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Ryan Charles Meldrum

CAREERS AND RESEARCH

Ryan Charles Meldrum, PhD, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, Florida International University

Ryan Meldrum's research focuses on the causes of juvenile delinquency. His path to becoming a delinquency researcher began when out of sheer curiosity he took a class on juvenile delinquency as an undergraduate student at Oregon State University. Having grown up in a small farming town in rural Oregon, Meldrum became interested in understanding why some teenagers would engage in delinquent and criminal behavior. His interest in making a career out of studying this topic was solidified during his graduate studies at Florida State University.

One of Meldrum's main areas of research concerns the measurement and operationalization of associating with delinquent peers. Traditionally, this construct is measured by having survey respondents report on the delinquent behavior of their friends. However, because of concerns over the accuracy of such reports, researchers are increasingly making use of reports of peer delinquency based on social-networking measurement strategies. With this measurement strategy, respondents are first asked to report who their friends are, and then researchers obtain self-reports of delinquency from those friends directly, bypassing concerns that someone might inaccurately recall and report on the behavior of their friends. Meldrum's research, and that of others exploring this topic, demonstrates how the empirical significance of peer delinquency for understanding individual involvement in delinquency may have been exaggerated in past studies relying solely on respondent perceptions of peer behavior.

His advice for students interested in a similar career:

Think like a researcher. One of the most challenging things for me early on was transitioning from a student who was responsible for consuming knowledge to a professor who was expected to produce new knowledge. What worked for me? I started to listen to news stories and read research with an eye toward thinking of new questions that needed to be answered or how a study could be conducted on the topic I was learning about. One day during my third year in graduate school the light bulb went off in my head, the floodgates of ideas opened, and I have been working ever since to answer questions related to the causes of juvenile delinquency.