



# Crime & Grits

ISSUE XII | MARCH 2026

## OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN CRIMINAL JUSTICE ASSOCIATION

### Welcome From the Executive Board

Greetings, SCJA Members!

As the winter weather begins to thaw across the Southeast, we are eagerly preparing for the transition into spring—and for many of us, that means gearing up for the annual Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) meeting! In this pre-ACJS issue, you will find everything you need to prepare for our time together in Philadelphia from March 3-7. Inside, we feature a farewell message from our ACJS Region II Representative, Dr. John Stogner, a brand-new Research to Practice column from our 1st Vice-President, Dr. Ben Stickle, and the official Call for Nominations for our 2026 Executive Board. For our graduate students and early-career scholars, we've also compiled a special Grit & Growth feature full of tips from the Board on how to survive and thrive at national conferences. Speaking of conferences, our annual meeting in Fort Lauderdale will be here before you know it: September 14-18! The abstract submission is open, with a June 15 deadline. Safe travels to Philly--we can't wait to see y'all at the General Business Meeting, our reception at Sueño, and panels!

*--The Board*

### DATES ON RADAR + TO-DO LIST

- ACJS in Philadelphia: March 3-7
  - SCJA General Business Meeting
    - Wed. March 4, 5-6PM Eastern
    - Level 4, Rm 414-415 of Marriott
  - SCJA Reception at ACJS
    - Thurs. March 5, 6-9PM Eastern
    - Sueño Philly, 114 S. 12<sup>th</sup> Street
- Submit nominations for elections
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President & Director-at-Large
    - See page 13 for details
- Submit abstracts for 2026 conference
  - Final deadline: June 15

Follow us on social media!



### In this issue:

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# SCJA EXECUTIVE BOARD, 2025-2026

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# Message from the President



## Hello, SCJA!

As the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Annual Meeting gets underway, I hope many of you are planning to join us for two important SCJA events: our General Business Meeting and our reception for members and prospective members. ACJS provides a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with long-time colleagues, welcome new scholars into our community, and share updates about the exciting direction of the Southern Criminal Justice Association. I look forward to seeing many of you there.

Since our outstanding 2025 Annual Meeting in Charleston, the Executive Board has been hard at work building on the momentum generated by that incredible week. Our Charleston conference theme--*Bridging the Gap: Advancing Research to Practice*--came to life in meaningful ways. We hosted more than 100 presentations, 14 roundtables, and 35 posters, along with a series of Presidential Discussant panels designed to push conversations beyond scholarship and into impact. Panels addressed gun violence, treatment courts, rural justice, reentry, and law enforcement-community relationships, reinforcing SCJA's long-standing commitment to research that informs policy and practice.

I am pleased to share that the SCJA Board voted to once again offer travel awards for students and untenured faculty to help offset the costs of attending our annual meeting. These awards are a tangible reflection of our commitment to accessibility, professional development, and inclusion within our association. In addition, we will continue our ongoing investment in mentoring the next generation of scholars and practitioners at our 2026 meeting with student events focused on graduate education, the academic job market, and career pathways inside and outside academia.



Speaking of 2026, we are thrilled to invite you to join us in Fort Lauderdale Beach, Florida, September 14–18, 2026. We will be meeting at The Westin Fort Lauderdale Beach Resort, a beautiful beachfront property with an amazing room rate and unbeatable location. After the tremendous energy of Charleston, we are excited to bring SCJA back to the beach!

Building on last year's focus and capturing the forward-looking, interdisciplinary, and global nature of our discipline, the 2026 conference theme is *Justice in Transition: Innovation, Equity, and Community*. We look forward to receiving innovative papers, panels, posters, and roundtables that reflect the dynamic work being done across our region and beyond. The abstract submission portal is open and the deadline is June 15.

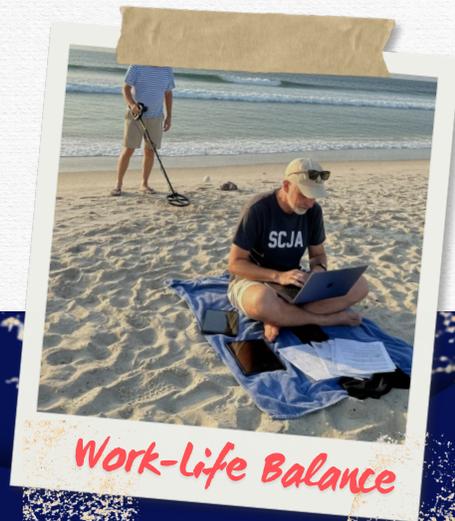
If you are interested in supporting the 2026 conference through sponsorship or other opportunities, please reach out to Dr. Ben Stickle, our 2026 Program Chair, at [Ben.Stickle@mtsu.edu](mailto:Ben.Stickle@mtsu.edu). Sponsorship support helps us enhance programming, student engagement, and networking events that make SCJA special.

Thank you for your continued commitment to SCJA. Our association remains strong because of your scholarship, service, and collegial spirit. I look forward to connecting with many of you at ACJS and to seeing you in Fort Lauderdale in September 2026.

Best regards,

*Shawn Thomas*

President, Southern Criminal Justice Association



# SCJA

# A Message from Your ACJS Region 2 Representative



## Greetings, SCJA!

This recent snowy weather has me looking forward to the September SCJA conference in Fort Lauderdale Beach! Of course many of us are headed even further into the cold this March for the annual Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences meeting in Philadelphia. Whether you'll be attending your first or fiftieth ACJS, you're in for a treat. There are four days packed with panels, workshops, roundtables, social activities, and networking opportunities. Arrive early to take part in the Cybersecurity Workshop (Investigating Cryptocurrency Crimes- preregistration required) or refine your managerial skills in the Academic Leadership Development Summit (preregistration required). During the conference, you can hear two recent Winners of the Stockholm Prize in Criminology present their work: Dr. Gary LaFree [2024 recipient] at 9am on Thursday and Dr. Charis Kubrin [2026 recipient]

at 9am on Friday. As a reminder, I'm not a member of the SCJA board; my role is an elected position within the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. I'm responsible for maintaining communication and cooperation between our organizations with my most important responsibilities being encouraging ACJS members to attend regional conferences and SCJA members to attend the annual ACJS meeting. Those are successful endeavors as we are consistently the largest regional conference and generally have the highest or second highest number of ACJS members. My term is ending during the Philadelphia conference, but you'll still be getting frequent ACJS updates from my extremely qualified replacement: Dr. Francis Boateng of the University of Mississippi. He'll take any of your concerns to ACJS and assist in any way possible.

For those of you just starting to attend ACJS, make sure to attend the SCJA events (everyone is welcome at general business meetings and receptions) and take advantage of the opportunities to network outside of the region. The new member breakfast is a great place to start. ACJS has many sections; attending one of their meetings will help you meet scholars with research interests that mirror your own. Don't skip things like the research pictorial showcase or the awards luncheon –you can meet a lot of great people at both. You could even drop by the general ACJS meeting on Friday morning and get on one of ACJS's many committees! Feel free to reach out if you have any questions about attending ACJS this year!

*Dr. John Stogner*  
[johnstogner@charlotte.edu](mailto:johnstogner@charlotte.edu)

**ACJS**  
**63<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL MEETING**  
**MARCH 3-7, 2026**  
**PHILADELPHIA, PA**



CRISES ACROSS THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE LANDSCAPE:  
THE NEXUS OF GOVERNANCE & RESPONSIBILITY





# SCJA & Stogner's Recommendations PHILLY!

ACJS 2026

## Pre-Meeting Workshops

Cybersecurity; Academic Leadership  
Pre-registration required

**NEW ALLIANCE BREAKFAST (Lvl 4, Franklin Hall 1)**  
Wed, March 4th | 7:00-8:00 AM EST  
Open to new ACJS attendees

**General Business Meeting (Lvl 4, RM 414)**  
Wed, March 4th | 5:00-6:00 PM EST  
Open to ACJS attendees

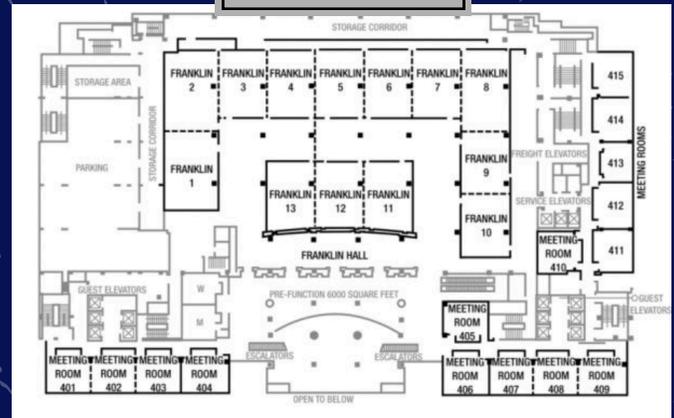
**Stockholm Prize Winners (Lvl 5, Salon H, I, J)**  
Gary LaFree | Thurs, March 5th | 9:00 AM EST  
Charis Kubrin | Fri, March 6th | 9:00 AM EST

**ACJS Student Luncheon (Lvl 5, Salon H, I, J)**  
Thurs, March 5th | 12:30-1:45 PM EST  
Student badge required

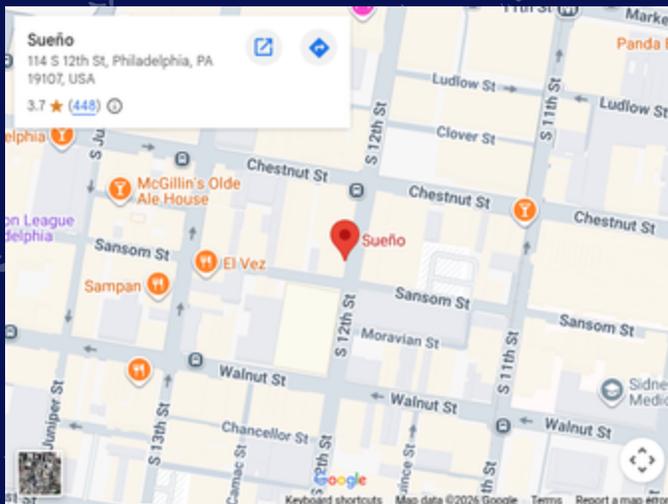
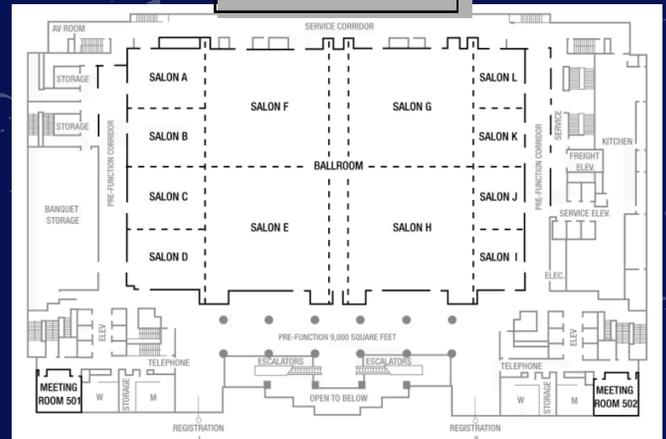
**ACJS Awards Luncheon (Lvl 5, Salon H, I, J)**  
Fri, March 6th | 12:30-2:00 PM EST  
Open to ACJS attendees

**Research & Pictorial Showcase (Lvl 5, Salon G, K, L)**  
Fri, March 6th | 6:30-8:00 PM EST  
Showcase and reception open to ACJS attendees

## Franklin Level 4



## Ballroom Level 5



Join us for the SCJA Reception  
**Sueño, 114 S. 12th Street**  
Thurs, March 5th | 6:00-9:00 PM EST  
For current and prospective members

**Click for Directions to Reception**  
Exit Marriott at Market St. doors, go left.  
Right turn at 12th St, stay on the right.  
Continue past next traffic light at Chestnut St.  
Sueño is on the right, just past Kichi Omakase



# TRANSLATING PRISON EDUCATION RESEARCH INTO REAL WORLD IMPACT

**Ben Stickle, Ph.D.** | *Middle Tennessee State University*



## Research >>into>> Practice

This feature details strategies our members have used to bridge the gap between researchers and practitioners, including practical tips for providing actionable recommendations to support evidence-based, data-driven policies. To contribute to this and other features--or recommend additional features--please email [scja.socials@gmail.com](mailto:scja.socials@gmail.com)

Bridging the gap between academic research and criminal justice practice can feel daunting, but intentional dissemination makes it achievable. A recent example from prison education research illustrates a practical sequence that any scholar can adapt to move evidence from journals to the people who need it most.

The foundation was a meta-analysis published in the *American Journal of Criminal Justice* (open access): ["Are Schools in Prison Worth It? The Effects and Economic Returns of Prison Education"](#) (Stickle & Schuster, 2023). Reviewing 79 high-quality studies (1980–2023), the review found that prison education programs reduce recidivism odds by about 19% in stronger research designs, roughly a 6–7 percentage point drop from typical baselines around 46%. Post-release employment odds increase by 13–14%, with modest quarterly wage gains (around \$141). Returns on investment are positive across program types, often far exceeding costs through averted incarceration expenses. Vocational programs stand out for particularly strong cost-effectiveness, while college programs deliver the largest per-participant benefits. To carry these findings beyond academia, the dissemination followed a deliberate, replicable path.

First, a concise [policy brief](#) distilled the evidence into clear recommendations: expand programs across basic, secondary, vocational, and college levels; keep them free to participants; allow progression through multiple types; and prioritize vocational training for the highest return per dollar. This format speaks directly to policymakers and correctional administrators.

# Research >>into>> Practice

Next, a public-facing article in *The Conversation* translated the numbers into accessible terms: prison education more than pays for itself, improves job prospects, and supports Pell Grant access for incarcerated students. Pieces like this reach educators, advocates, media, and the broader public.

Locally, an op-ed in *The Tennessean* applied the evidence to Tennessee's context, highlighting high per-inmate costs (over \$40,000 annually) and the potential to save millions through even modest recidivism reductions. It called for automatic enrollment, centralized administration, completion incentives, and ongoing evaluation.

Beyond writing, direct engagement with practitioners proved essential. Presentations at correctional associations, reentry coalitions, state reform commissions, and workforce summits created opportunities for dialogue with those running programs, hiring formerly incarcerated individuals, and shaping policy. The work informed government reports (e.g., the U.S. Sentencing Commission and CoreCivic) and reached practitioner audiences, demonstrating how evidence can influence real decisions.

**For SCJA members: strong research is the essential first step, but impact grows when we follow through.**

Research to practice doesn't require massive resources. It just requires persistence and a focus on audience needs. When we make these extra steps routine, we help ensure good evidence shapes smarter policies, better programs, and more effective reentry. It's work worth doing, and it's within reach for all of us.

## Recommended Sequence

1

### Publish the foundation

Aim for a respected, accessible journal like *American Journal of Criminal Justice*!

2

### Distill into policy briefs

Short briefs highlight actionable recommendations, aimed directly at policymakers & administrators

3

### Write for general audiences

Use outlets like *The Conversation* to translate numbers into accessible terms for educators, advocates, and the public

4

### Target local media

Place targeted op-eds in local or state media to connect findings to regional priorities.

5

### Engage practitioners directly

Present at conferences, working groups, professional meetings where decisionmakers gather

# Grit & Growth



Conferences, networking, and making the most of your time in another city

Sarah Harper, Ph.D.

In the last issue of *Crime & Grits*, I shared an exchange featuring two women I consider mentors and peers in this field, Drs. Kathrine Johnson & McKenzie Jossie. We discussed the dynamics of mentorship—both the kind that had been provided to us and how we have evolved to mentor others. In this issue, I am excited to share about where these contacts began for me: conferences.

Good mentors can be challenging to find, especially within the confines of a single department. Fortunately, our field offers opportunities to expand our professional networks and connect with potential mentors based on shared research interests, introductions through existing relationships, or simply by standing at the same lobby television to check a game score.

My earliest conferences were actually in a different discipline, where I was guided through a gauntlet of public administration panels. I survived on little sleep and too much caffeine, acutely aware of the awkwardness of navigating a new professional wardrobe. My initial worry was that everyone knew what they were doing except me. It turned out, however, that many would follow a quick glance at my name tag with a kind handshake—they recognized that "First Timer" look and had walked in those exact shoes before. Of course, I also learned how many connections were available from one room to the next, finding myself seated at luncheons with new faces and panicking at the same printer before our respective panels. Intellectual curiosity is a strong unifying force.

## A Decade of SCJA Mugs

My first SCJA conference was in 2017 in my favorite city--New Orleans--I delivered my first-

ever solo presentation on my Master's research. I was equally comforted and anxious seeing my advisor and department chair among the attendees, and I was acutely aware that I was speeding through my analysis section, terrified my nerves would cause me to blank on the broader meaning of my own findings.

But the presentation didn't end there. A fellow panelist asked me to expand on the implications of my work. Amidst my nerves—and an urgent, dehydrated desire to find the nearest oyster happy hour—I was stunned that an established scholar genuinely wanted to hear my insights. That single question sparked a post-session conversation, which led to another chat at our shared luncheon table, and eventually blossomed into an enduring professional connection.

I have enjoyed many post-panel chats since then. Now, I bring my own students to SCJA conferences in various cities. Yet, I still occasionally catch myself in that haze of imposter syndrome, thinking, "Wait, this person just asked about my work as if I am an expert?"

I have found Southern to be a conference where we actively want to see students and early-career scholars joining us and making connections. I learned quickly that the inherent

# Grit & Growth



intimidation of academia tends to dissolve in the welcoming environment we cultivate (aided, inevitably, by the promise of good food). Even beyond Southern, everyone eventually finds “their people.” It may require asking a brave question or double-checking that your nametag is facing the right way, but the collaborative spirit of conferences helps ensure you feel you belong.

## The Cost of Connection

We must acknowledge, however, that conferences are not within reach for everyone. For some, the driving distance is too far and airfare is simply untenable. Registration costs and membership dues present their own challenges, and not every university or employer provides funding up front. In fact, the reimbursement model is the reason I applied for my first credit card as a 31-year-old graduate student and single mother.

Dining in larger cities can stretch student budgets to the breaking point, and per diem rates for faculty may still be insufficient. Yet, if financial barriers prevent you from connecting with colleagues in these spaces, you may miss out on opportunities that could positively alter your professional trajectory. After all, it was a chance encounter during an LSU game preview that kick-started my enduring connection to countless people within this organization.

To their credit, various organizations, divisions, sections, and departments now offer stipends, awards, and pricing scaled to academic rank. Several even provide childcare funds to offset the costs associated with traveling with dependents. Both of our national conferences have opportunities for supporting even more under-resourced attendees each year.

## How SCJA Opens the Door

A regional organization like ours is uniquely positioned to provide accessible pathways, allowing newcomers to connect with contemporaries over shared research and the inevitably baffling hotel elevator systems:

### Accessible Locations

Fort Lauderdale is a major budget airline hub!

### Travel Awards

We offer Student & Untenured Faculty Travel Awards to offset costs of attending and presenting at our annual meeting.

### Scaled Pricing

Registration is scaled by academic rank to ease the burden on students.

These connections have plugged me into collaborative opportunities, valuable advice, free snack sources, well-timed ibuprofen, and vital reminders (such as the fact that we're on Eastern time and I need to wake up even earlier).

## Next Stop: ACJS Philadelphia

In anticipation that more members can join us in the Conference Wonderland, I wanted to focus this issue's Grit & Growth on maximizing your conference experience. Though our SCJA annual meeting is six months out, the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences national conference is upon us this week in Philadelphia. Here are some tips from me and the board!

# CONFERENCE

## Success Tips

### Protect Your Peace

It can be loud and overwhelming. If receptions aren't your scene, that is okay! Some of the best networking happens quietly over coffee or sitting next to someone in the back of a panel room.

### Attire & Temperature

"Academic business casual" is an SCJA standard. Wear comfortable shoes; clean sneakers with a blazer or cardigan are fine. Pack layers—conference session rooms are notoriously freezing, even if it is sweltering outside!

### Pace Yourself

You don't have to rigidly commit to a panel during every single time slot, or you will quickly exhaust yourself. Build in time to take a nap before the evening receptions!

### The Buddy System

Carpool, share a room with friends, and explore the city together. If you are venturing more than a block away from the conference hotel, remove your nametag and take a buddy.

### Tech & Networking Prep

Technology fails happen. Always have your presentation on a flash drive AND emailed to yourself. Keep a spare battery--conference apps drain phones quickly. Update your LinkedIn & use a QR code to share it in case you forget business cards

### Hydrate & Fuel

Scope out where the free coffee and snacks are located. I highly recommend keeping Liquid IV packets and a reusable water bottle on you at all times.



# CONFERENCE

## Success Tips



Dr. Andrew Denney, Director-At-Large  
"Attend as many panels as you can. You never know who you will meet. Many of the professional relationships I have today came from attending and networking at my first SCJA conference nearly 15 years ago."



Dr. James Hawdon, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President  
"Don't be shy about approaching other SCJA members you would like to discuss ideas with, regardless of who they are. People generally enjoy talking about their work, and it is a great way to network. Go to the receptions, mingle, and enjoy the always-interesting conversations that people are having."



Dr. Andy Hansen, Secretariat  
"I would encourage students to take advantage of all the events designed specifically for them, such as breakfasts with journal editors and graduate faculty."



Dr. John Stogner, ACJS Region II Rep  
"For those just starting to attend ACJS, make sure to attend the SCJA events, but take advantage of the opportunities to network outside of the region. The new member breakfast is a great place to start."



# Call for nominations!

The SCJA Nominations & Elections Committee is pleased to announce the opening of nominations for the 2026 officer elections. As one of the nation's leading regional organizations for scholars, practitioners, and students in the field of criminal justice, SCJA thrives on the dedication, vision, and leadership of its members. This is your opportunity to help shape the future of the Association and strengthen our collective voice in advancing research, teaching, and practice across the discipline.

The election process will follow SCJA's bylaws and will be conducted electronically. Once nominated, candidates will be contacted to confirm their willingness to run. Those who accept the nomination will then provide a brief biographical statement and a statement of interest outlining their qualifications and goals for the position. Voting will open in late spring, and newly elected officers will transition into their roles at the SCJA Annual Meeting this fall in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

**This year, nominations are open for three positions on the SCJA Executive Board:**

**Director-at-Large (2 positions)  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President**

Nominations are due by **May 8** and should include the nominee's name, affiliation, contact information, and the position for which they are being nominated.

Nominations & questions should be submitted via email to [elections@southerncj.org](mailto:elections@southerncj.org).

Elected officers play a vital role in setting the organization's direction, supporting our annual conference, promoting student and early-career member engagement, and ensuring that SCJA remains an inclusive and innovative forum for the exchange of ideas. Serving in one of these roles offers a meaningful opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from across the country and contribute directly to the growth and vitality of the SCJA.

Members may nominate themselves or fellow SCJA members in good standing. Nominees should demonstrate active engagement with SCJA, a commitment to advancing its mission, and a willingness to serve throughout their term.

Your participation in the election, as a nominee or a voter, is essential to maintaining a vibrant member-driven organization. SCJA's strength lies in our collaborative spirit and shared commitment to advancing the field. By stepping forward or nominating a colleague, you help ensure that the SCJA continues to thrive and embody the highest standards of scholarship and service in the field.

We look forward to your participation in shaping the leadership and future of SCJA!

*Julie Baldwin*  
Immediate Past President

# RECOGNIZE Excellence

Do you know a colleague or student who goes above and beyond in the classroom, in their research, or in the field? SCJA is currently accepting nominations for our annual awards, to be presented at the Fall conference in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

## Outstanding Educator

Recognizing exceptional dedication to student mentorship and innovative pedagogy in criminal justice.

## Outstanding Students

Awarded to Doctoral, Masters, and Bachelors students (one each) demonstrating excellence in research and academics.

## Practitioner of the Year

Honoring professionals applying criminal justice principles to make a tangible impact in the field.

## Student & Untenured Faculty Travel Awards

Honoring early career scholars presenting original research at the annual meeting to support travel and lodging at the annual meeting

Visit [southernj.org/awards](https://southernj.org/awards) for full criteria and deadlines

# M E E T Y O U R S C J A

# Dr. James Hawdon 2nd Vice President



## The Basics

James Hawdon, Ph.D. | Professor, Virginia Tech  
Director of Center for Peace Studies & Violence Prevention  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President of SCJA Executive Board  
2025 Outstanding Educator of the Year winner

## Research & Current Interests

Examining increases in political violence within a historical context, a lens of community and how the political communities shape the current situation; how do these communities--both in-person and online--shape what becomes political violence and interact

Also interested in the discourse surrounding academic freedom. Namely, how do we protect it while recognizing the academy's responsibility with that right to maintain it, what we owe the public through fostering public debate, rather than censorship

## Favorite SCJA Memory

SCJA 2018 in Pensacola Beach: the beloved beach towels from then-President Dr. Marv Krohn! During his Presidential address, Marv was surprised to find so many in attendance because they had a towel and no excuse for missing out on the beach. Though the pictures have been lost to the sands of time, Immediate Past President Julie Baldwin's performance in the costume contest and beach race while dressed as a dinosaur or gator, Marv as Gilligan, and others in pool floaties.

## Fun Life Update

The band we know and love from SCJA conferences past--Cozette and the Fifts--is recording an album that we can get on streaming after it is finished with production!





# MEMBER UPDATES



**Dr. Cody Telep** (Arizona State University), **Dr. Dragana Derlic** (Georgia Southern University and SCJA member), and **Dr. Ben Stickle** (Middle Tennessee State University and 1st VP of SCJA) were recently invited by Dr. Patrick McClanahan and the faculty at the University of Alabama Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice to participate in a Colloquium on Translational & Applied Criminology, focused on bridging research and real-world practice.

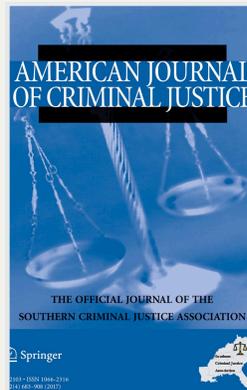


**14** Days to First Decision

**1.8** Impact Factor

**#2** Google Scholar in Criminology, Criminal Law & Policing Rank

WE'RE ON  
LINKEDIN!  
CLICK LOGO  
TO FOLLOW!



## what's new

Explore the new "short report" format  
Accelerated review for focused, <2000 word submissions on emerging issues in CJ

Abstracts Due  
June 15



# *Southern Criminal Justice Association Annual Meeting*

*September 14-18, 2026  
Fort 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 pool or relax at the poolside bar and grill. Cross the hotel's skywalk, 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!





Don't forget!!  
Register as a Region  
II member  
ACJS Conference,  
March 2026: Philly



*Thank you for reading!*

[www.southerncj.org](http://www.southerncj.org)

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by the

Records & Communication Committee  
Chair: Dr. Sarah Harper