

TheCrimAcademy_64_Alward_Orosco_Smith

Sun, Jan 22, 2023 11:23AM • 1:04:59

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

dissertation, defended, research, questions, criminal justice, chair, work, process, people, defense, writing, prospectus, committee, important, faculty members, point, area, students, committee members, dissertation defense

SPEAKERS

Carlena Orosco, Wesley Smith, Jenn Tostlebe, Lucas Alward, Jose Sanchez

Jose Sanchez 00:03

Hi everyone. Welcome back to The Criminology Academy where we are criminally academic. My name is Jose Sanchez,

Jenn Tostlebe 00:08

and I'm Jenn Tostlebe.

Jose Sanchez 00:09

And today we have three guests on the podcast, Lucas Alward, Carlena Orosco, and Wesley Smith to talk with us about the final destination in graduate school, the dissertation and dissertation defense.

Jenn Tostlebe 00:23

Lucas Alward is an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at Boise State University. He received his PhD from the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Central Florida in 2022. His primary research interests include community and institutional corrections, procedural justice and legitimacy, prisoner reentry and implementation of evidence based practices. In 2019, Luke was awarded the American Society of Criminology Division of Corrections and Sentencing Dissertation Scholarship Award. His work has been published in Crime and Delinquency, Criminal Justice and Behavior in the Journal of Criminal Justice, among others.

Jose Sanchez 01:04

Carlena Orosco is an assistant professor in the School of Criminal Justice and Criminalistics at California State University Los Angeles. She received her doctorate from the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Arizona State University in 2022. Carlena previously served as the research and planning supervisor in the strategic planning, analysis and research center at Tempe Police Department as a senior research analyst for the Arizona criminal Justice commission, statistical analysis center, and as a dispatcher for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, where she was also an acting supervisor and systems monitor. Carlena's research spans numerous content areas

including de escalation in policing, police, dispatchers, criminal justice, and law enforcement decision making. Carlena's work can be found in Policing: An International Journal, Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, American Journal of Public Health and Justice Quarterly.

Jenn Tostlebe 02:01

And Dr. Wesley Smith spent 12 years in the United States Army and Army National Guard while pursuing his PhD in criminal justice from Sam Houston State University. He works for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and their research and development shop, teaches for Doña Ana Community College and as a paid research consultant for several policy groups as well as businesses. His work for the State of Texas focuses primarily on developing and measuring the effects of policy and programmatic interventions for those supervised by or working in the TDCJ. In his spare time, he also is engaged in research examining the pathways of veteran involvement in the criminal justice system, various outcomes associated with facility and service animals, substance use treatment program fidelity, and the consequences of being sentenced as a juvenile to life without parole. His work has been featured in Corrections, Crime and Delinquency, Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Women and Criminal Justice, and the Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment.

Jose Sanchez 03:03

Thank you, all three of you for joining us today. We really appreciate you taking time out of your day to talk with us.

Jenn Tostlebe 03:11

All right, so a brief overview of the episode, we're going to start off by talking about just writing the dissertation and the behemoth that this process is, then we're going to move into the actual dissertation defense, and finally wrap up with some discussions about what happens after you defend. So with that being said, Jose, why don't you get us started?

Jose Sanchez 03:35

Sure. So we've did an episode on defending your perspective. And so this is sort of picking up where that left off, a sequel, if you will. And so we've moved past that you've defended your perspectives, it's time to actually deliver your dissertation. And were there, and we want to start with were there any major challenges, or major changes to your actual dissertation, as opposed to what you proposed and defended, during your prospectus?

Carlena Orosco 04:07

I'll start, I will say that there are definitely changes I think many of us can relate to the fact that we are overachievers. So my prospectus was overly ambitious. And one of my committee members said, this isn't a dissertation, this is a research agenda, need to carve out the smaller piece of this and focus on it for your dissertation. So it's actually something I welcomed. I was like, Oh, it can be smaller than this great. But I had to make changes and kind of focused in a little bit more, rather than having these kind of lofty aspirations to have several different research questions, a different data sources. So that helped me to actually focus so I had to kind of trim it a bit from what I proposed, which was actually a good thing. So that was my experience personally.

Lucas Alward 04:51

Yeah, kind of bouncing off that some of the challenges I face were pretty similar, especially collecting my own data. So what I proposed was as part of the prospectus and to getting on the ground to actually start that primary data collection process to what was actually available to me once I was within the agency, and then kind of throw in the challenges of COVID. So I initially defended my prospectus a year before I was able to actually collect data. And so within that timeframe, new studies being published, just kind of the natural progression of how my understanding of my own project changed within that year gap. And so really kind of more of this iterative process going back and forth between, okay, this is what I initially proposed. And now this is kind of what's available to me, based on the data that are accessible, for sure.

Wesley Smith 05:47

I would have to absolutely mirror what Carlena and Luke both said, you know, COVID kind of came down and laid to rest the plans of a lot of graduate students for quite a bit. And I was, I was among them. And so you know, had to determine, basically, my whole collection methodology had to be scrapped, because I would be surveying veterans in person at veteran organizations. And so this is where students need to have kind of, you know, secondary and tertiary plans, if they're going to do primary data collection, we don't know when the next wrench in the gear will be thrown, so to speak. And so for me, it ended up you know, I had to flex from in person surveys at veterans organizations to chain referral sampling via social media, it worked out really well for me in the end, but I had to, I had to stay flexible. So I think that's a pretty common occurrence. And like everybody else, I wanted to change the world with my dissertation and give lots of survey fatigue to my survey takers, and, you know, need that guidance from my dissertation chair and committee to say, Hey, slow down, we need to cut some of this.

Jose Sanchez 07:03

Yeah, I think that's a good point to bring up of having like a Plan B, and maybe like a Plan C, as I know, Jenn kind of had the COVID dissertation experience, I almost did, thankfully, we were able to sort of salvage our data collection, just enough to where I'm going against Plan B, for sure. Like, it's not my original dissertation idea. But the data collection still managed to get us enough to write a dissertation, right? Like I have, like all these, like fancy statistical models that I was gonna run like, this is gonna be great. Like, the crim world doesn't even know what's about to hit it. And then none of that is happening, because now we've got, we don't have the numbers that we thought we're gonna have. Right? So yeah, so and then. So it also, and I think it's good to keep in mind, like the people often will be like, Whoa, COVID's once in a lifetime type thing. So you know, like, what's the big deal, but COVID just kind of like an extreme disruption, but disruptions happen. So kind of having those fallback plans are, it's a good idea to have a good discussion to have with your advisor.

Jenn Tostlebe 08:15

Yeah, I was gonna piggyback off of that, because I know, all three of you. And then me and Jose, we've also we've all been impacted by COVID. But my first dissertation idea was impacted before COVID even happened, and that was because an agency shut us out. And so like those original data collection, things happen as well. So yeah, I think having those secondary, you know, tertiary, and even after that, in my case, ideas are good to have. Like, did you have something you wanted to add?

Lucas Alward 08:46

Yeah, that was something I didn't necessarily consider every probably should in the moment, but kind of a part of that also understanding the time. So even having an initial plan or a plan B to were submitting some type of formal proposal to IDOC or to Department of Corrections, just the the time that it takes for that to go through that formal process, to where potentially I was just kind of sitting in limbo for several months to where it probably would have been, behoove me to have another plan kind of In the making at that time. Of course, it works out in retrospect, but something thinking something to think about moving forward for students in similar positions.

Wesley Smith 09:29

Yeah, just adding on to that, since Luke brought up Department of Corrections, you know, part of what my job is doing is steering the process to approve or deny external research requests and granted, the state I work for is, you know, we're the second biggest agency next to the feds. So we get a lot of research requests as it stands now, after streamlining our process. It's really, there's 180 days, probably about minimum between we're, us, receiving an individual's research application or an approval. And so obviously, right, that can be a long time to wait to get a denial from a correctional agency, especially if this is your dissertation. And also, you know, agencies are subject to internal and external forces as well, that's a long time for potential policy changes, or legislation changes, or, you know, just events to happen, that will make agencies more risk averse. And so I mean, that's, you know, if you're collecting administrative or primary data from an agency, you really, really have to get into the game early. As far as going through the approval process with them.

Carlena Oroasco 10:44

I think you also just echoing the sentiments really need to kind of go in with this perspective of flexibility and being able to adapt, I think, at baseline, and criminal justice, we're working with agencies and populations, it's already challenging to gain access. And having worked in policing for many years, I kind of anticipated, okay, the pandemic, I didn't have that on my bingo card, it will say that much. But, you know, just anticipating scheduling changes, resource limitations, working with dispatchers in particular, mandatory overtime. So I literally was like, well, okay, I'm gonna guess I'm going to go on graveyard shift to collect this data, or I'm going to conduct my observations is, whenever I can, whenever they're available, and really being adaptable to this changes, to collect that data, it was very important to me to do that. But again, I think you just have to be as flexible as possible, I think it's also important to have those internal champions in the agency that you want to work with, that really see the benefit of the research and can really advocate for you to get access and help you and you face those roadblocks. So all of that is just incredibly important, I think anticipate challenges with data collection. And if you go in with that, and some creativity, you can definitely work around it.

Jenn Tostlebe 11:59

Alright, so talking about another possible issue that could come up, you know, for your dissertation, can you walk us through kind of how you created your dissertation committee, and then whether you had any people change, you know, between your prospectus and dissertation defense.

Lucas Alward 12:21

I could start with that. I think for me, it was much more organic kind of process, in terms of already working with some of my advisors on similarly related projects to were already kind of developing that relationship early on in graduate school, that then led to additional projects that ultimately helped me decide on my dissertation kind of topic. And so it was kind of a natural progression in terms of who I asked to be my dissertation chair, or on my dissertation committee, especially more from a content expertise, obviously, different approaches, different philosophies about incorporating other individuals with that statistical or methodological expertise. But I really wanted individuals that were really within that literature, much more of a niche literature. So I think mine was much more organic. And I was very fortunate, I did not have anyone lead you for any of those additional challenges that I know can be especially difficult to navigate for graduate graduate students in that space. I was very fortunate.

Carlena Orosco 13:29

I was also very organic. I was my dissertation chair was working for him as my RA supervisor, my mentor. And so my chair, I knew kind of what that was going to look like. However, you know, I chose a topic. Of course, again, my chair, we all did chose a topic that hadn't really been explored before. And so the expertise was a little bit difficult to have it kind of had to think more broadly, in terms of okay, my chair is policing, I'm policing. But I really needed to think about areas of expertise in terms of methodology in terms of kind of theoretical and policy implications more broadly, because I knew my specific area was very something that again, hadn't been really explored too much. So I also considered how they worked together. I thought that was incredibly important as well, that helped with kind of seamless processes in terms of revisions and organizing things. My external reader I chose based on subject matter expertise. I knew there were maybe five, you know, scholars who looked at dispatchers and things and so I chose based on that and also someone I had worked with previously who knew my work and was very intimately familiar. So, again, organic, I really didn't have any challenges. I have no changes in my committee. So also very fortunate as to how that worked out.

Wesley Smith 14:55

So, you know, my situation was, was a little bit different, not a bad way, if you know me, you know, I am a schemer, I'm always scheming probably much to everybody around me dismay. I just want to plan and plan out everything. And so I really from from the get go, once I determined what my dissertation topic was about, or the broader topical area, I was really just kind of laying out those boxes I needed, right, I needed someone who had experience in statistics, specifically structural equation modeling, because that's what was going to be kind of the crux of my dissertation, I needed someone with experience in veteran's resource research, or someone was, who was a veteran, because that's my topical area, I needed a biosocial person, because I was looking at kind of the end results of biological processes and trauma to the body. And then, you know, obviously, uh, you know, Luke and Carlena, both both kind of hit on this is you need a committee, that one you want to work with but people who would who drink together and are sorry, work together? Sorry, you need a committee that you would work with and and people who would work together? And really what I think of is the drink test, you know, is your committee do they get along to the degree that these people would sit down and drink a beer with each other? And could you see yourself at the table, and if not, there's likely to be friction to some degree. So you really need to, you know, these are these are people you're going to be communicating with quite a bit over the course of a year or two years, you're going to be working alongside you're going to learn a lot from them. As well, even though you're not in courses. You're not

thereRA during this process. And so you really have to make sure that your personalities mesh. Luckily, most people are very professional. And you're going to get along with most faculty members at institutions. But you'll know through the course of your grad school, you'll identify people, and you'll see like, you know, I could not work with that person. And that's okay, that that's natural, they probably think the same way about you to be honest. And that's all right. I did not have any issues losing my advisor during the dissertation process, because I was very purposeful with my selection. She was someone who I'd worked with for for a bit at that point, we had a lot of common interest overlap and got along, but I know people who have. And so just because it hasn't touched on, the advice I'll give is there's you know, lots of reasons why your chair might have to slide out the chair spot and become a committee member, or leave altogether, whether those are positive or negative, really, the minute you find out that your chair is not charing your committee, you need to be on the hunt for a secondary. And you know, at that point, if you're already, if you've already started the process of dissertating, your first and foremost goal is going to be who's going to jump in and, and kind of take the reins and be supportive of me because your process has just experienced a major derailment, your number one goal of that dissertation has to be to finish it so you can get the cool government job or industry job or professorship, right? And so you need someone who's going to kind of take charge, fill that void and be supportive of you.

Jose Sanchez 18:33

And just so that kind of we cover cover this base, what did the structure of your committee look like? Because I know for Jenn and I, it's five people, at least three of them have to be within the department. And at least one of them has to be outside of the department. So I think Jenn and I are both following the three inside, but two outside people format, just because we're in a soc department. There aren't a lot of like criminologist in our department, so we kind of had to go outside for some of that. But what did your committees look like?

Carlena Orosco 19:09

So at Arizona State, I was required to have three total committee members and I chose an external reader. I don't believe it may be different now. But it wasn't required that I have that external person. But because of the nature of my dissertation topic, I wanted to make sure I had a subject matter expert in my specific area. And that's why I chose the external reader. And to my knowledge, several of my former peers also had the same kind of experience with an external reader, but it's three faculty members, one chair and two other faculty members at ASU.

Lucas Alward 19:42

Yeah, so mine was a little unique because given our much newer PhD program at UCF. And so there's a little added protection, I think, for students within that process, in terms of if you have a faculty member that's never chaired a dissertation within our own department or own university, then that student is required to have a co-chair, just to kind of help understand some of those more bureaucratic processes to make sure kind of everything is lining up on the up and up. And so I did only have three internal committee members, but I technically had a co-chair and then just outside reviewer, that had to be an actual PhD. So you couldn't have someone with like a juris doctorate. I think part of that was more just being a new program. So they were much more aware of that bureaucratic, bureaucratic rules, those processes, so they're pretty strict on, on having students followed that.

Wesley Smith 20:45

Sam Houston State follow the traditional model. So it was, you know, three, three faculty members, all have to be tenure track on your committee, and your chair needs to have have tenure, I believe, I'm not sure they've ever done the co-chair process out there. For myself, those were all department internal, but I know individuals who have had, you know, faculty members from, you know, tenure track faculty members on their committee, from other departments. I don't think that's an issue out there. But no, largely, students are really just going to have to find out what the standards of their department are. And if they're asking for a, someone to chair, their dissertation within their department, that person is probably going to have some experience and know or if they're a newer faculty member know how to figure it out.

Lucas Alward 21:35

And what they just add kind of on the the co-chair situation, for me, it worked out really well, there was the two faculty members worked well together. And my main advisor took more on the role of official chair, but I have had colleagues in situations to where kind of getting both individuals kind of trying to take that lead. And that can be put the student at such a potential disadvantage of trying to navigate potentially competing ideas, edits, whatever it may be. And that's just something to think about. If students are kind of put in that same situation, kind of going back to what we talked about, about choosing your dissertation committee, these individuals that are going to work well together, is there any strife or or scholarly disagreements that could come into play as you kind of navigate that dissertation process.

Carlena Orosco 22:31

I, let's say to kind of bounce off of that is that I think you should also anticipate that there will be some disagreement in your committee in terms of how to proceed with methodology or how to approach a specific research question, I think that is actually a good thing. Because you get to hear different perspectives, you can grow from that, and adjust accordingly. And I think that also speaks to the importance of choosing a chair that you know, will guide you accordingly and say, you know, let's take this into account and make this adjustment, it's not going to take much more time, it'll actually strengthen your dissertation, or maybe someone that can say, this is good for publication purposes. But for now, let's focus on what we already have planned. And so there will be disagreement, there will be differences of opinion, because they're individuals, and they have their own experiences and lens with from which they research. And so I think it's a good thing. anticipate it, don't let it make you nervous. And just trust in your chair and trust in the process. It'll all work out.

Jenn Tostlebe 23:26

Yeah. And that circles back Wes, to your point about finding people who are, you know, friends outside of work to that they can drink together. Because even if you have those academic debates, I like finding people that are good on a personal level, I think it's important.

Wesley Smith 23:44

Yeah, absolutely. And I'd say just just one thing for students to remember is, you know, your chair might have recommendations, committee members might have recommendations, the end of the day,

it's your dissertation, you're in the driver's seat, right? You know, luckily, people were pretty amenable on my committee, committee, they all got along really well. And there were some conflicting recommendations, and disagreements, and, you know, most of the time, I took some of their, you know, one person's feedback, but I can remember probably one or two instances where I was like, you know, neither of that makes sense in this subject area. So I'm gonna go do my own thing. Students need to remember that they have the power to do that. They're the subject matter experts on their dissertation in that area. And you know, it's not the goal of your dissertation is not to clone your chair and make you the next your chair or to exactly mirror their work. And so to kind of safeguard that you need to be able to make those decisions because you're in the driver's seat. At the end of the day.

Carlena Orosco 24:49

I think it's finding a sweet spot between what is possible and what will allow you to pass the defense and also have your own individual identity and your own research voice expressed in the dissertation. And that's critical, as Wesley said. So I think finding that balance is easier than you think. It's just being a champion for your research and also taking those opinions into account, and being able to filter them accordingly and kind of move from there and not let it get you stuck, I think, because that can happen as well, when you hear a lot of different views and perspectives. So just at the end of the day, as Wes said, you know, you know your research better than anyone so.

Jose Sanchez 25:26

And just to quickly reference what Luke was talking about with the co-chairing, we actually do have an episode on CO advisors from almost two years ago with our friend Tara Streng Schroeter. So if anyone's curious about CO advising, that would that is a topic that we do touch on in our early days of this podcast. Okay, so one of the things that I think is a struggle for a lot of us is our dissertation is not the only thing that we are unfortunately doing. Whilst we often have to teach or keep being like an RA for other projects. And depending on what we're trying to do also, like publish or start getting ready to go on the academic market, more start preparing materials for the alt-ac job market, how did your sort of juggle trying to wrap up your dissertation while also trying to handle all these other things that you have to take care of at the same time?

Lucas Alward 26:36

Yeah, I sorry, go ahead.

Wesley Smith 26:40

Sorry, I lost my train of thought. So I actually want the entire time I was I was deserting, I was either in an internship are actually working full time because that internship turned into a job for me. And so I was I was working full time, especially during the back end of that, that dissertation. So I had to find time to write and run my models and do that work kind of effectively. And so I think, here's where a lot of students have issues when they hit this phase of their dissertation. I feel like a lot of folks don't know how they work effectively, by this time. And so my recommendation is something you can't wait till your dissertation to do, but figure out how you work effectively, specifically writing. And for me, I'm one of those weird people that I need. I don't do it last minute, but I have marathon writing sessions, I think I did my back end of my dissertations, like from nothing to a draft in about a week. And you know, a day of that was outlining for days, we're just writing like crazy. And then like two or three days, right, where

we're plugging in more citations and stuff that made sense, just add supporting evidence, and then editing, editing, editing. So I knew I had just kind of schedule and block out this, like a full week off of my new job, off of work to complete this marathon session, because that's how I was going to be effective. Some folks can do the hour a day thing, right? Or some folks need to wait till a week before they get they need to do it, you know, send it into their advisor to even start. And that's all great, if that's your style, that's your style. But I think really, when you start having to juggle all of these expectations and responsibilities is the back end of the process. You need to know what works for you. And and you need to plan accordingly.

Lucas Alward 28:43

Yeah, just to kind of echo west there, I'd say very similar approach, almost in the sense of like binge writing, to where I think for my experience, it was waiting so long to get out into the field to collect data. And which took much longer than anticipated even though anticipating challenges and definitely something my chair to acknowledge, maybe budget a little extra time I was like, oh, no, no, it'll be fine. No budget extra time. But within that process, kind of getting back to then sitting down and taking like three weeks to write the majority of the back half of my dissertation from almost the updated data methods to discussion. And having that time to be very self disciplined of like you said, as Wes said, today is just not my day, tomorrow, I'm writing 10 pages the next day and writing 10 pages and so on and so forth, until you actually just have words on paper and a full draft. And just to kind of go off what Wes said again, really understanding how you work. Understanding your own styles for me, I am a night owl. I can kind of shut everything off during the evening not getting texts. There's no sports games that could be You're distracting me, or having them in the background to where I can just kind of just sit there and produce something. So really kind of having an idea of how you work best in that situation.

Carlena Orosco 30:12

Much of the same for me, I'm a non traditional student in the sense that I was a practitioner before I was an academic. So I was in law enforcement for many, many years before I decided to go down this path. And I was working full time for the police department during the entire Ph. D. program for me, not only working full time, but running a crime analysis unit during my last year, conveniently, dissertation time, right, and I have to run this unit. And I was also working for my, I had a research assistantship as well, in addition to my full time job, which I don't recommend students, but that's what I did at the time. So I had to be very strategic with my time down to the hour. And I know that doesn't work for everyone. But it gave me a sense of, okay, I can get this done, because I have these hourly tasks that I'm going to do. And again, as they said, know what works well for you, I knew that I was a morning person, when I wake up, my brain is fresh and ready to go. At night, I'm a little more tired. I do like kind of basic tasks, we may need to edit the table. Maybe I could format references at night. But during the day in the morning, my brain was ready for writing, I also pulled my time to do some binge writing actually saved my vacation time for a year, and took off almost a month to get my writing done. Because I knew otherwise, it would be too difficult with working 60 hours a week and trying to juggle everything else. And then life happening, you just don't know what's going to happen. So I was very, very strategic with my time, when the job market when it was time for job talks and things, I prioritized that I discussed it with my chair, adjusted my schedule as a result. And I think that's how I was able to get all this done, and then went back to work because I knew I just had revisions at that point in my defense to plan for.

So I did much of the same, I knew I needed that block of time. So I saved for it and I strategize accordingly. And that worked for me.

Jenn Tostlebe 32:01

Sounds like all three of you wrote your dissertation in like a very short amount of time then. Because we've talked to some other people, and they've been like, it took like two years to write and it was spread out. And I was like, Well, I did not plan my time appropriately then. So that's good to know.

Carlena Orosco 32:18

I mean, you'll have pieces, you know, you have pieces of you have your proposal done, you have your lit review, just you have all of that done, your front end is done. So at that point, you have your data, you're writing your analyses, you're making your graphics, whatever the case. So at that point, it's not as massive as it seems there's not starting from square one, you're doing the back end. So.

Lucas Alward 32:41

Yeah, and within that budgeting time for formatting, like one of the things that, what, do as I say not as I do, to put that off into the last minute, that was the worst decision. Of just understanding all those little rules they have, what is the university looking for, that's the last thing you want to be left with, when you're you're really trying to press your time just to submit everything to the deadline. And overall, it didn't take too long, but just something to be aware of to format it maybe even just your prospectus in the right format, type of thing.

Wesley Smith 33:17

And even if you write to that format, budget time for after your defense, to write and reformat, you know, I wrote in a template that they provided followed everything. And you know, I was still going back and forth with Sam Houston's library that supervises the cataloging and dissertations for about a week and a half, after my, my dissertation, and they're not the defense, and they're not the bad guys, right? They're doing their job, but, you know, templates change where you miss a, you know, a, an indentation here or, you know, some margin change screws up everything. So you just, you really have to budget for that time. I think I lost the rest of my hair doing that.

Carlena Orosco 34:06

It's frustrating, okay, so expect to be frustrated, because it's so funny when I look at my Dropbox and there's like 20 iterations after it's already done, because I forgot one more space and my table of contents or something ridiculous and you're so tired by that point. So plan for formatting, do the best, you can anticipate changes. And even after you make those changes, you may look back at your dissertation and still find something that no one caught. And that happens to you and it's okay, it's done. But the formatting, I mean, I've had colleagues who waited until the last minute and didn't sleep for days because they had so much to do. You don't want to be in that spot when you're already extremely exhausted. So.

Lucas Alward 34:48

Yeah, definitely have the final final, final, final, final final. Yeah.

Jose Sanchez 34:56

Okay, and before we move into talking about the actual defense itself, Do you have any other advice and final words about actually writing the dissertation?

Carlena Orosco 35:06

I do, I want to pass on some knowledge from one of my mentors, Dr. Diana was gonna give her credit for this. But she said, make sure that you're doing a little bit of something every day. So maybe you wake up and you're like, I don't feel a lot I don't want to write today. But I can format tables, I can edit my references, I can find another article that speaks to this, do a little something every day. And then you feel like you're accomplishing something, you're moving towards that goal. So don't get down on yourself, if perhaps you don't have a beautiful writing day, knock out 20 pages, but you're still getting something accomplished and moving yourself toward that goal. And that was the best advice I could have been given. Because it helped me to kind of accept where I was, and still feel as though it was making progress. So I think that's what I would pass on from Dr. Wallace to everyone else.

Jenn Tostlebe 35:51

All right, so let's move then into the actual dissertation defense. And this might be kind of a silly question. But when did you feel like you were, like, ready to actually defend your dissertation? Or was this kind of more of a product of, alright, we're to, you know, the deadline, I have to do it, now. Let's, let's get it done.

Wesley Smith 36:18

About 30 minutes after I successfully defended. A lot of head nods. I agree. If you're like me, right, the the imposter syndrome is real, and that's okay. But you know, you have to remember to your chair signed off on you being there, you're a direct reflection of them at that point. And so that pressure or nervousness of your dissertation defense, that's largely an internal process, based off of yourself. If you're, if you're doing this in any sort of normative manner, the external pressure, it's not it's, it's something you're projecting. Your chair, thanks, you're ready, your committee thinks you're ready, you're going, no matter what I tell you, you're probably going to experience a lot of stress and anxiety, but just realize you can let it go. Once, once you've, you've done that presentation and answered those questions. And they tell you, you passed and your doctor such and such, because the people in that room right there rooting for you, you're going to complete it. If you're if you're allowed to schedule it, you're there, you've you've, you've won the final steps, or you know, I know chairs are gonna hate me for this, the final steps are largely performative, you have to perform them, don't get me wrong, you have to put forth a good faith effort. But by that stage, they should be just it should be checking the box, essentially.

Carlena Orosco 37:53

I agree completely. I think that, you know, the phrase that we hear so much, and as we're going through it, we hated hearing, but it's true. A good dissertation is a done dissertation. But I know right? But it's so true. I mean, it's not going to be perfect. You know, there will always be a little something, you could have done something you could have added more data it could have collected, but ultimately, by the time you're done and ready for your defense, I kid you not you will know that dissertation front, front back every possible way. Because you've been with it, it's intimate, you're intimately familiar with

it, you're more prepared than you think I promised you that. Even when questions arise, you're like, Oh, I handled that pretty well, even though you kind of anticipate getting, you know, kind of caught into question, you're actually very prepared. And ultimately, the faculty, they want you to succeed, they're not there to trip you up or to make you fail, they want you to succeed. And any questions are just going to make future publications future research better. And so that's kind of how I went into it. And I think if you had to put like a marker on it, when I completed the first round of major revisions, the first draft that was sent to my chair, and I got those revisions back, when those were done, I knew, Okay, it's just going to be a little changes here. And there, I'm going to schedule it because it kept me on track. So I scheduled it ahead of time, because it helped me to stay on track for meeting that goal. It also helps that I had a position waiting for me. So I knew that I needed to stay focused and stay on track. So if you're the type of person that wants to set the date and work from that, I think that's also really helpful. If that's going to be too stressful, then try a different approach. But for me, that's how I kept myself meeting that target.

Lucas Alward 39:29

Yeah, and I definitely echo both Carlana and Wes, especially in the sense of kind of what we talked about of of who's on your committee. So kind of having that that trust there already that relationship to know that. Alright, if you're accepting that I'm ready to defend, you're not going to you're not putting me in a position where I'm not going to succeed. And so by that point of even just having the scheduled date that you're you're on track that everyone's there to support you and really demonstrating all the work that you've accomplished throughout thattime. And so definitely knowing that in some ways it is somewhat of a formality. But it also an opportunity, I think, to somewhat brag to really kind of sell yourself all the work that you've done to really kind of culminate your your graduate experience to now that you are doctor such and such and that everyone in that room is there to support you in that in your endeavor to achieve that. Of course you have conversations on suggestions, edits, whatnot, revisions, especially as you move forward for ideas about publication, public publishing, and whatnot. But I think it's really there to somewhat celebrates all the work you've done to get to that point.

Jenn Tostlebe 40:47

Awesome. So part of this is like demystifying this process, right? So this is kind of a simple question. But can you just give us a rundown of like your actual defense, like how long it was, if you were nervous, how you went about navigating questions, and then just kind of, in your opinion, how it compared to the prospectus defense.

Lucas Alward 41:10

So for me, mine was in person, which was nice, we'd gotten far enough along through COVID, that we're able to kind of come back to campus and invite colleagues, friends. I think in total, I spoke about 35-40 minutes, with about probably 45 minutes of questions. And definitely nervous. But I think for me, a lot of the nervousness stemmed from the anticipation of what could they potentially ask, by the time I was actually in the room and started speaking, then it's just go time. To me that's, that's the best part. It's always the anticipation of waiting to get there of Oh, my goodness, what if they asked me this question, or? Or how is this actually going to go? But I think as we talked about, that, it's there to really allow you the opportunity to kind of talk about your research, everything you've you've completed. And then just genuine questions, to really create, I think, a discussion. And to me, that was the difference

between my defense versus prospectus to where the prospectus was, hey, think about all these different methodological questions you need to consider. These are some little limitations you might need to address to then the actual defense of, hey, this is some really interesting research. Have you thought about this, or really kind of launching a general discussion about your research and how that contributes to the field? Ideally?

Wesley Smith 42:39

Yeah, so mine was a hybrid model, as sorry. So my dissertation defense was a hybrid model, meaning I presented it in person, but I was followed on camera by all those people who wanted to spy me via zoom and kind of watch as they did their own writing and work, but still be there to support me. Mine was a little bit on the shorter side of me a 30 minute presentation, maybe 20 minutes of questions afterwards, that wasn't really due to a standard or anything, we don't have any time requirements standards, or didn't. Sam, for a dissertation defense, it was just as long as takes versus you know, I had a colleague who was up there talking for almost an hour for his but it was a very, very in depth qualitative dissertation. So depending on your structure, your subject matter that might change. I will say that, you know, my my thoughts are similar to Luke's as in the largest change was really it was a, it was a discussion, right, it was a chance to now discuss that fleshed out kind of relatively finalized research project you did. And not just to kind of defend what you've done and talk about that. But to get advice from people who have otherwise not been socialized with the project, or by your committee members who were now kind of entering that dialogue, and you know, you know, thinking of new things like, Oh, you could have done this, or maybe, you know, what do you think of this, or this is what you could do for subsequent analyses and all those typical questions you'll get, I will say, as someone who has a lot of social anxiety when they're speaking in public, including here now, is is don't, don't answer questions right away. Take a moment to think about them. And also, if you're not sure of the answer for question, don't bullshit. It's not productive here. For most questions, there's going to be no shame in saying something like, you know, that's something I need to look into, or I'm not really sure I'd be interested in your thoughts in that area. That being said, though, there is gonna there are going to be some questions that you damn sure bet never be able to answer. But those are typically going to be based on your method, the statistics or the prevailing theories in the area of research your your dissertation falls under, and you're going to be well versed in those before you start, as a function of you know, writing your prospectus or your your methods section of your dissertation long before you step from that room to defend it.

Carlena Orosco 45:28

I have, I had a mixed methods dissertation. So I was on the longer side had about 45 minutes to defend my dissertation, and then about 30 to 40 minutes of questions. Of course, I was nervous, I'm nervous, just in general, I was very nervous when that day arrived. But something that I love, and again, I can't say enough, just how amazing my committee was through this process. But my chair said, Hey, your topics been approved, you wrote your dissertation, you're just sharing what you found. And when I approached it that way, it made me feel a lot more comfortable. And that sense actually felt that it was a little bit easier than the defense, speak of, prospectus defense rather, because I was just sharing information. I was sharing my hard work. And so echoing a lot of the same sentiments are already discussed in terms of how that feels, and kind of approaching it that way. I will say the question part, definitely do not answer questions right away. I think what I did is I took a second to break apart

the question in my brain to make sure I was answering it correctly, thoroughly. I wasn't kind of going off on a tangent because I was nervous. And taking that extra second really helped me to focus, you can't anticipate the questions, right, but because you know, your your data still well, and your dissertation, so Well, you know, your limitations quite well, too. And so chances are you can speak to any shortcomings, you can speak to how it will impact policy, where are you going to take it from there? You know, how can this be improved moving forward any of the clarification that you need to provide you know that and so chances are, your questions will stem from those. And, you know, again, these are folks that maybe don't know your research very well, they may be from other areas of criminal justice, that are not policing. And so they may just be asking you to understand. And I think when you think of it that way, it's way less intimidating. So that's kind of how I approached it. In terms of my defense.

Jose Sanchez 47:18

Thinking about answering questions for 30 to 45 minutes is just the almost a non starter for me. I keep telling my adviser that I'm just gonna show up and filibuster my defense. Like, but he says that that's not actually an option. So we'll see how that goes. But yeah, I think, to Wes' point to think there are some things that you really need to like, be ready to answer. One of those, then, you know, Jen can attest to this, that we've been told, as you better know your data, right? And like, it's your dissertation. So it is intuitive that you need to know your data. But we've seen people get asked, like data and methods questions, and then not really know what the answer is. And that kind of makes you dead in the water at that point. Like, I think that's one of those questions where if you can't answer it, you might want to just pack it up and try again, later, because it seems to almost be like an automatic dq, at that point for a lot of people. So yeah, so know, know your data, like the back of your hand, which again, this is your dissertation. So you probably should know it. Like the back of your hand.

Carlena Orosco 48:28

I would also say Don't forget, this is a practice practitioner speaking here. But don't forget your implications for policy. Don't forget how that's translatable to the system. I think that often we're thinking theoretically, or, you know, this is obviously an amazing contribution regardless, but think about how this impacts policy, the implications for practice that is critical, in my opinion, to kind of where the field is going. And having something that has actual actionable outcomes that you can provide, and speak to would be my recommendation as well.

Jose Sanchez 49:01

And as we kind of wrap up the defence, any last piece of advice, or maybe like the best advice that you receive, about getting through this final hurdle, and get being on the hot seat for your defense?

Wesley Smith 49:17

Yeah, it's, it's gonna sound probably insane right now, if you're working towards your dissertation, which a that's my modus operandi. But like, try to relax, have fun with the process. If you can. As crazy as it sounds, you're likely going to miss grad school and the dissertation process in just a few short months, and kind of pining for those times you're a student and that was like one of the the major things on your plate. So try to cultivate that healthy perspective. enjoy it for what it is. But if that doesn't work for you, remember that the back end of the back end front end is a dissertation process. They're both kind of the same. They're like climbing a mountain. And so you take that one step at a time you don't

sprint up it. And so plan those steps and follow that plan one step after another, if that's what you need to do to get through it, don't look at it as this big whole thing that you need to get done at once. It's an iterative process.

Carlena Orosco 50:17

I agree, definitely savor the moment. I know it sounds again, silly right now. But you only have one dissertation defense. And you're only told congratulations, doctor, that one time, right. And so savor that experience in that moment. And I think when you're thinking about a dissertation topic, within reason, of course, think about what do I want to study for the next several years? You know, what do I want to look at? What expertise do I want to have, and go from there and kind of look at something that will not only make an impact in the field, but something that you want to spend time with for several years after, because ideally, that's what you'll do once you have your dissertation done. And so I would say that's an important kind of way to approach it. But having fun with it is very important. Because once it's done, it's done, and you do miss it. And you do miss kind of how you felt in that moment. We'll never have that again and that way. So I agree with Wes on that point.

Lucas Alward 51:11

I definitely agree with with you both and especially to embrace that. It's such a unique experience that really tries to culminate your entire graduate education or, or trajectory. And kind of going off of that, I think it's so important to really celebrate that. I think all too often in academia, where we're always looking at the next career objective, whether that's traditional academia, or even kind of the alt academia, job market, to where now I'm focused on getting tenure. Now I'm trying to get this next grant, this next publication, become an administrator. And so really taking the time to reflect that you've accomplished something, something that no one can really ever take away from you, you're always going to have that that doctorate. And I think taking the time to really acknowledge that in the moment, or even the process to get you to that that final stage is so important.

Carlena Orosco 52:07

One last quick point of what I did, I'll share this is I made a folder that said for bad days, and I saved screenshots to save emails, revisions with good, let's send it off or defense is scheduled or anything like that. And topic looks great, let's go for it. And then when I had a bad day, or I was tired, or had difficulty moving forward, I would look at that, and I would see everything and accomplished so far. And it really motivated me to kind of continue. And I still have a folder that I keep those things in, you know, now in this next stage of my career, but celebrating those little accomplishments is very, very important. Because they add up and everything is really such an achievement in this process. So.

Lucas Alward 52:49

Yeah, definitely saved the email or was no revisions needed. That's like...

Carlena Orosco 52:55

Formatting to it and put him in the library.

Jenn Tostlebe 53:00

Yeah. So first off, I don't believe at this point that I'm going to miss this phase. But that's good to know that eventually I will. But secondly, kind of getting to the point that Luke made, you know, it feels oftentimes, like no one really talks about like the aftermath of going through the dissertation defense. And just like, how good it feels to have completed something this big. And so can you just talk a little bit about, you know, what you did to celebrate if there was anything, any ideas for people? And just to kind of highlight that this is a big deal, and you've made it through it? And that it's important to take note of that?

Lucas Alward 53:42

Yeah, yeah, definitely. So I think I was very fortunate where I had some, some former classmates come back and join the defense. And so that was just great in and of itself, but then really having the opportunity, especially were some of my colleagues to where they defended via zoom to where we were still kind of in lockdown. And so I felt really fortunate that I actually got a real opportunity to kind of go out and celebrate we're friends to partake in some adult beverages, as you could say. And so that was that was just so meaningful to me to really kind of put the final mark on now you've, you've achieved this. And that's something that I won't forget.

Carlena Orosco 54:32

I think for me, I didn't mention this. My defense was virtual. So I didn't have that kind of moment of celebration. And yes, I was. I had applause and everything virtually, but what I focused on was number one sleeping. I took the week off of work, I did my defense, I defended on a Monday and I took the rest of the week off from work and I slept and I rested. I did not open my laptop for one week. I really took the time just to be. And I really focused on self care because admittedly, I'm not very good at work life balance. And I think I neglected a lot of that. And so I really just took the time to kind of pamper myself, and kind of sit with the experience and celebrated with friends later. But I really needed that time just for me to kind of process and decompress from something that your adrenaline you're pushing through. But when it's done, you are exhausted, and you just want to rest and relax. So I focused on that before I went back to work. And that was really important and helpful.

Wesley Smith 55:31

Yeah, I agree with Carlena. It's a draining process. And so for me, it was kind of, you know, go hit the bar with friends afterwards, rent a robe for graduation and get back to work because I was already working full time. But you know, largely, I'm a, I'm really good or bad at work life balance, depending who you ask, my, my wife will kind of stare at me sometimes and be like, you're lucky read and write fast because you're lazy. So I spend a lot of time with family and making time to kind of take care of myself because I find I'm, I'm working more effectively when I'm at work afterwards. So I had to get back to it, you know, two or two or three days later, but you know, I got that, that work life balance and that decompression on the front end. And you know, that works for me, doesn't doesn't work for everybody. I will say, you know, prepared for the punches to keep rolling afterwards, though. You know, to this professor in in the PhD program, Ryan Randa at Sam Houston State, he was one of my committee members, very, very funny guy. But I think couched in some humor was some of his some of the most insightful recommendations ever were essentially to enjoy grad school, enjoy your dissertation and enjoy the tough times that you're having now. Because they don't get any easier. It's a form of stress inoculation, we have in this field, things don't slow down after your dissertation for work

as an assistant professor or researcher at a nonprofit or government agency, or what have you, things will get faster, you'll have more to do, you'll have more work to get done. You'll build up to that over time. But you're going to get better at handling higher volumes of work. And so you know, what that means is, you know, those habits of decompression you're creating now, during your dissertation phase are the ones you're going to take with you good or bad. And the also means cherish the moment, cherish that that went of that dissertation or just getting to that phase, and remember it, it doesn't get a whole lot easier.

Jose Sanchez 58:05

Okay, so going into our final question. So you've successfully defended your dissertation, you've done a little celebrating. What kind of were the next steps after that, you know, like you've mentioned having to, like prep your dissertation for I don't even know where it gets to submit it. I guess Wesley said, like the library. I don't even know where it goes. I probably should. But I don't. Preparing to publish off your dissertation on have an interviewer like that stage or have already submitted. So can you walk us through like those next steps after?

Wesley Smith 58:48

I'll jump in here, because I'm pretty easy. So you'll submit to your library, they'll submit through ProQuest. So your your dissertation will get published online, more likely than not be loaded. It'll be indexable, through Google Scholar, and all of that. And then, you know, if you're like me, you get back to work at the job you had at the end of the dissertation. Personally, you know, publications are not part of my success metrics. You know, I'm working with state government, you kind of walk in with tenure, in a way and so good or bad. That means I you know, I'm not there yet publishing my dissertation. It's been sent out to places because it's such a niche topic. It is. It's difficult to find a journal that benefits that which is okay, that's part of the process. There's a home for it somewhere. But for me, I haven't I haven't got around to publishing it and, you know, that's okay. It served its goal, which was to get me through grad school and get me working. So.

Carlena Orosco 59:53

I will see for me that, you know, I did take a few months where I did not look at my dissertation and I chose to do that, because I needed just a break from it. And I also think that stepping away provides clarity in terms of where I want to take this next or, you know, how will this evolve, right. And so I just had something published on my dissertation, one specific part of it. But really, it was because I was excited about it. And I think you, and I want to do work with practitioners, as I've done my entire life, my entire professional life. I'm working with agencies, and I think this is important work. And so I was excited to get it out there because I can use that as kind of a jumping off point to establish these partnerships and work with agencies to do this. So I did publish off of it, but I tried to make it manageable in terms of how can I break this dissertation apart into papers and space that out so it's manageable. And I'm not stressing myself out too much with my service requirements with teaching everything, but still making progress on that. And so, you know, I graduated in May, it's November. And so I took some time off from it before I started tackling publications. I think that's very important to do. So that's kind of where I am at this point.

Lucas Alward 1:01:04

I think for me, I think I'm still in that phase where I can't look at it. Just coming from completing my dissertation, or defending in summer of 2022, I'm still kind of focused on other projects that were kind of ongoing, kind of simultaneously, which has been great to really kind of refocus on other research, that's really a desire of mine or real interest to were kind of just in the background, getting things ready to eventually start publishing on some of my dissertation data, especially through kind of next spring or the next couple years.

Carlena Orosco 1:01:41

I will say really quickly that I've heard of folks who after they finish their dissertation, maybe don't want to explore that area anymore. And I you know, that research area, and that's okay, I think you can still take something from that experience, whether it's methodology or you know, policy implications, and kind of tailor it to another area of research. So I still think it's a very valuable tool, in terms of using that to propel you forward. Even if you choose to go a different direction, the skills you gained will be credibly beneficial, regardless, so

Jose Sanchez 1:02:15

Well, unfortunately, that's all the time we have for today. Thank thank you all so much for taking the time to talk to us. And this was very insightful. This is a lot of help for Jenn, myself, and hopefully a ton of other grad students that that will listen to this. Is there anything that any of you would like to plug anything that down the pipeline that we should be on the lookout for? [NOTHING] All right, where can people find you? Do any of you like Twitter? I know we don't know if Twitter is going to exist anymore. But I guess for now, if you are on Twitter, can you let us know your username or handle feel like I'm out getting myself very hardcore right now.

Lucas Alward 1:03:06

I'm trying to remember my own Twitter handle. I think it's just LAIward3, just kind of what was available but like you said, we'll see if Twitter still exists another week or so. So if not, you can find me at Boise State.

Wesley Smith 1:03:21

Well, until this, the ship sinks my Twitter handle is WesleyTSmith3. And, you know, I I'd love to talk to anybody about veterans research, the policy implications those research, that research and how to plug the gaps in veterans research specifically if they're interested, so feel free to slide into my DMs.

Carlena Orosco 1:03:48

You can find me again until the ship sinks that my Twitter handle is at CarlenaOrosco, I also have a LinkedIn profile as well, which is helpful for practitioner partnerships can find me at Cal State LA and if anyone's interested in learning more about why consider the gatekeepers and policing as dispatchers wants to talk about crime analysis, or anything of the sort. I'm happy to help and chat with you about that.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:04:12

Awesome, thank you all, to all three of you again, this is super helpful for me moving forward. So thank you. Thank you. Yeah.

Carlena Orosco 1:04:21

Thank you for having us.

Lucas Alward 1:04:22

Yeah, thank you. And it was great meeting everyone as well.

Carlena Orosco 1:04:24

Great meeting with you.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:04:28

Hey, thanks for listening.

Jose Sanchez 1:04:30

Don't forget to leave us a review on Apple podcasts or iTunes. Or let us know what you think of the episode by leaving us a comment on our website, thecriminologyacademy.com

Jenn Tostlebe 1:04:40

You can also follow us on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook at thecrimacademy.

Jose Sanchez 1:04:52

or email us at thecrimacademy@gmail.com. See you next time.