Young Adult Court Program

Co-Sponsored by the University of California Consortium on the Developmental Science of Adolescence

The Young Adult Court (YAC) of Orange County is an experimental, scientifically-informed approach to handling transitional-aged youth (ages 18-25) in the justice system. Transitional-aged youth represent one of the largest segments of individuals involved in the criminal justice system and experience the highest rate of recidivism. However, emerging evidence in developmental science indicates that the brain continues to mature well into the mid-twenties. Accordingly, both developmental scientists and legal scholars have questioned whether current approaches to criminal justice are appropriate for this age group. In response to the misalignment between developmental research and the application of criminal justice policies for transitional-aged youths, the YAC of Orange County was founded. The YAC is a collaboration between the Defense Attorney, the District Attorney, Probation Officers, the Judge, the Orangewood Foundation and University of California, Irvine. Participation in YAC results in the dismissal or reduction of a felony charge to a misdemeanor. Additionally, participants receive services, such as housing, employment, education, and health care assistance. A critical component of the YAC of Orange County is determine whether it is effective in reducing recidivism and promoting prosocial behaviors. Accordingly, UCI will conduct interviews with all participants who are eligible for the program, regardless of whether they are invited to participate in the YAC. UCI will be able to examine how young adults in and out of the YAC change over time. For example, does one group tend to reoffend more than the other? Without evidence on the effect of YACs, the potential of YACs to reduce the impact of a criminal record remains untested. This project targets a segment of the population that is undergoing a crucial transition period and focuses on evaluating a social institution that has generated and exacerbated inequality. This study will improve criminal justice decision-making by providing evidence on the impact of YACs and to reduce the disproportionate impact of a record on minority young adults.

Elizabeth Cauffman is a Professor in the Department of Psychological Science at the University of California, Irvine and holds courtesy appointments in the Department of Criminology, Law & Society, the School of Education, and the School of Law. Dr. Cauffman received her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from Temple University and completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the Center on Adolescence at Stanford University. She has published over 100 articles, chapters, and books on a range of topics in the study of contemporary adolescence, including adolescent brain development, risk-taking and decision-making, parent-adolescent relationships, and juvenile justice. Findings from Dr. Cauffman's research were incorporated into the American Psychological Association's amicus briefs submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court in Roper v. Simmons, which abolished the juvenile death penalty, and in both Graham v. Florida and Miller v. Alabama, which placed limits on the use of life without parole as a sentence for juveniles. As part of her larger efforts to help research inform practice and policy, she served as a member of the MacArthur Foundation's Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice as well as the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Committee on the Neurobiological and Socio-behavioral Science of Adolescent Development and Its Applications. Dr. Cauffman currently directs the Center for Psychology & Law as well as the Masters in Legal & Forensic Psychology at UCI.

The Honorable Judge Maria Hernandez was appointed Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court for Orange County on January 1, 2014 where she served until January of 2018. She was a juvenile judge since 2009, where she was responsible for both dependency and delinquency inventories, presided over Juvenile Drug Court, Dependency Drug Court and the Boys Court program. Judge Hernandez created and presided over the dedicated court addressing commercially sexually exploited children (GRACE-Generating Resources to Abolish Child Exploitation) and co-chairs the Orange County Committee relating to Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC). She is currently assigned to the Court's Felony Trial Panel handling felony criminal trials and has recently created and launched a Young Adult Court (YAC) which will address the special needs of emerging adults in the criminal justice system. She serves as a member of Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye's “Keeping Kids in School and Out of Court Initiative”, the Judicial Council of California’s “Advisory Committee on Providing Access and Fairness” and is a faculty member for the Judicial Council of California’s Center for Judiciary Education and Research (CJER). Judge Hernandez leads numerous projects and commissions working to reduce truancy and creating successful educational outcomes for the youth in Orange County. She is an active member of numerous law and community related organizations at the local, state and national levels. She has also worked as a senior deputy public defender for the County of Orange as a trial lawyer until she was appointed to the bench as a Commissioner in 2006, and appointed by Governor Schwarzenegger as a judge in 2009. Since 2011, she has served as adjunct Professor of Juvenile and Domestic Law at Western State College of Law. Judge Hernandez is a University of California, Irvine alumni, having graduated with her undergraduate degree from UC Irvine in 1986 and law degree from Western State University-Fullerton in 1991.

Wednesday
May 22nd

12:00—1:00pm

UC Center
Sacramento
1130 K Street
Room LL 22
Sac, CA 95814

Register by:
May 15th at:
uccs.ucdavis.edu

Lunch will be served

For questions contact Brooke Miller-Jacobs at (916) 445-5161 or bmillerjacobs@ucdavis.edu

The views and opinions expressed during this lecture are those of the speaker and do not necessarily represent the views of UCCS.