanding Paper Award:

The William L. Simon/Routledge Publishing Outstanding Paper Award is given for the outstanding paper presented at the 2024 Annual Meeting.

Winner: Peter Lehmann

Sam Houston State University

Title: "Classroom Disruptiveness and Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Disparities in Office Discipline Referrals" (2024). [Conference presentation]. ACJS 2024 Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL.



Prior research has shown that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to experience office discipline referrals than White youth, and the magnitude of these inequalities has been found to vary by gender. However, it remains unclear whether racial/ethnic and gender disparities in office referrals might be amplified among students in more disruptive classroom environments. Using the data from the 8th- and 10th-grade cohorts of the Monitoring the Future survey, **Dr. Lehmann's** paper reveals that, among male youth, Black-White and Hispanic-White differences in office referrals are substantially weaker for students who describe their classrooms as more disruptive. The award committee noted that the paper was well-written and well-conceived, has rigorous methods that have been explained well, and addresses an important topical issue in our field.



PURDUE GLOBAL™

National Criminal Justice Month Education Award:

The National Criminal Justice Month Committee oversees awards given to academic departments, schools, colleges, and/or universities for National Criminal Justice Month celebrations that focus on education and community engagement, as well as an overall program of the year award. The intent of the Education Award is to recognize a National Criminal Justice Month event for the educational impact on students and the community.

Winner: Purdue Global's "Women in Criminal Justice Roundtable" - Held on March 14, 2024

Purdue University Global

hosts an annual "Women in Criminal Justice Roundtable" to highlight women's roles in the criminal justice system. In 2024, they had a record number of more than 200 registrants, many of whom earned professional development credit for their participation. Attendees represented various internal and external constituencies, including students, alumni, faculty, administrators, government officials, and criminal justice practitioners.

2025 ACJS Award Winners



Academy Leadership and Innovation Award:

recognizes a practitioner whose work has had a direct, positive, and significant effect on the criminal justice system and who has a commitment to improving the criminal justice system.

Winner: Cary Heck

Denver Adult Probation Department

Dr. Heck integrates his research expertise into his leadership role. His career spans both academia and applied practice. As the Chief of the Denver Adult Probation Department (DAPD) since 2015, Dr. Heck has implemented multiple programs that have significantly enhanced supervision outcomes, especially for high-risk clients with severe substance abuse issues. Notably, his Specialized Drug Program integrates probation officers within treatment programs, fostering communication and accountability to improve treatment outcomes.

Dr. Heck's visionary leadership, commitment to evidence-based reforms, and innovative approaches to probation and rehabilitation underscore his outstanding contributions to the criminal justice field. His work not only enhances the effectiveness of the Denver Adult Probation Department, but also serves as an influential model for agencies nationwide. The awards committee noted that Dr. Heck is highly deserving of this recognition for his invaluable contributions to criminal justice, public service, and community development.

Student Scholarship Award:

is given to support meritorious scholarship by students and to enable them to present their research at the Annual Meeting.

Winner: Melissa Kilmer

American University



Melissa Kilmer is a PhD student in American University's Department of Justice, Law, and Criminology. Her research efforts focus on gender-based violence prevention, sexual victimization, and help-seeking behaviors. Her current manuscript, Predictors of Reporting Intimate Partner Violence to Police: Examining Homeownership, Race and Ethnicity, assesses how a victim's tenure at a location may impact their willingness to call police following an IPV incident.

2025 ACJS Award Winners

Student Scholarship Mini-Grant Travel Awards for People of Color and Women:

These travel grants are given to racial/ethnic minority and/or female students for the purpose of promoting the involvement of all minority groups in the Academy. The winner of this award must be the first author on a paper that is presented at the meeting.



Wei-Gin Lee

George Mason University

Wei-Gin Lee is a doctoral student at George Mason University. He worked as a police lieutenant in Taiwan for nine years. His research focuses on the synthesis of policing and cybercrime.

Emily Walker

University of South Florida

Emily Walker is a doctoral student at University of South Florida. Her research interests focus on human trafficking, interpersonal violence, trauma, and minority and marginalized groups. Her recent publication in the Journal of Intimate Partner Violence explores the relationships between trauma-related shame, intimate partner violence, and commercial sexual exploitation, primarily among African American women.



2025 ACJS Award Winners

Sage Junior Faculty Professional Development Awards:

Provide junior faculty with travel reimbursement scholarships to participate in the Annual Meeting and to attend the ACJS Teaching Workshop.



Colton L. Daniels
St. Mary's University

Dr. Colton L. Daniels is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, St. Mary's University. In 2021, Dr. Daniels earned a PhD from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Dr. Daniels's research explored a variety of topics, including public health behaviors and attitudes, the impact of personality traits on the prevalence of intimate partner violence, and how religious beliefs and practices can mitigate the effects of risk-taking behaviors.

Chris Guerra

University of Texas El Paso

Dr. Chris Guerra is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Texas at El Paso. In 2022, Dr. Guerra earned a PhD from Sam Houston State University. Dr. Guerra's work focuses on immigration and antisocial behavior, criminological theory, policing issues, and cybercrime.



Elizabeth Hartsell

Sam Houston State University

Dr. Elizabeth Hartsell is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, Sam Houston State University. In 2022, Dr. Hartsell earned a PhD from the University of Florida. Dr. Hartsell's research interests include courts, problem-solving courts, substance use and mental health services in the criminal justice system, mixed methods and evaluation research, and instrumentation.

Narim Lee

Texas A&M International University

Dr. Narim Lee is an assistant professor in the Department of Social Sciences, Texas A&M International University. In 2024, Dr. Lee earned a PhD from the University of Central Florida. Dr. Lee's research interests include sexual assault, cybercrimes, intimate partner violence, and victimization.



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3rd Place Winner:
Gift Onwuadiamu
University of
Delaware



15 Things I Wish I'd Known as a Young Faculty Member

By Craig Hemmens

In the January 2025 issue of ACJS Today, David May published “15 Things I Wish I’d Known as a Graduate Student.” This article provided graduate students with some excellent tips to aid them in navigating their entry into the sometimes arcane world of academe. Upon reading this article, I felt inspired to build upon it with some tips for junior faculty—those folks who have moved from graduate school into their first tenure-track job. As someone who has been a faculty member for 30 years, at three different schools, I can at least lay claim to having been doing the job for a long time. And I believe I have learned, sometimes the hard way, how to do the job successfully. Circumstances have certainly changed since I started working at Boise State University in 1996, but I believe many of the principles I have learned remain relevant. Without further ado, here is my list of things to do (or not do) on your way to achieving tenure:

1: Learn how to work with others—while much of academic work, especially scholarship, can be a solitary pursuit, make an effort to engage with others. Coauthor papers, find mentors, make friends—doing this will make your life easier and richer.

2: Don’t be afraid to ask for help—from senior faculty, graduate school friends, colleagues you meet at conferences who share your interest. It’s OK to admit you need help occasionally—solitary suffering is pointless.

3: Learn how to say no—do not teach an overload, leave some time for writing in the summer instead of teaching multiple summer classes for the extra cash, be a good (but not insane) department citizen

regarding service. At first, it all is new and exciting, and it is easy to go running after every bright, shiny object you see, but you must focus on what will help you obtain tenure.

4: Avoid wasting time—I have known several colleagues who spent a lot of time drinking coffee and chatting with everybody in the hall and then struggled to achieve tenure. Being friendly is important, but learn where to draw the line. It’s called work for a reason.

5: Avoid complaining—administrators are going to do stupid things, students are going to do stupid things, colleagues are going to do stupid things. Just deal with it and move on. You’ll do your share of stupid things, too. Nobody likes a whiner. Focus on what you can control.

6: Finish what you start—there are so many interesting classes to prepare and research projects to conduct, but you must learn your limitations and do not exceed them. One finished paper is better than five papers in preparation. Doing what you said you would do will do wonders for your reputation.

7: Go small, not big—you have five years to complete the requirements for tenure. Putting all your eggs in one basket is a risky proposition—why not complete three smaller projects in the time you need to complete one large project? Numbers matter in the tenure decision.

8: Read the room—focus on the requirements for tenure at your institution. Does your school emphasize teaching or research? Be sure to do the things your school requires, not what other schools require.

9: Relatedly, you can write your way out of

anywhere—if you want to move up the academic ladder, publications are essential. But you cannot focus on writing to the exclusion of good teaching if you are at a teaching-intensive school.

10: Treat everyone better than they treat you. Be nice, respectful, and honest. People can be jealous, competitive, or just plain nasty. You gain nothing by acting like them. Make your small part of the world a better, happier place. It's a small world, after all—people remember bad behavior (and love to gossip about it).

11: Remember how lucky we are to be doing what we do—studying, talking about, writing about a subject that interests us and that matters in this world. Have fun!

12: Remember that we work in an applied discipline. We do not only teach students about criminal justice; we help prepare them to do justice out there in the “real world.” What we teach really matters, and how we engage with students matters.

13: You don't have to be the best. But you should do your best.

14: Achieving tenure is a goal, not the goal. It is just another step. Keep going.

15: Quit reading articles like this and get to work!



Craig Hemmens, Ph.D. is a Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at Washington State University. He holds a J.D. from North Carolina Central University School of Law and a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice from Sam Houston State University. He previously served as Department Chair here at Washington State University, as Chair of the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Missouri State University, and as Chair of the Department of Criminal Justice, Academic Director of the Paralegal Studies Program, and Director of the Honors College at Boise State University. Professor Hemmens has published more than 20 books and 250 articles and other writings on a variety of criminal justice-related topics. He is a past-President of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.



Doing the Most with Criminal Justice Curriculum: The Case for Creating an Interdisciplinary Legal Studies Minor at Your Institution

By Elizabeth B. Wiles

One of the most enriching things about teaching in an undergraduate criminal justice or criminology program is that our programs attract students from diverse backgrounds, with a variety of interests, and we get to see them go on to thrive in a wide range of career fields related to criminal justice (and beyond!). Criminal justice coursework can be useful for students from a variety of majors, so including your courses in an interdisciplinary Legal Studies minor is a great way to reach even more students. While a Legal Studies minor is particularly attractive for pre-law students, it is truly beneficial for any student considering a path in government or law-adjacent careers. In this article, I will explain the many benefits that come from creating an interdisciplinary Legal Studies minor that includes criminal justice coursework. And because many of us are “doing more with less” in higher education, I will also demonstrate how most, if not all, institutions can build a vibrant, academically robust interdisciplinary Legal Studies minor with coursework they already regularly teach.

Legal Studies minors are becoming more common, but they are by no means ubiquitous. If your institution lacks a Legal Studies minor with strong criminal justice coursework, take a moment to consider the myriad benefits a Legal Studies minor will create for students and your program. An immediate benefit of building an interdisciplinary

Legal Studies that includes criminal justice coursework is that it will be highly feasible for your criminal justice students and help prepare them not just for law school, but for many careers. Beyond that, including criminal justice coursework in this popular minor can bring even more diverse students into your classroom, such as pre-law students from other majors and minors across your campus who might not have previously considered criminal justice coursework. Relatedly, it should not be an afterthought to consider how attractive Legal Studies minors are to prospective college students.

For some background, at my institution, our Legal Studies minor was only launched in Fall 2023, and it is already one of the most popular minors on our entire campus. In our Criminal Justice program, we’ve had a more than 20% boost in enrollment in our courses that count for the Legal Studies minor from students from outside our department. We have also seen numbers in our Criminal Justice Studies major and minor grow since introducing the Legal Studies minor. While the reasons for that growth are diffuse, anecdotally we know that at least some of that growth is attributed to outside students taking criminal justice coursework for the Legal Studies minor and realizing how much they enjoyed it, so they added the minor (or even the major!).

At the outset, you may be wondering, why a Legal Studies minor? It might first come to mind that a Legal Studies minor has a natural affinity to pre-law studies, yet when counseling pre-law students, most of us rightfully heed the advice from the American Bar Association (ABA) that there is no pre-law major. However, the ABA does recommend students pursue experiences that help them gain exposure to the law; cultivate a commitment to justice and service; and broaden their understanding of societal, cultural, and political

influences on the law. These recommended outcomes are embedded in criminal justice and criminology coursework, making it an ideal complement for a Legal Studies minor.

With these outcomes in mind, there are a few considerations that can guide creating a Legal Studies minor at your institution. First, the ideal interdisciplinary Legal Studies minor will draw on coursework from a range of disciplines, such as criminal justice (or criminology), political science, business, history, philosophy, economics, sociology, and more. Even at smaller institutions facing a reduced faculty body, there are still likely more than enough course offerings across these common disciplines to build a Legal Studies minor. It is important to think expansively about legal studies to include coursework that approaches the law and legal system from multiple angles, socially, historically, philosophically, and more. For example, my institution is a small, public liberal arts university and like others, we are doing “more with less” these days. We built a dynamic and accessible Legal Studies minor where students choose a total of six courses (18 credits) that are mostly electives, spanning more than 10 disciplines. The minor only has two required courses (one on government and one on the legal system), but beyond that, the minor is comprised of a flexible set of “core electives” (courses that are focused on the law and legal system) and “supporting electives” (courses that provide supplementary perspectives on how the law intersects with society).

Because students interested in a Legal Studies minor will come from a broad range of majors, the path through the minor should be as flexible as possible, while still satisfying the learning outcomes. Flexibility is appealing to students as a practical matter because they may be juggling completing specific course requirements from other majors and minors. Flexibility is also inherently appealing to this generation of learners who value an intentional yet

individualizable curriculum, with a practical eye toward maximizing coursework that will promote their future career. Because a minor is a relatively smaller curricular outlay (usually 5–6 classes or 15–18 credits), it can complement a variety of academic paths and is a lower stakes commitment with wide applicability, even if a student doesn’t go on to law school or a law-related career.

There are many ways to build a Legal Studies minor, and ultimately the structure will be guided by the course offerings and availability at your institution. Criminal justice curriculum can and should play an integral role in a Legal Studies minor. In our institution, Criminal Justice Studies contributes the largest share of course offerings to the Legal Studies minor, with Political Science, unsurprisingly, also contributing a significant number of course options. Criminal justice coursework is invaluable to a Legal Studies minor, especially for pre-law students. Criminal justice coursework will not only orient students to the “black letter law” they will be further trained in during law school, but also the real-world impacts of the criminal legal system.

One key element to keep in mind that will promote flexibility for students and, crucially, ensure buy-in from the related departments that contribute coursework is to allow double-counting courses for the Legal Studies minor and other major, minor, or general education requirements. Although the idea of double-counting coursework might initially raise some eyebrows, in an interdisciplinary minor such as this, it makes sense for several reasons. First, for students, the appeal of double-counting coursework is obvious: it allows them to choose coursework they can “stack” for multiple degree requirements so they can graduate expeditiously, and it ensures their coursework is doing the most in furtherance of their career goals.

Second, for faculty in the related departments that

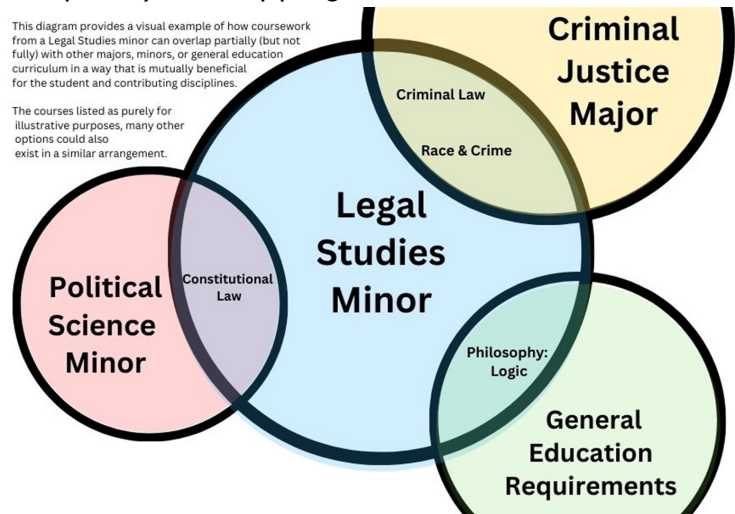
can contribute coursework—such as Criminal Justice, Political Science, etc.—allowing double counting will allay fears that contributing to a Legal Studies minor will take students away from their programs. This concern, somewhat ghoulishly described as “cannibalization,” is an understandable fear, but in this case, it is unfounded. Allowing coursework to be double counted can attract new students not only to a department’s classes, but also the department’s major or minor if students discover they enjoy that discipline.

Because a Legal Studies minor will appeal to students from a variety of majors, contributing your criminal justice classes to the minor creates mutually beneficial opportunities. It exposes outside students to your discipline who may join your program, while also enriching the classroom experience for everyone by expanding the class with more diverse viewpoints and experiences. Including your coursework in a Legal Studies minor will often bring students to your class who are civically engaged or public service-minded. These students tend to be motivated, hard-working, and intellectually curious. Keeping this abundance of benefits in mind should convince even the staunchest disciplinary purists that contributing to an interdisciplinary Legal Studies minor is good for the goose and good for the gander.

Yet to maintain the integrity of contributing disciplines, allowing liberal double counting only makes sense when there are other structural guiderails in place in the Legal Studies minor to ensure students are taking a range of rigorous courses that satisfy the intended learning outcomes. For example, my institution’s Legal Studies minor has no restrictions on double counting, but a minimum of three disciplines (prefixes) must be represented, and there is a limit on courses per discipline in each category. A further requirement is that most courses must be upper level (300 or above), and only one

course can be at the 100 level. Another common structure in Legal Studies minors is to group courses by subject matter or skill set and require students to take a certain number of courses across groupings. Often, the topical groupings will be somewhat delineated by discipline anyway, so this structure likewise ensures students aren’t unfairly “gaming the system” by only double dipping from one or two programs to satisfy a Legal Studies minor.

These are simple but effective guiderails that balance flexibility with curricular integrity because a student can modestly overlap coursework from other majors, minors, or perhaps general education coursework, but they are still completing the Legal Studies minor in a way that is intentional and meets the learning outcomes. You could visualize this in Venn diagram form as a big circle in the middle representing the Legal Studies minor and partially overlapping circles, at the margins, representing another major or minor. However, the area of overlap is small because of the inherent rules in the minor, such as those requiring multi-disciplinarity. There would never be two completely or almost completely overlapping circles.



In an intentionally interdisciplinary Legal Studies minor, students will appreciate getting the most bang for their buck course-wise, as they are able to complete coursework that ticks multiple boxes aligning with their academic interests and career goals. Students who otherwise might not have taken

a criminal justice course will undoubtedly have an eye-opening experience, unique from other disciplinary approaches to the law and legal system. As educators, we can appreciate a Legal Studies minor providing our students with useful skills and knowledge. As Criminal Justice faculty, we can be proud of our role in contributing to a minor that reaches more students from diverse backgrounds, with critical and powerful insights about the justice system and society.

Elizabeth Wiles, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, graduated from Truman with a Bachelor’s degree in Philosophy & Religion ('06) and earned her Juris Doctor from the University of Missouri School of Law, where she served on the Editorial Board of the Missouri Law Review. During law school, she interned for the Honorable Mary R. Russell ('80) of the Supreme Court of Missouri. After law school, she served as a judicial law clerk for the Honorable Patricia Breckenridge of the Supreme Court of Missouri.

As Chair of Legal Studies & Pre-Law Programming, Professor Wiles aims to provide meaningful mentorship to improve access to legal education to students from all backgrounds. She was awarded the William O'Donnell Lee Advising Award in 2020.



Professor Wiles teaches courses such as: Introduction to Criminal Justice Studies, Wrongful Convictions, American Law & Society, Criminal Law, Constitutional Law & Due Process: Limits on Law Enforcement, First Amendment: Fight for Free Speech, and Criminal Justice Studies Capstone. She was awarded Educator of the Year in 2024. Her academic interests include higher education/legal education policy, how the legal system impacts disadvantaged and minoritized populations, and merit-based judicial selection methods.

She is a proud native of rural northern Missouri, originally from nearby Chillicothe, and loves everything outdoors about Kirksville and the surrounding areas.

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Deeanna M. Button, Heather L. Pfeifer, Monica Summers, Courtney Porter, & Jared R. Dmello
Published Online: January 6, 2025
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2024.2439268>

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Emily K. Pelletier
Published Online: January 9, 2025
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2025.2449610>



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Seraphinus Mariano Agung Serman & Esther Clasina Kwano Yoku

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2025.2451311>



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<https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2025.2460587>

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Published Online: February 23, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/24751979.2025.2468274>



Article

I Am Erik Menendez and Lyle Menendez

By David L. Garlock

As you read the title of this article, you might wonder how this person is like Erik Menendez. He is writing this piece from the confines of his home and not stuck in prison serving a life without parole sentence for taking the life of his parents. You probably have never heard about David Garlock,

unless you are in the criminal justice reform space. My story was never on Inside Edition, People Magazine, or other news outlets.

Yes, I am not in prison right now, but I did serve 13 ½ years in prison in Alabama for murder. Like the Menendez brothers, my brother and I were sexually and physically abused by a non-family member while we were kids. This abuse went on for years and we felt the only way out of the situation was to take the abuser's life. I was 19 and my brother was

22 when we made this irrational decision.

Our stories are very similar to the Menendez brothers' because of the abuse that we endured and because we got to the point where we felt the only way out was through a murder.

I am writing this piece to give a different lens for people to view the Menendez brothers through as well as the countless other victims who took the life of their abuser. This type of action, especially back in the 1990s–2010s, was not viewed in the context of someone who was a victim escaping the abuse. We were only looked at as offenders, never as a victim and an offender. The criminal legal system was not designed to consider the complexities of young people's trauma and abuse. In the current criminal justice landscape, this is a concept that is being discussed and studied. But there are many individuals languishing in deadly prisons who are not receiving assistance despite mitigating circumstances, such as childhood physical and sexual abuse, that contextualize the offense that they committed.

Various social media outlets have featured takes on what the Menendez brothers did. Many of these comments are made from a place of privilege. The privilege I am talking about is never having experienced childhood trauma and abuse. It is so easy for someone to be on the outside looking in and make assumptions about what should have been done or how they would have reacted or responded to the situation. I understand how easy it is to make these assertions from your own life, but it does not represent what is happening in the mind of the person being abused.

I hope that by sharing my story I can shed light on two main questions in these commentaries: Why didn't they call the police, and why did they go on a spending spree after the murder? These are comments that people make about the Menendez

brothers and then deduce that it was only done for the money. They wanted to have access to the money that their parents had, and this was the easiest way to make that happen.

My brother and I didn't call the police because of fear and shame. The abuser had tried to kill us a couple of times, and we were being abused on a daily basis. He had our Social Security numbers, so we knew that if he did go to prison for what he had done to us, he would hunt us down when he was released. He had threatened us since the abuse began about killing our family and us. We knew that he would do it—especially if he had gone to prison for the harm that he had inflicted on us. Shame was a key factor, too: What male is going to want to admit that he had been sexually and physically abused for years? Would someone really believe that these horrible acts had been committed for years? Would they believe that we didn't like what was happening? Then the main thought with shame was that a MAN wouldn't allow this to happen to him. These were thoughts that plagued us when we thought about ways out of the situation. I believe that these same thoughts went through the minds of the Menendez brothers. Also, when their offense happened in 1989 and ours in 1999, abuse of males was not talked about, and as their first prosecutor stated, "A man lacked the right parts to be raped." Not being believed would've been a slap in the face. It is also a reason that many people who are being abused do not come forward about the abuse.

The Menendez brothers' spending spree was not about finally having access to the money—it was a trauma response. They were now free from the prison that had them trapped for years. When people are released from prison, they react to that freedom in different ways. Some people live it up and go wild. My brother and I had freedom for four months after the murder. Each of us lived it up differently. My brother left Jasper, Alabama with a

waitress we worked with and went to Florida to work for a carnival. This is what freedom looked like for him. My motto during this time was, "Sex, Drugs, and Rock & Roll." Every day I had to stay high and drunk. This was not just partying, but it also was the way that I coped with taking the life of someone. No one could know about the abuse I endured or the fact that a murder had taken place.

I am not writing this to change your mind, though if that happens then it is great. I think it is important for another lens when we think about the Menendez brothers and others who take the life of their abusers. Ask questions like, "What led them to kill their parents?" and "What type of prison were they in to go on the spending spree? instead of "Why didn't they call the police?" and "Why did they spend so much money after the murder?" It is imperative to get a whole understanding of their state of mind and view it from a trauma-informed space.



David L. Garlock is a successful returning citizen and criminal justice reform leader. Sharing his powerful testimony of grace and redemption, as well as leveraging his professional expertise and wide-reaching network, David fights for second chances for all and believes that everyone is worthy to be restored.

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 **Article**

Interactive Criminal Prosecution Presentation

By Diane Wells

Many years ago, I was prosecuted for a crime I did not commit. The ordeal consumed six years of my life, but I never went to prison. The experience was humbling and profoundly eye-opening, reshaping my understanding of the U.S. criminal justice system in ways I could never have imagined.

My academic background is in economics and business, not law. Like many Americans, my ideas about the U.S. justice system were shaped by TV shows and casual conversations. Yet, unknowingly I had always carried a deep-seated belief that justice would prevail if I simply kept telling the truth and

worked diligently to prove it.

In my case, sometimes that belief held true; other times, it didn't. My case included two motions to dismiss—one due to perjured grand jury testimony, the other concerning the mysterious destruction of all the original business records during an active investigation. Despite these issues, I was convicted by a jury. The judge, however, overturned the verdict. But the government appealed, and I was reconvicted and sentenced by the same judge who had acquitted me.

Living through this was nothing short of horrific, but with time and perspective, I came to see an opportunity to create something meaningful from my experience. I realized I could help educate and, with any luck, inspire the next generation of criminal

justice leaders—those with the inner compass to push the system closer to the collective values we hold dear.

Telling anyone about my case could never be as meaningful as involving them in it. With this in mind, I developed an interactive prosecution presentation. It takes students through the entire prosecution, from investigation to post-sentencing, immersing them in the process by assigning them roles such as defense attorney, prosecutor, judge, defendant, and others who played pivotal parts in my case.

The presentation uses actual testimony and transcripts, including depositions, hearings, trials, appeals, and sentencing. I narrate the experience, but the students/participants are actively engaged, standing up to read key excerpts from the proceedings. We believe in a few things that differentiate our presentation from any others:

First, this was an actual case and I can speak to what happened from a firsthand perspective. The authenticity is powerful.

Second, if you want people to be impacted or transformed, their direct involvement increases the probability of that if they are participating in some way.

As a sample of how some of the prosecution unfolds, each excerpt is read by a student/participant.

The presentation begins with a letter from the government:

The Prosecutor says, "I regret to inform you that you are the target of a federal criminal investigation based on your working with Fund III. I would advise that you get counsel and expect to hear from you next Monday." It was the Wednesday before Thanksgiving.

The first plea deal arrives:

The Prosecutor says, "This letter is to extend an offer of a plea negotiated settlement of the criminal matters pending against your client... subject to final approval ... we are authorized to offer a plea agreement with the following terms:

"Your client will plead guilty to one count. All remaining counts will be dismissed.

"We urge you to discuss with us all the other sentencing factors as we are willing to share our thoughts. The proposed agreement will allow the opportunity for your client's punishment to become mitigated. It will furthermore resolve all pending matters.

"If negotiation is possible, we stand ready to enter into a discussion with your client and you." It continues, "To waive knowingly and expressly the right to appeal...

"To waive all rights, to request or receive from the U.S. any records pertaining to the investigation or prosecution of this matter.

"To assist in the U.S. in recovery and forfeiture of any assets.

"Whenever called upon to do so by the U.S., to disclose fully and truthfully in interviews with Government agents information concerning all conduct related to the indictment and any other crimes of which the Defendant has knowledge AND to testify fully and truthfully in any proceeding.

"To submit to a polygraph examination whenever requested.

"If the defendant provides false, incomplete, or misleading information or testimony, this would constitute a breach of this Agreement by the

Defendant and the Defendant shall be subject to prosecution for any federal criminal violation."

As the investigation continues, it is discovered that the original business records have been destroyed:

The Defendant says, "We hereby submit this memorandum in support of this motion to dismiss because the government allowed the destruction of thousands of documents including materially exculpatory evidence in the form of questionnaires and other documents that were contained in 22 boxes of records that were well-preserved and handed over by the defendant.

"The government knew, or should have known, that the records were relevant to an ongoing federal grand jury investigation and potential charges against the defendant.

The Judge says, "This court denies the defendant's motion to dismiss. Defendant argued in her motion to dismiss that the government failed to preserve potentially exculpatory evidence that was in the possession of a trust, and that the government's failure required that the indictment be dismissed. In denying defendant's motion, the court agreed with defendant that the government has a duty to preserve and produce exculpatory materials that it possesses.

"However, the allegedly exculpatory materials were not in the government's possession when they were destroyed, but in the possession of the trustee. Defendant does not contest this fact, but instead contends that the government was in effective possession of the materials when it received notice from the court of the intention of the trustee to destroy the documents.

"Defendant's theory of constructive possession is unsupported by law. Defendant's motion is denied."

As the investigation continues, the government explains that one of their cooperating government witnesses lied at the grand jury hearing:

The Judge says, "In determining whether an indictment must be dismissed because it is based on perjured testimony, a court must engage in a two-part inquiry. First, the defendant challenging the indictment must demonstrate that the prosecutor knew that the testimony was false at the time the testimony was given, or at least before the return of the indictment. Second, the perjured testimony must be 'material.'"

The judge provides jury instructions:

The Judge says, "The burden of proof is on the prosecution to prove the defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. The defendant is not required to prove innocence or produce any evidence. If the prosecution does not meet this burden, you must find the defendant not guilty.

"You are the sole judges of the credibility of the witnesses and the weight their testimony deserves. In evaluating credibility, consider the witness's behavior on the stand, their ability to recall events, potential bias, and whether their testimony aligns with other evidence in the case.

"The defendant is presumed innocent of the charges. This presumption remains throughout the trial unless and until the government proves the defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

"Expert witnesses are allowed to provide opinions based on their specialized knowledge. It is up to you to decide how much weight to give an expert's testimony, considering their expertise, the reasons for their opinions, and how the testimony aligns with other evidence."

There are lots more twists and turns to this criminal prosecution, and depending on the amount of time allotted and the goal of the professor, it can be tailored to focus on various aspects of the case for the benefit of the class. The important thing is that it feels real and that the students are involved.

This is followed by a lively Q&A session, fostering discussion and deeper reflection, as requested.

This interactive approach has been met with overwhelmingly positive feedback. Bringing a real prosecution to life in this way not only educates but also challenges students to think critically about the justice system and their potential role in shaping its future.



Diane Wells is the Executive Director and Founder of Impartial, a criminal justice non--profit founded in 2021 and located in the Raleigh, NC area. Diane has BA's in Economics and Business Management from NCSU, a MBA from Campbell University and a Duke University paralegal certification. Impartial's mission is to engage people with prison artwork, justice video games, content, membership and data so people can choose to make a meaningful impact on criminal justice issues. Diane's commitment to Impartial's mission stems from her own unjust prosecution.



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Ryan Community College Scholarship. This scholarship is presented in honor of Patrick J. Ryan to recognize his many contributions to the field of criminal justice higher education. As a non-traditional student and life-long learner, Dr. Ryan was a role model for all students to emulate. The NEACJS Scholarship is awarded annually to a student pursuing a lower-division two-year degree in Criminal Justice or Criminology. Student nominees must be admitted to or matriculated in a two-year lower division or community college degree program. Nominations must include a letter of recommendation from one of the student's instructors. Please send a current resume for nominee. Candidates must have earned at least 30 credits in an accredited criminal justice program located within the NEACJS region; possess a GPA of 3.0 or greater; and have completed at least 30% of degree specific courses with a 3.0 or greater GPA in those courses.

All nominations must be made by current members. Awards include \$250 and a one year membership to NEACJS. Awards will be presented at the Annual Meeting in June, 2024, Prince Edward Island, and the award recipients and/or their NEACJS sponsor should be present for the ceremony.

Send all submission materials to Jen Balboni: Jbalboni0608@curry.edu by April 11th.



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Region Two - Southern Criminal Justice Association (SCJA)

www.southerncj.org

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Hotel: Francis Marion Hotel

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Abstract Deadline: June 15, 2025

Award Submissions: Roughly July 1, 2025

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Please email questions to Shaun Thomas at shaun@uark.edu



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Hotel: Aloft Hotels Magnificent Mile

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Awards: Student Travel Scholarships, Student Paper Competitions, Poster Competitions, Practitioner Award, Tom Castellano Award

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Brandon L. Garrett's

Autopsy of a Crime Lab: Exposing the Flaws in Forensics

University of California Press

ISBN: 978052038965

Review by Carl M. Ustupski

Milan Police Chief, Milan, New Mexico

In *Autopsy of a Crime Lab: Exposing the Flaws in Forensics*, Brandon Garrett exposes the imperfections of forensic evidence that are often believed to be crucial in criminal convictions. Forensic evidence is heavily relied upon in court and has contributed to many being wrongly convicted. Garrett separates his book into four parts. Part I describes how the crisis was uncovered by lawyers, scientists, and investigators. Part II explores the ways that forensics can go wrong. Part III changes from forensics experts to crime labs. Part IV explores the path forward from what has been discovered. Garrett compares forensics to air travel and pharmaceuticals because those are carefully regulated, and the consequences of failure are great.

He calls for national regulations of forensics because of what is at stake for someone. We are trained to believe that crimes should be solved in minutes and that evidence is easy to find and accurate because of what is seen on television. At the end of CSI, the crime is solved, and someone is usually arrested because of the outstanding job the detective did. Judges allow evidence into the courtroom most of the time because an expert witness is there to testify and talk about it. Garrett's book dissects the failures of crime labs and forensic experts and gives suggestions on how to fix them.

Autopsy of a Crime Lab

Exposing the
Flaws
in Forensics



Brandon L. Garrett

The first case mentioned in *Autopsy of a Crime Lab: Exposing the Flaws in Forensics* is one that was dubbed "the bite mark case." It involved a murder trial in 1982 in which the victim had been bitten on her legs and a male, Keith Harward, was wrongly accused and spent 33 years behind bars because of expert testimony given by forensic odontologists. Only after Keith Harward had given up on appeals and other avenues did he decide to write to the Innocence Project asking for help. The Innocence Projects are underfunded and under-resourced groups that have operations in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia with the goal of helping innocent people who have been wrongly convicted (Roberts 2009). Through the Innocence Project, DNA evidence that had been collected was utilized to determine that Harward was innocent of the crime he had spent 33 years in prison for. They were able to determine who the subject was that actually bit the victim and discovered that male had already passed away in another prison. Alarming issues involved in bite marks cases like this are that there is no single set way for dentists to do comparisons of photos and molds. Dentists also state that when comparing bite marks and teeth, they are looking for features not apparent to the naked eye and suggest that no two humans have the same features and teeth. The problem is that there has never been any research

to prove this theory. There is no measure or data to determine how often people share the same characteristics in their teeth. In fact, the National Academy of Science has even stated that it has “not been scientifically established” that human dentition is unique. The entire process of utilizing dentists for forensic evidence is said to be subjective and depends on the judgment and experience of the dentist. So, the question that must be asked is why do courts still allow dentists to provide expert testimony, and why are juries convicting innocent people? It could be because, according to several studies, people believe experts who show great confidence in their findings and trust them.

Famed writer John Grisham wrote his first nonfiction book, *The Innocent Man*, about wrongfully convicted Ron Williamson. Ron was set to be executed for the crimes he was wrongfully accused of before DNA testing exonerated him. An “expert” had provided testimony in the trial that was the most damaging for the defense. Once again, people trusted the so-called expert knew what he was talking about. Garret does a good job of showing just how important the Innocence Project is in helping set those wrongfully convicted free. Statistics show that 370 and counting have been exonerated after post-conviction DNA testing proved them to be wrongly convicted. Garret explains that DNA was first identified in the 1860s, and in 1980 British geneticist Sir Alec Jeffries made it possible for DNA testing to be used in criminal cases. The results of DNA testing do not provide what is termed a match but suggests a probability because scientists can calculate the likelihood of finding another person with the same DNA profile. With bite marks, hairs, fingerprints, or other objects this is said to not be the case. DNA testing has freed hundreds of wrongfully convicted individuals, and it has been found that they were accused because of severely flawed forensics. With so many errors and wrongfully convicted individuals, Congress started funding to try and fix the issues. Meetings were held over

several months and various experts gave shocking revelations on forensics. For instance, one expert admitted that research had yet to be done in the area of fingerprinting and making conclusions about certain prints. Another expert voiced his concern about hair analysis and basically stated that someone could be wrongfully convicted if hair evidence was brought to court. Reports were released that called for the stoppage of flawed forensic evidence until proven scientific data could be produced. Several believed the reports to be damaging and defended forensics evidence in court proceedings. Many leading scientists stated that besides DNA testing, other forensic techniques have not been proven through rigorous testing. The rates of error are just too great and unknown.

When discussing fingerprinting and the possible rate of error, Garret utilizes cell phones to explain the possibility of error occurring. He writes that errors can happen because of a dirty cell phone screen or a wet fingertip. He suggests that failure to open your cell phone is a small inconvenience compared to criminal cases where life and liberty are at stake. The case of Brandon Mayfield is another example. Brandon was arrested and accused of having a role in a terrorist bombing in Madrid, Spain. A smudged fingerprint collected at the scene was examined, and three experienced FBI examiners were convinced the print was in fact Brandon’s. This even after investigators from Spain tried telling the FBI that Brandon was not the suspect. Brandon essentially was released after Spanish authorities arrested the correct suspect. This was such a high-profile case, and three experienced examiners got it wrong. Garret’s point of the errors in forensics is never clearer to this point and makes the reader question how many wrongly convicted people are sitting in prison or have been put to death. An explanation of the process of examining fingerprints is given and just how hard a task it is. There are many contributing factors to why it is difficult to get a good print, such as the surface,

changing of prints for various reasons, or the oil on skin. A study at the Houston Forensic Science Center concluded that 56% of latent prints the lab received were deemed to have no value or were not suitable for comparison. In a 2014 Miami-Dade Police Department study about error rates involving latent prints, it was discovered that there were several different false positive and false negative rates. The PCAST report concluded that as high as 1 in 18 cases could result in a false positive (Pacheco et al., 2019). Garret discusses four possible areas that further research should be conducted on. First, are everyone's fingerprints unique or are there similarities in some? Second, how often does it occur that someone's prints appear to be the same as those from a crime scene latent print? Third, how good are experts at making comparisons and what is their accuracy rate? Fourth, why is technology not catching the errors if available? In the wake of the Mayfield case, the FBI made several important changes to examining prints and the verbiage used when concluding and testifying. For instance, "100% level of certainty" was recommended not to be used. Also, the fingerprint examiner can offer a conclusion of "source identification" instead of "source individualization." Even with the changes, a jury still will only hear that an expert reviewed the prints and that the conclusion is fact and they cannot be wrong. Garret writes about error rates in fingerprints, bite marks, and hair testing, and the number of errors that are discovered is unbelievable. To suggest that results or conclusions are 100% affirmed without actual research backing those claims is absurd.

Garret speaks about expert overstatement and, in particular, testimony of experts in cases where hair evidence was the source of wrongful convictions. He writes that the biggest scandal in forensics started at the Watergate complex. That case involved the wrongful conviction of Donald Gates. The main piece of evidence was a single hair that an expert testified to being a match to Donald. The

expert, Special Agent Michael Malone, was considered the best in the world at what he does. He gave testimony that the hair collected from the crime scene could not have been anyone else's but Donald's. Agent Malone was confident in his findings, and because he was deemed an expert, and perhaps the best in his field, Donald Gates was found guilty. Donald was later exonerated and freed after being wrongfully convicted. Garret's example of overstatement by experts gives you a clear picture of how court proceedings seem to go when an expert is called in. The term expert seems to carry so much weight, and they are believed by the normal person in the jury box. It was later discovered that Malone's cases he testified in were problematic. An astonishing 96% of them, in fact. Experts had claimed in several cases about the number of hair fibers they had compared, and rarely were two a match from other people. One expert claimed to have examined 25,000 hair samples and had yet to find a match to his own. To a jury with no experience, training, or knowledge of testing hair samples, this would be hard to dispute. Calls were made for a change and an audit of the FBI crime lab. There was a review of 2,900 cases that the FBI had conducted. An FBI team concluded that 96% of those cases consisted of flawed testimony from experts. To think of all those sent to death that had already been executed or those that died in prison because of overstatement is sickening. Garret explains some issues with the experts that have been found to play a part in false convictions. Those issues included some not being qualified although they claimed to be experts. Others had false credentials, and some had hidden biases. In North Carolina, a trial judge deemed an examiner from a police department to not be qualified to be considered an expert, based on training and experience. An example given by Garret of false credentials is that the head of the Maryland State Police Firearms Unit lied for years about his credentials and later committed suicide after retiring. Garrett states that we may all be

personally biased, but there is an expectation of blind justice when it comes to the criminal courts. It is suggested that most forensic experts working for the police have some bias already. Garret states that we are all biased but do not hold the life and liberty of the accused in our hands. In a study about cognitive bias in forensic pathology decisions, the researchers state that cognitive biases are not intentional but can emerge for various reasons. Such reasons could be the case at hand and how it was examined, the person conducting the investigation and organization factors, or just human nature (Dror et al., 2021).

In *Autopsy of a Crime Lab: Exposing the Flaws in Forensics*, Garret discusses the failed labs across the country and what went wrong. Examples are given of analysts who were caught stealing drugs and using them for more energy. There have been so many labs that have closed down due to failed audits and errors in multiple cases. So many cases have been overturned because of the theft of narcotics, such as a San Francisco lab where a 27-year veteran analyst was caught stealing cocaine. These are not analysts with a few years on; these are people who have been doing the job for quite some time making poor decisions. A reason cited was lack of supervision. An analyst in Massachusetts started to manufacture crack in the lab because there was not enough coming into the lab to support her habit. She admitted to this and stealing other analysts' samples. The lack of supervision and accountability made this possible and for years nobody noticed. The National Academy of Sciences stated that there was a need for standard rules and procedures at labs. There is mention of making sure labs are accredited, which would involve having a professional scientific body make sure that labs meet scientific standards through periodic checks. But would this be enough? Marvin Schecter conducted a study of 50 major laboratories. What was discovered was fraud by analysts, evidence destruction, failed proficiency

tests, misrepresentation in findings, and tampering with drugs. Twenty-eight of those labs were nationally accredited (Beety, 2016). With so many failures, we must look at how to correct the issues and improve forensic testing and labs. Garret lays out a vision of how to do this. His suggestion is to start with finding out the error rates and discarding techniques prone to errors, such as bite mark testing. He then suggests that experts must disclose their error rates to the courts and eliminate terms that mislead a judge and jury. Finding out the reliability of an expert is important before they are allowed to serve as experts. The next step would then be to build firewalls to eliminate cognitive bias and then to have quality controls in place, such as blind testing or random audits. Police evidence technicians should be supervised by scientists, and judges should be able to ensure full discovery is provided to both prosecutors and defense counsel. Judges also need to make sure the jurors are aware of any limitations to forensic evidence. Establishing forensic science commissions would help ensure all the ideas from Garret's vision are implemented because it would instill quality control and institutional oversight. Only 13 states have established forensic science commissions, which mean 37 have not (Dow, 2020). What has happened is that the number of cases that are being processed has far exceeded any oversight. Garret points out the need to improve quality of work in laboratories and build a system that ensures police quality control while providing oversight. His book was an eye opener to the many issues and problems that most, like me, are blind to. The need for improvement in all areas of forensic evidence is a major task but must be something that continues to occur to ensure that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is maintained for everyone.

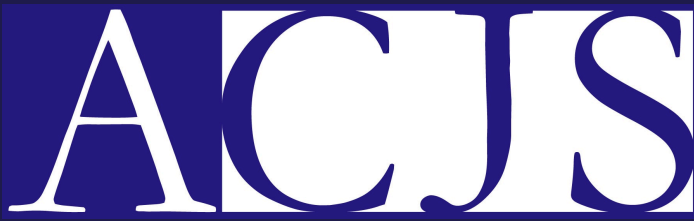
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Carl Ustupski is the Chief of Police for the Milan Police Department in Milan, New Mexico. He has been a police officer for 19 years in New Mexico and Wisconsin. He has always been proactive in his enforcement efforts regarding impaired driving and has consistently been active with his involvement in the community. Carl received his Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from Point Park University and his Master's in Criminal Justice from Lamar University. Carl is also a graduate of the Northwestern University School of Police Staff and Command.



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Publication Schedule

- January
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- May
- September
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Distributed to current ACJS members.

Submissions

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