The Career Corner is intended to highlight the individuals who work at the intersection of law and psychology, where they come from, how they got there, and how their experiences influence their research, teaching, and/or practice. This edition of Career Corner profiles ***Randy Salekin, PhD****, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Psychology at The University of Alabama (UA).*

Dr. Salekin is currently serving as the 2025-2026 President of the American Psychology-Law Society (APA Division 41). Dr. Salekin received his PhD in Clinical Psychology from The University of North Texas (UNT) and completed his clinical internship at Yale University. His primary research interests involve Conduct Disorder (CD) and its affiliated personality traits (grandiose-manipulative, callous-unemotional, and daring-impulsive). Specifically, he proposes that the inclusion of personality characteristics may offer clinicians richer clinical descriptors for CD, facilitate understanding of the etiology of CD, and promote the development of novel and effective interventions for youth with conduct problems.

Sidra Capriolo*, a 3rd-year Clinical Psychology PhD student at UA and 2025-2026 Student Committee Chair-Elect, interviewed Dr. Salekin.*

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

Dr. Salekin: When I was an undergraduate student at Simon Fraser University, I became very interested in psychology. Through some work in a few different laboratories, I learned about psychology and law. I was also very interested in the personality condition of psychopathy and there were two professors working at the University who were students of Robert Hare. These students were David Cox and Steve Hart. They were working on the Psychopathy Checklist Screening Version (PCL:SV) while I was an undergraduate student at SFU and I was in an office just down the hall from them.

At the time, a few honors students were also permitted to serve as teaching assistants (TAs), which is why I had an office in close proximity to post-docs and early career professors. I also was influenced by the work of Jim Ogloff who had conducted one of the first treatment studies on psychopathy with Stephen Wong. Jim was also an AP-LS member and was my mentor for my honors thesis, which was a jury decision making study that focused on the emotion of the defendant and how that emotion could affect decision-making.

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

Dr. Salekin: While an undergraduate, I had a few different career plans. Like many students, I did not know for sure what I wanted to do. I first earned a business associate degree before transferring from a community college to Simon Fraser University, and then, I thought I might work toward a law degree. However, it was a psychology course that caught my eye. Once I had taken introduction to psychology, the following semester I had my first abnormal psychology class (psychopathology). This class was taught by a professor named Michael Coles, who had extensive experience with mentally ill patients—some in forensic hospitals. He was able to weave his experiences into his lectures and chapter material. I was quite interested in this course and wanted to better understand the etiology and treatment of mental disorders, and I was also gaining an interest in understanding personality disorders. This class really captured my interest and is probably when I first started to think about the possibility of training to be a clinical psychologist.

When I started graduate school, whenever possible, I sought out child clinical cases with externalizing problems which included DSM disorders such as Conduct Disorder and Oppositional Defiant Disorder. This helped with my clinical experience with externalizing youth and with my eventual career path. We conducted one of the early studies on adolescents with an adapted version of the PCL-R. From UNT, I went to Yale University for internship. There I was primarily interested in learning more about severe mental illnesses and also about psychopharmacology, and Yale had excellent opportunities for work in those areas. My first academic job was as an assistant professor at Florida International University which I started right after my internship, and I subsequently moved to the University of Alabama, where I currently work in the Department of Psychology.

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

Dr. Salekin: The work we are conducting right now focuses on Conduct Disorder (CD) and the personality specifiers for CD. We see this as important work, because CD itself is primarily made up of behaviors (e.g., fighting, stealing). That is, if a child or adolescent meets criteria for CD by having three or more of the 15 symptoms, they will be diagnosed with CD, which does give us some information, but that information is pretty limited, and there is quite a bit of heterogeneity to the disorder. This heterogeneity is a barrier to better understanding the condition. It is more important to think about the personality vulnerabilities that a child or adolescent may have that is likely to be leading to the conduct problems, than the behaviors themselves. In this regard, we have been centering on the dispositions of “grandiose-manipulative”, “callous-unemotional”, and “daring-impulsive”

personality traits. By focusing on the personality traits that are affiliated with CD, we feel that we will be in a better position to understand what propels conduct problems, but also to then better know potential biological markers (neural circuitry) for each of the specifiers and how to better innovate treatments. We recently published a paper in the *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology* (2025; https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2024.2447240) on this topic in their "Future Directions" section. It is titled, "Future Directions for Conduct Disorder and Psychopathic Traits."

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

Dr. Salekin: I think one of the reasons that this work can be rewarding is that we are trying to help people with mental health issues. With respect to children with CD, they do not really know why they keep getting in trouble at home, school, and with the law, and we can start to help them, hopefully at some point, to alleviate the problems that come along with the issue of having, for example, problems with self-other comparisons, problems with understanding others' emotions, or problems with taking risks that far exceed the risks that others are willing to take. With regard to the latter, this level of daringness also gets peers into trouble. Lately, I have been asked to provide presentations on this topic to psychiatry departments and clinical psychology programs, as well as to provide webinars, and these outlets are helpful to disseminate this information to psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, and other allied mental health professionals. I enjoy this aspect of the work as well.

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

Dr. Salekin: People likely do not all have the same or similar experiences with this. I remember writing some of my first papers as an undergraduate and I would have to make my way to the library and into the stacks to collect research articles. At the time, I had to utilize the card catalogue to identify where the books were in the library. And, when I had my first assignment that required a scientific review paper, I thought the experience was quite rewarding. I later found myself looking forward to these types of assignments and eventually writing other papers on other topics such as self-monitoring, behavior therapy, ADHD, historical figures (René DeCartes), and some more specifically on conduct disorder and psychopathic personality traits. The hours in the library helped shape my career and furthered my interest in the potential for building up what we know regarding the causal mechanisms for CD and related disorders.

When I entered graduate school, at the University of North Texas, I joined research teams and found myself volunteering and engaging in research that extended beyond my masters

and dissertation projects and this extension eventually resulted in being involved in more and more research projects. That process continued to build my writing, statistical, and data analytic skills. At UNT, I also learned more about extensive literature reviews, data collection, data analyses, and the presentation and publication process. I think these experiences likely shaped my career trajectory toward academics.

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

Dr. Salekin: I think some of the biggest challenges are the current manner in which the legal system itself is being challenged and what that will mean for some of the work we have done at AP-LS, and some of the work we are currently doing. There were major breakthroughs in psychological research through the years with competency evaluations, insanity evaluations, eyewitness testimony, jury decision-making, and a whole host of other breakthroughs with respect to psychology-law science. Some of these breakthroughs also have had an impact on the US juvenile and adult court systems. I wonder if psychology law and AP-LS could help to further remove bias from legal decision-making and lawmaking, in general, in future years. Maybe, APLS is one of the more specialized and informed groups to start to think about this issue.

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

Dr. Salekin: We may need more research on how to protect against group-think with respect to how to apply the law, and we may need more work on how to live in harmony. There will always be some disagreement, but these are societal issues that may need more psychology-law focus in the upcoming years. Part of this may entail improving respectful communication and collaboration with superordinate goals.

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

Dr. Salekin: Like a lot of AP-LS members, my mentor asked me if I would like to attend a conference when I was an undergraduate student and then as a graduate student it became a regular conference for many of my fellow graduate students (our home conference). AP-LS was a place where we would submit our first ideas and research works and present our first posters and deliver our first papers. I was at AP-LS for some important developments, including the MacArthur grant award and discoveries related to psychology and the juvenile justice system (i.e., how to think about developmental maturity). AP-LS has

been a great home conference and a terrific place to witness new discoveries. I think it is also important to broaden out too though. I and my colleagues started attending other conferences, too, and this I believe also helps one broaden and build on what they know. This also helps to bring information back to AP-LS where ideas can be further thought about and refined.

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

Dr. Salekin: I am in the early stages of establishing several initiatives. First, one is related to the programming for the upcoming AP-LS conference, in Reno. This programming will touch on issues like integrity, honesty, and civics. Second, I plan to have webinars that also center on these topics. Third, I have agreed, and I am excited to help Chris Meissner with the Strategic Plan for APLS. Chris has been an amazing president for AP-LS and when he was starting his initiatives, we agreed together that this would be a 2-year planning and implementation process. In my President-Elect year, I was very happy to be involved and experience Chris's thoughtful initiative. It is important for any society to occasionally look back at where It has been and then forward to where we may have plans to go. So, this as well will also be a part of my overall initiatives.

AP-LS Student Committee: How can students and early career professionals become more involved in AP-LS and the psychology-law field?

Dr. Salekin: There are always opportunities to volunteer. I would recommend volunteering and helping with a committee, to start. This also helps to get one familiar with other students and faculty working within AP-LS. If you decide you like the work and/or want to continue to help, students can join additional committees, or alternately shift roles. That is one excellent way to get involved. With respect to the field, I think it is finding a research area or trying to contribute in some way that is meaningful and helpful to the psychology-law field. This is sometimes done through basic science and other times through science that leads to better or more informed clinical practice.

When I was a graduate student, my mentor was asked to evaluate an adolescent (and potentially testify) being considered for transfer to adult criminal court. At the time, there was very little information on what psychologists should do in such cases. My mentor asked me to make a trip to the law library to collect the cases of *Kent v. US* and *In re Gault*, and any other relevant case law. That trip and reading those cases and related articles led to the development of a more structured way to think about and assess these difficult

issues (e.g., level of developmental maturity amenability to treatment). There are always things that need improving in the psychology-law realm and finding these areas, if you are interested in the topic, can be a way to get further involved in the psychology-law field itself.

AP-LS Student Committee: What are some of your hobbies outside of your career?

Dr. Salekin: Outside of academia, I have always been a big sports person. I have enjoyed playing hockey for many years. Tennis has become an increasing interest of late. Because of convenience, I now like to go on runs, or to the gym for some exercise, but will occasionally play some of these other favorite sports when I can. Aside from the recreation activities, during more quite times, I also like to read (fiction, neuroscience, pop psychology books relevant to what I study).

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

Dr. Salekin: I very much enjoy my work, so that makes things a bit easier. Still, I believe you have to set aside some time for the things you enjoy. Creating time for some of the hobbies you like, such as having some contact with nature, going on walks, and going for coffee with friends and family, is important to me. I really enjoy going for coffee with my daughters is one thing I like to do. Even when things are busy, I try to make time for these some life balance.

AP-LS Student Committee: What advice would you give to undergraduate students interested in graduate school in this field?

Dr. Salekin: Undergraduate studies are enjoyable because there is so much learn at that developmental phase. I would say paying attention to those things that inspire you can be important. If undergraduate students find themselves getting excited about psychology and perhaps psychology-law, I recommend seeking out research experiences in those areas. For me, it was abnormal psychology and how some individuals with mental health issues found themselves in contact with the law, so I began to seek out experiences in those areas. I would recommend that undergraduate students talk directly, especially with faculty, and with graduate students at their earliest convenience. Faculty and graduate students can give undergraduate students amazing advice about i) how to get into graduate school, ii) what to look for in graduate programs, and iii) how to obtain letters of recommendation, etc. I would also encourage making a shift to a different institution for graduate work to broaden overall knowledge.

AP-LS Student Committee: What advice do you have for current graduate students?

Dr. Salekin: I would say one piece of advice is to embrace the experience of graduate school and to learn all that you can. This includes classes and mastering the material for your classes and gaining experiences that help build your career. Read as much as you can on the area of interest and on other related topics. I think it is good to manage your time and whenever possible do work that counts for two things (e.g., obtain clinical experience while collecting thesis data). I would devote time to knowing your field well and to obtaining experiences, and to work to obtain meaningful research publications, and meaningful relationships with mentors and fellow graduate students.