

**AP-LS Student Committee Webinar Minutes:  
The future of forensic psychology featuring Kirk Heilbrun, PhD**

**Presentation:**

- Five important goals for next decade (from Heilbrun and Holliday (2010))
  - Goal 1: National Institute of Forensic Science proposal
    - Never ended up happening—probably financial reasons
    - Proposal envisioned various kinds of sciences that could be applied to the law, but did not include psychiatry or psychology
    - There are a lot of advantages to be had in taking silos that exist between the forensic sciences and asking, “How does psychiatry or psychology fit what them, and how might we learn from one another?”
    - Policy and legal professionals start to feel excluded and that AP-LS is not looking at the broader context (versus specific things you can investigate in the lab)
    - Important to have relationships with other organizations (cross-pollination, interdisciplinary work) and to learn from one another
    - Not sure if institute is ever going to happen but would love to see it—for your generation to pursue
  - Goal 2: Improve the quality of FMHA practice broadly
    - In 1980s, very few training sites and models existed (e.g., Michigan, Virginia)
      - We’ve gradually seen a shift toward models, best practice recommendations, and specialized measures that can be used
    - However, the problem is a stubborn one
      - You will be disappointed in the quality of forensic evaluations in the real world (e.g., draw a random sample of reports from community hospitals, courts, etc.)
      - Evaluators often not following best practices
    - 17 states have state-level training or certification for forensic evaluators
      - Pretty heterogeneous models that the states are using
      - Certification has resulted in some push back from professionals over their concern that the state is interfering with their livelihood
      - Alternative to certification and its challenges: e.g., Virginia provides a list of persons who received specialty state CE training to the courts, to which the courts are receptive—a promising model that falls short of certification
  - Goal 3: Expand scope of field to include important innovations
    - 1. General shift in emphasis (at least over the past five years) to include important emphasis on intervention as well as assessment

- E.g., Risk assessment is a leader in this movement (has served as a bridge between forensic mental health assessment and correctional psychology)
- Do good work in applied settings: use the tools, methods, best practices, etc. that the field has yielded in recent years
- If employed in an applied setting, consider the big advantage you have in terms of access to research participants
- 2. Technology rut (stuck in the late 1970s)
  - Use your imagination to think of the potential of tablets, smart phones, Internet, etc. for monitoring, supervising, collaborating, researching, etc.
- Goal 4: Expand consultation and education to include more services to the areas described in the previous goal, particularly in the public sector
  - Bring others along in doing it right, including modeling things for lawyers, clinical administrators, lawyers, etc.
  - Valuable trend toward use of empirically support interventions and specialized tools—convince others these things are as great as we think they are
- Goal 5: Expand diversity of our field
  - Low bar to clear
  - Not that people are not trying, but we could still do much, much better
  - I don't have any magic bullet
    - E.g., in our academic setting, we do our best to take diversity into account in bringing people in to work with us; also bring up when consulting, etc.

### Q&A:

- *Submitted question: You have a very mature perspective of the field; based on all that, what do you see as hot topics in research moving forward that students can get involved in?*
  - Intervention research is harder to do (versus prediction research, which is straight forward to carry out)
    - But we've long since passed the time that we can't do intervention research
  - How can we get people better engaged in working with us (i.e., shift in focus from just what we're doing intervention wise, to also whether people care and want to participate)
    - E.g., getting people convinced that there are such things at risk factors that apply to them, and that they want to work on them
      - E.g., motivational interviewing
      - E.g., Pre-interventions that convinces people that they do have some area of need and that it would be worthwhile for them to work on those things
  - Risk assessment: Pretty convinced we've hit the ceiling of our predictive validity or classification accuracy (AUC values in mid 0.7s)

- Skeptical of idea that we should continue to invest time, energy, and money in increasing predictive accuracy—would just as soon invest in resources on how to reduce risk and effect changes
- Also: How is it that you could use technology to improve not only interventions that are delivered but to develop them:
  - E.g., Skeem and colleagues: Being firm but fair as a community corrections officer is better than being punitive or arbitrary, and size of caseload also makes a difference
    - What if an offender had a smartphone he or she could use to interact with his or her community corrections officer, or Siri-type character, who was responsive to their needs and coached them on managing their risk factors in real-time
    - Community corrections officers would then be free just to monitor and respond to emergency
  - iPad study at Drexel—participants fascinated in technological overlay
    - Anticipate and respond to objections from, e.g., correctional administrators; same thing we saw earlier regarding pushback to introduction of sharp pencils and pens into correctional facilities
- *Ryan Kelly from Roger Williams: Ogloff (2000) in his paper on the past and future of AP-LS briefly writes about "moving away from the parochial of forensic psychology" whereas we should shift our focus from just the American legal system to different legal systems throughout the world. How important do you think this goal is and in what ways would you imagine this could be accomplished?*
  - Think Jim was right in many respects
  - Technology would assist—it makes international research feasible
  - Disciplinary silos: getting other organizations going on an interdisciplinary and international basis
  - Challenging: different cultures, legal systems, priorities, etc.
  - Visited an Australian community court last year while on sabbatical, and was really struck by how the magistrate interacted with court participants
    - E.g., during one instance, judge came down off the bench and sat at table with the individual (his family came in as well) and talked to that person for about an hour
    - This would be unheard of in an American court, even in a problem solving court
    - Worth it? How well does it work? Is it something to which our judges could pay attention?
- *Matthew McNally's submitted question: Post-doctoral fellowships are ideal for specialty training. But there are not many formal forensic psychology post-docs out there. What alternative courses of post-doctoral training would you recommend for forensic psychology?*
  - In grand scheme of things, post-doc training is a recent addition on the stage for the field

- E.g., back in the 1980s, there was one in country at FSU
  - Today there are at least 13 or 14
    - Still, means that the majority of individuals who want to specialize or become proficient won't be able to through one of the post-docs
  - But that doesn't mean you can't pursue specialty training
    - E.g., if work in federal or state prison, or community mental health center, or jail, etc., then you will be exposed to the issue
    - Careful in getting CE (there is a fair amount of good CE available today) and attending right conferences to get good ideas
    - If don't have immediate supervisor familiar with area, consider contracting with someone around country via technology (e.g., one hour of consultant's time per week for a year for advice on things to read, do, view some of your projects, view his or hers, etc.)
      - This is something people do in preparing for board certification for ABPP, but you might consider doing it even if not preparing for board certification
    - Have people with like interests assemble (e.g., professional interest meeting)
      - Given where we're at on this webinar, people don't have to be in same region
      - Could read, prompt one another, etc.
- *Amy A Hamilton from SHSU Psych Services: Thanks, Dr. Heilbrun! I regret missing New Orleans & Dick Latessa's talk on how RNR is to be applied to interventions. You mentioned a few years ago that RNR still needed to be "translated" into terms psychologists can use. Do you perceive next steps for doing this in, say, sex offender treatment? Reserach here at SHSU by Meeks indicates quite a disconnect between 1) sex offender treatment providers and what they're emphasizing with sex offenders (e.g., victim empathy, denial) and 2) empirically supported risk factors. What can APLS do to bridge this gap?*
  - Some ideas die hard
  - Could take playbook from psychiatric rehabilitation with persons with SMI: can't teach them out of experiencing SMI, but can teach them how to act as if
  - This is probably what we're after in working with some types of offenders
  - Sexual offenders is one of the least homogeneous categories of offenders I know
  - One thing I'd suggest: break "sex offenders" down some, at least with expectation that the umbrella term connotes some pretty clear meaning that may or may not distinguish them from other kinds of offenders
  - As move in direction to delivering the best kind of interventions, we should look at two kinds of things: (1) things most strongly related to propensity for reoffending; (2) focus on things that we can change and modify
    - Might be stuck if have something that seems difficult to change and causal—but let's not accept that too quickly
    - E.g., clinical lore that psychopaths are treatable

- People accepted that very easily, so need to exclude them, manage their risk, etc.
- Reality is that they are difficult to treat and some do not respond, but others might, but they need the right dosage, intensity, and kind, that some early research failed to evaluate
- E.g., study that psychopaths get worse with treatment—kind of treatment they were undergoing included sensory deprivation, hot tub therapy, etc.—no surprise they did not get better or got better at conning people
- Short answer: through out research, identify things that are most important (causal links with risk-reducing potential) and if something is challenging, see if can figure out ways around the challenge

**Parting words:**

- Generally very encouraged with where field is at and how it has developed
- There are more high caliber trainees and professionals, which bodes well
- Hope everyone on call takes serious their responsibility to model good practices and disseminate good practices to trainees, judges, lawyers, etc.