



Crime & Grits

ISSUE XI | FALL 2025

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN CRIMINAL JUSTICE ASSOCIATION

Welcome From the Executive Board

Whether you're shuffling through fallen leaves, or just now getting below 80 degrees, we are excited to share this latest issue of Crime & Grits! As our clocks fall back, this issue takes a look back at our 2025 annual meeting, September 9-12 in Charleston, SC, at the Francis Marion Hotel. Our Board is proud of the successful week in such a gorgeous city! We enjoyed delicious food, danced and tailgated, and connected to share impactful and innovative research that our region is known for. Dr. Julie Baldwin's time as President was capped with a moving address on the importance of translational research. We are thankful for her energy and effort serving this organization! Keep reading for a special message about the conference from our new President, Dr. Shaun Thomas. This issue also includes the first mentor/mentee feature from the *Grit & Growth* series, where three of our members share a conversation reflecting on their experiences with mentorship. You will also find our Spotlight on Dr. Jeff Smith, our Practitioner of the Year for 2025. We hope you are able to check out the latest from our conference journal, *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, with a Special Issue and new features. Be sure to read the updates from Editor-in-Chief J.C. Barnes regarding exciting things you'll see from the journal this year.

--The Board

THANK YOU

- Dr. Brenda Vose finished her 3 year term on the Board as a Director-at-Large, following years of dedicated service in other roles!
- Awards committees for their service in reviewing the nominees and candidates for the 2025 awards!
- UCF graduate students for their time and effort at the registration desk each day at the conference!
- SCJA 2025 site selection committee for scouting the location!
- Our members and attendees who continue to support our organization as we grow and improve each year!

DON'T FORGET

Follow SCJA Social Media



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SCJA EXECUTIVE BOARD, 2025-2026

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*It's
official!*

SCJA 2026

FT. LAUDERDALE BEACH, FLORIDA

SCJA is going back to the beach! We are excited to announce that our 2026 meeting will be held at the Westin Fort Lauderdale Beach Resort from September 14-18, 2026.

Cool off from the South Florida sun and insightful meetings with a refreshing dip in the outdoor pool or relax at the poolside bar and grill. Cross the hotel's cleverly designed skywalk, which is directly connected from the pool deck to the beach. Soak up the sun in the complimentary beach chairs and umbrellas, take a dip in the turquoise waters of Fort Lauderdale, or stroll along the palm tree-fringed, beachfront promenade. Stay tuned for more details. We look forward to having you join us!



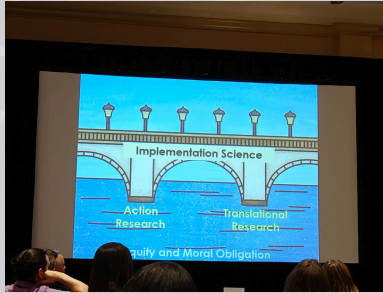
2025 SCJA Annual Meeting Recap

Charleston, SC



Dr. Julie Baldwin
Presidential Address

Dr. Julie Baldwin's Presidential Address at this year's conference discussed the theme, "Bridging the Gap: Advancing Research Into Practice." This theme resonates throughout Dr. Baldwin's roles as Interim Vice Provost for Research & Innovation, founding Director of the Center for Research & Collaborative Partnerships, and Research Professor of Justice, Law, and Criminology at American University, which afford her a wealth of firsthand experiences in translational research and partnerships with practitioners. She emphasized the importance of un-siloing academic research to encourage data-driven program and policy decisions. The bridge metaphor was used to represent what can happen when we engage more readily with stakeholders at each level of a policy (including end-user feedback), resulting in more refined practices that can make a more meaningful impact.



FAVOR Lowcountry
2025 Philanthropy

The proceeds from the raffle and fundraising at the 2025 conference were donated to FAVOR LowCountry, a Charleston-based non-profit that assists individuals impacted by substance use disorders and their families. Attendees and SCJA donated a total of \$1,238!



Dr. Michael White
Keynote Speaker

The Keynote Speaker for the 2025 conference was Dr. Michael White, Professor of Criminology & Criminal Justice at Arizona State University. Dr. White's keynote explored the utility of AI tools to facilitate data collection from extensive video footage and the value of BWC video in identifying effective police practices for training and research. Dr. White and his colleagues recently published an article in SCJA's *American Journal of Criminal Justice* on officer acceptance of AI and how it used in reviewing BWC footage.

ANNUAL MEETING 2025



Kaitlyn Stearns
Student Poster Award



Vitoria deFrancisco Lopez
Outstanding Doctoral
Student



Zoe Andrews
Outstanding
Undergraduate

James Hawdon, Educator
of the Year



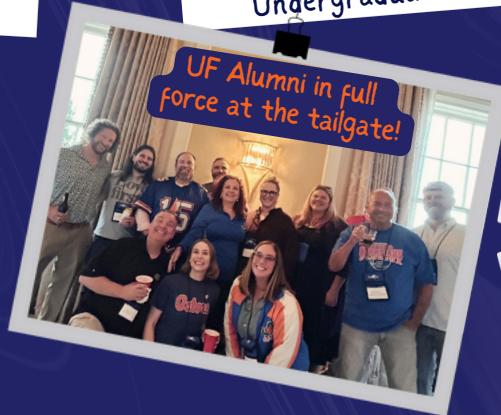
Brenda Vose
SCJA Board
Service



The Worm and a Live Band



Passing the gavel
to the next President



UF Alumni in full
force at the tailgate!



Kenneth Lomenzo
Student Poster Award

BY THE NUMBERS

212

REGISTRANTS

130

PRESENTATIONS

330

SCJA MEMBERS

Congratulations to the 2025 SCJA Award Winners!



Outstanding Masters Student
Karina Costa Baraldi
University of Alabama



Outstanding Professional of the Year
Dr. Jeff Smith, Assistant City Manager
City of Loganville, Georgia



Tom Baker Outstanding Undergraduate Student
Zoey Andrews
University of West Georgia



Outstanding Doctoral Student
Vitoria de Francisco Lopes
University of Mississippi



SCJA Educator of the Year
Dr. James Hawdon
Virginia Tech University

Outstanding Student Poster Award Winners “Youth Victimization and Early Adulthood Fatalism”

Kaitlyn Stearns, University of Alabama--Birmingham (with Dr. Lindsay Leban)

“Experience Matters: Officer Tenure & Injury Outcomes in Use of Force Incidents”
Kenneth Lomenzo, University of Mississippi

Student & Untenured Faculty Travel Awards

Ellie Yates University of Tennessee--Chattanooga	Allison Excobedo University of Texas--Dallas	Jazmine Villarreal Texas A&M University--San Antonio
Johanna Isenberg University of Tennessee--Knoxville	Sara Diaz Sam Houston State University	Kathleen Hillman University of Tennessee--Chattanooga
Kaitlyn Stearns University of Alabama--Birmingham	Stacey Clifton, Ph.D. Radford University	Atlee Dean University of Tennessee--Chattanooga
Rachel Gilbreath University of Tennessee-Chattanooga	Matthew Hoggatt, Ph.D. University of Southern Mississippi	Katelyn Hancock, Ph.D. University of Tennessee-Chattanooga

Practitioner SPOTLIGHT



Dr. Jeff Smith

Assistant City Manager, Loganville, GA
2025 Practitioner of the Year

During our annual meeting in Charleston, the Southern Criminal Justice Association was delighted to honor Dr. Jeff Smith as the 2025 Outstanding Professional of the Year. His remarkable career perfectly mirrors this year's conference theme, "Bridging the Gap: Advancing Research to Practice," showcasing a deep-seated commitment to both the front lines of criminal justice and the academic world.

Following a family tradition as a fifth-generation police officer, Dr. Smith served the Lawrenceville Police Department for over 33 years. He rose through the ranks to Captain, leading diverse units like patrol, traffic, investigations, and special operations, all while serving as a senior instructor in critical areas such as accident reconstruction and constitutional law. After retiring from the force in 2023, he didn't slow down, transitioning seamlessly into the role of Director of Operations for the Gwinnett County Solicitor General's Office before taking his current position as Assistant City Manager in Loganville, GA.

Impressively, Dr. Smith pursued advanced

academic credentials alongside his demanding law enforcement career, earning both a Master of Public Administration and a Doctor of Science in Emergency Management. Since 2010, he's brought invaluable real-world experience into the classroom as an adjunct instructor for several universities, including Georgia Gwinnett College and Troy University.

In an interview at the ACJS conference in Denver, Dr. Smith reflected on the unique position SCJA holds in connecting these two worlds. He finds SCJA "more practitioner-friendly" and welcoming than some larger national conferences. "We hear folks talking about being researchers or about being researchers and practitioners, but also hear talk of 'just a practitioner'," Smith shared. He sees "SCJA as a vital space where 'practitioners and academics... bring them together, [so] that can pull more practitioners and make it real. He can bring real things to the table as a practitioner."

Bridging that gap, Dr. Smith believes, requires mutual respect and genuine effort. "Academics

Practitioner of the Year



definitely need practitioners," he stated, but cautioned against stereotyping, noting, "Knowledge is definitely something the academic brings... but the practitioner needs to understand the narrowness of the scope of their knowledge."

How can academics build that trust? "Initiate the practitioner/academic relationship," Dr. Smith advised. "Show up for others... Be seen... Ask 'what's useful here and how will I craft it for you?'... Invite practitioners to come speak and hear what they have to say."

He speaks from experience. While working on his own dissertation, he found his police colleagues eager to participate, but coordinating with fire services proved challenging due simply to the logistical hurdles of their schedules – a practical reality researchers often face.

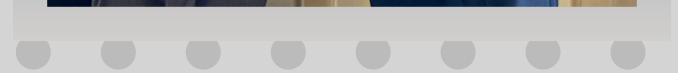
Dr. Smith also offered advice for involving practitioners in academic settings like conferences. "Be careful in inviting," he cautioned. "Not every practitioner is right for academic conferences... They should be prepared to encounter views they may not agree with... They should not get defensive or argumentative." He suggested that practitioners who also hold advanced degrees might be particularly well-suited for these environments initially.

Looking forward, Dr. Smith champions a proactive approach to collaboration. "Science is supposed to be objective," he reflected, "but by virtue of choosing the topic we research, there is inherently something we are biased about...we

don't need the 'last disaster,' we need to be proactive."

Dr. Jeff Smith's journey—marked by leadership, continuous learning, and a commitment to connecting research with practice—serves as an inspiration. His dedication extends beyond his professional roles into extensive community service, truly embodying the spirit of the Outstanding Professional Award.

Congratulations again, Dr. Smith!



CHECKING IN: 2024 SCJA AWARD WINNERS

Each year, SCJA presents awards that honor extraordinary efforts, promising early-career scholars, and individuals dedicated to the field, students, and colleagues. In this feature, past award winners share how the recognition has impacted their professional journeys.



Dr. Abigail Novak
Assistant Professor
University of Mississippi
2024 Untenured Faculty Travel Award

“The SCJA Faculty Travel Award allowed me to attend the annual meeting in Greenville, South Carolina. Because I was able to attend the conference, I received helpful feedback on a paper-in-progress from my fellow panelists and audience members. I was also able to build connections with graduate students in other programs and connect with peers in other departments to discuss future work. Finally, through presenting, I was able to bring in a co-author on the paper I presented (a graduate student who also received the travel award), and we have recently submitted the final paper for review.”

Savannah L. Doherty
Graduate Student
University of Alabama at Birmingham
2024 Student Travel Award



“Receiving the SCJA Student and Untenured Faculty Travel Award was extremely beneficial to my professional development and conference experience. By receiving this award, I was able to attend my first professional conference and display a research project on ACEs and the victim-offender overlap in the poster presentation portion. Attending SCJA allowed me to expand my network and receive advice from other students and professionals in the academic space. This inspired me to apply and enroll in Temple’s Ph.D. program in criminal justice for Fall 2025! Overall, my time at SCJA was incredibly pivotal and furthered my desire to join the field of academia and set me on the path to do so.”

AMERICAN JOURNAL OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE: EDITOR'S REPORT

Dear Fellow Southern Members,

I am proud to announce the American Journal of Criminal Justice is now inviting manuscripts for our Collection on Crime and Place! This Collection will be guest edited by David Weisburd (Distinguished Professor at George Mason University, Executive Director of the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy, and Walter E. Meyer Professor Emeritus of Law and Criminal Justice at the Hebrew University Faculty of Law in Jerusalem) and Martin A. Andresen (Professor in the School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University). [Check out the call for papers here.](#)

A Collection is like an on-going special issue. Authors can submit anytime and, if accepted, your manuscript will appear under the "Crime and Place" banner in an upcoming issue of AJCJ. This novel submission option will continue elevating the American in the field and aligns with my mission to make our journal THE American Journal of Criminal Justice!

Sincerely,

J.C. Barnes, Ph.D. | Editor-in-Chief, AJCJ

what's new

2025 Springer Outstanding Article Award

Emily Piper, Barak Ariel, Vincent Harinam, & Matthew Bland

The Compounding Effect: How Co-Offending Exacerbates the Harm Caused by Violent Offenders

Volume 49, p. 485-507 (2024)

Explore the new "short report" format

Accelerated review for focused, <2000 word submissions on emerging issues in CJ

Special Issue on Justice & Mental Health

Volume 50, Issue 5 (Oct. 2025)

Guest Editor: Dr. Ben Stickle



Days to First Decision

31

Impact Factor

1.8

#2

Google Scholar in Criminology, Criminal Law & Policing Rank

Grit & Growth:

Reflections on the Role of Mentorship in Successes, Taking Risks, and Lessons We Learn

In our previous issue of Crime & Grits, I introduced this new feature, Grit & Growth, which focuses on unveiling the “hidden curriculum” of our field. I shared my personal mantra for overcoming Imposter Syndrome (“steal the canoe!”) and the role that mentors and audacity played in my journey thus far. I previewed that this feature would include conversations between mentors and mentees reflecting on lessons learned—whether through guidance, trial and error, or even admonishments—and what we want students, early-career folks, and peers to know from our experiences. In this issue, I’m excited to share an exchange I had with two “Dr. Js” who have been part of my journey in different, but important, ways.

Dr. Kathy Johnson
(University of West Florida)

has been my professor, mentor, colleague, and conference roommate. She was my professor when I went back to school for my B.A. in 2014, then had me as a Master’s student, then was my mentor/colleague while I served as Internship Coordinator. She later served on my dissertation committee. She’s been a sounding board for teaching ideas and an example I look to as I form my own identity in academia, this organization, and life.

Dr. McKenzie Jossie (Louisiana State University) is in her second academic year as an assistant professor. We connected through SCJA, and though she is more “junior” on the tenure track, I find there are times when she offers just as much guidance and insight to me as I do to her. I’ve learned a lot from her as I started my own funded project and navigated the path of recruiting practitioners.

It’s great to have someone who trusts me to offer sound advice despite the mild chaos I may bring to the function.

We each took time to respond to questions, and there were some exchanges back and forth. We found a lot of overlap, but there were unique contributions that stem from having distinctive journeys and mentorship experiences.

I hope you find it interesting and informative! If you are interested in participating in a future issue with your mentor or mentee, please reach out to SCJA.socials@gmail.com, and we can help bring more of the hidden curriculum into view.

Steal the canoe!

--Sarah Harper, Ph.D.



Kathy Johnson, Ph.D.
University of West
Florida



McKenzie Jossie, Ph.D.
Louisiana State
University



Grit & Growth:

Reflections on the Role of Mentorship in Successes, Taking Risks, and Lessons We Learn

Can you describe how mentorship has played a role in your career development and your journey into becoming a mentor? What do you carry on from your own mentors?



I never thought much about mentorship until I won an ACJS mentoring award. I was nominated by a student who became an exceptional academic. That made me reflect on my own journey. I had the BEST mentor as a master's student who later served on my dissertation committee. All these years later, he's still the person I think about when I consider who helped shape me as the academic and mentor I am now.

My academic career was shaped by mentors whose guidance and support were truly transformative. I wouldn't be where I am today without their encouragement, advice, and belief in my potential supporting me through graduate school, research, and the job market. Good mentorship is crucial to student success. I carry forward their example in my own mentoring relationships.



I love that there's a legacy that now traces down to me. Meeting Kathy's mentor at SCJA was a great full-circle moment. Kathy's investment and support—navigating academia, curriculum, student mentorship, and even conference sleep patterns—gave me a better perspective on how to take things on myself. I now try to impart to my own mentees. They don't always know what they don't know, and we should be willing to share.

I think it's about letting the relationship develop organically. Assigning mentors never made sense to me—"here, go do stuff with this person." In academia, graduate assistantships can open the door for something beyond supervision. Networking in organizations is a great way to reach out to people with similar interests in teaching and/or research. That's when real mentoring can begin.



I think of my mentors when considering my own mentorship style. It's important to have a good fit: work style, communication, meeting frequency, expectations, research alignment, and/or career support. One key takeaway from my mentors was the importance of treating this career like a 9-to-5. Consistency is key for success. Now, I have an approach that is structured, supportive, and sustainable.

I learned flexibility with a variety of mentorship styles because I was asking for their time and attention. Mentors being upfront about how they could best support me reduced my uncertainty. I explain to mentees off the bat what I can offer and where I may lack structure. I encourage feedback. Mentorship is a relationship--it lives and dies by communication, compassion, grace, and honesty.



Grit & Growth:

Reflections on the Role of Mentorship in Successes, Taking Risks, and Lessons We Learn

How did you find your mentors? What recommendations do you have for junior faculty or students for finding a mentor and making the most of mentorship opportunities?

Early in my PhD, I overheard my eventual mentor chatting about Jimmy Buffett, ‘shrooms, and surfing contests in our office suite hallway. As a fan of a different musician with a cult-like following (Dave Matthews Band), I knew I needed to hitch my professional wagon to his. 😊 Sometimes it’s a faculty member, but I’ve also connected through online communities, conference receptions, and even by impressing one with my ability to handle the conference hotel printer.



I cannot say I ever sought out a mentor. I’m not certain if anyone ever sought me out as a mentor either. I believe it’s largely an organic process. The qualities I look for in a mentor include being approachable, caring, supportive, challenging, and willing to share their knowledge and experiences with others. Those are the people who have made the biggest difference in my journey.

I recommend finding someone who can support your research, teaching, and provide career guidance. Make the most of your time with them, go to all meetings prepared—with questions, updates, and upcoming tasks. Be open to feedback and constructive criticism. A good mentor wants to see you succeed and improve. Being prepared and receptive demonstrates that you take the relationship seriously and are committed to your own growth.



Some mentors are more obvious when you’re a student—you can find them in your department, through classes, or fellow students. In early career, I’ve reached out to senior academics I already had a connection with. Alumni of your program and “research siblings” are easy connections. ACJS sections are great for subject-specific contacts. Like Dr. Jossie said, be respectful of your mentor’s time. And not every mentor fits every need—having a few lets you draw on diverse strengths.

Take the initiative to reach out. If you don’t take that first step, how will you ever find someone? This doesn’t mean walking up to someone to ask them to be your mentor. It means reaching out with questions, research thoughts, teaching ideas, cool technology things, etc. Begin to build rapport with them. See where it goes.



As I move into my third year on the tenure track, I am glad to see more people being forthcoming about the realities we face in this career. I’ll never forget Dr. Rick Moule at USF saying “we don’t know what we don’t know,” to describe hidden curriculum. Be intentional about sharing lessons we had to discover just in time—or too late. Our field wins when people are open with knowledge others can use to succeed. Mentors can light the path now that we’ve made the journey.

What's Going On Around SCJA

Don't forget!!
Register for ACJS as a
Region II member
ACJS Conference, March
2026: Philly--Look out
for announcements for
our reception

Congratulations to SCJA members Drs. Brenda Vose and Mitch Miller, who have been named 2025 US BJA Fellows per their selection to participate in the third cohort of the agency's Reaching Rural: Advancing Collaborative Solutions initiative! Brenda and Mitch will be working in the context of research-practitioner partnership with Dublin, Georgia Police Chief Keith Moon, Community Service Board of Middle Georgia CEO Densie Forbes, and Superior Court Judge Trey Taylor, Dublin Judicial Circuit, to align an evidence-based oriented local justice system connections to treatment and recovery plan for individuals suffering from mental health and substance abuse disorders. The Initiative is a one-year program in which the Reaching Rural Fellows receive coaching and participate in skill-building workshops as well as virtual and in-person learning experiences. Drs. Vose and Miller participated in the 2025 National Reaching Rural Summit in Atlanta this past April.



SCJA Records &
Communications
Committee wants to
share your updates!

Email
SCJA.socials@gmail.com
with your
achievements, student
spotlights, and photos
from SCJA history!

WE'RE ON
LINKEDIN
NOW! CLICK
LOGO TO
FOLLOW!



CONTENT IDEAS?

Would you like to be featured in a future issue of Crime & Grits? Would you like to nominate a member for a spotlight article or submit photos to include in social media from SCJA history? Send it to SCJA.socials@gmail.com

COMMITTEE SERVICE OPENINGS

The Records & Communications Committee is seeking social media and newsletter support! If you are a student or regular member, you are eligible. Please contact sarah.harper@tamusa.edu



Thank you for reading!

www.southerncj.org

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Chair: Dr. Sarah Harper