

### **Annotated Excerpt from a Full Research and Mentoring Plan**

The William T. Grant Scholars Program encourages applicants to stretch their expertise. What does it take to assemble a high-quality proposal and demonstrate your capacity to stretch theoretically? To guide potential applicants, the annotated excerpt from this proposal showcases the kind of thinking, theorizing, and methodological rigor we expect to see in proposals. This example advances a question that is well-served by a qualitative approach and is intended as a guide. It does not, however, dictate the specific topic or study design that we are seeking. This proposal includes clear thinking, research questions that are motivated by theory, well-defined terms, and tight alignment between the literature review, research questions, methods, and analyses.

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Excerpted from:

*Creating More Equitable and Developmentally Attuned Disciplinary Environments for Adolescent Students*

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# Creating More Equitable and Developmentally Attuned Disciplinary Environments for Adolescent Students<sup>1</sup>

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## PART I: RATIONALE

The substantial attention paid to racial inequality in the criminal justice system has led to often heated debate about school disciplinary practices and how they may disproportionately harm the future trajectories of students of color. Current school policies allow educators discretion in assigning punishments, often leading non-white students to be disproportionately assigned exclusionary punishments (Bracy 2011; Hagan, Shedd and Payne 2005; Hirschfield and Celinska 2011; Shedd 2015). Exclusionary school punishments – such as suspension, expulsion, and arrest – are associated with enduring psychological trauma, high school dropout, and dampened academic motivation and achievement (Gregory, Skiba and Noguera 2010; Kirk and Sampson 2013; Perry and Morris 2014). The punitive discipline that disproportionately attaches to non-white students has dramatic implications for these students’ future life chances, the well-being of their communities, and for broader patterns of societal inequality (Perry and Morris 2014). Not only are exclusionary punishments stigmatizing for students (Perry and Morris 2014), but they also appear to be “developmentally unwise,” (Yeager, Dahl and Dweck 2017). Specifically, these disciplinary policies may not motivate positive behavior because they do not honor adolescents’ high reactivity to perceived injustice and need for peer approval (Yeager et al. 2017).

In this section, the applicant makes a compelling case that studies of school discipline have not been framed within the lens of developmental appropriateness. She also identifies why situating school discipline in this manner represents a meaningful reframe for scholarly inquiry.

Notice how the applicant indicates what is needed -- "information about how the disciplinary environments being created are responsive to adolescents' developmental needs" and does not stop with a critique of the existing literature's limitations. This helps the reader anticipate what might be proposed.

In part to address these problems, in recent years, educators and policymakers have sought to make school punishments more developmentally appropriate, equitable, and conducive to learning (Kupchik and Hirschfield 2016). To give shape to this new direction, practitioners and policymakers need information about how school staff, students, and parents interpret and negotiate the complex disciplinary environments that characterize today’s schools. They also need information about how the disciplinary environments that are being created are responsive to adolescents’ developmental needs. In recent years, researchers have shown that the brain systems that regulate cognitive and psychosocial development are not well-integrated during much of adolescence (Albert, Chein and Steinberg 2013; Somerville 2013), leading to a heightened risk for conformity and risky behavior, especially in the presence of peers (Collins and Steinberg 2007; Crosnoe and Johnson 2011; Hurd et al. 2012). Thus, adolescence alters how students behave, the kinds of relationships they need to have with fellow students and teachers, and their ways of interpreting and responding to adult action.

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<sup>1</sup> Deidentified version

A W.T. Grant Scholar Award will allow me to examine systematically how three aspects of a high school setting - a restorative justice program, a police presence, and parents' intervention into school disciplinary matters – co-exist and interact to shape well-being among a racially and socioeconomically diverse sample of adolescents. In particular, I am interested in whether there are unintended consequences of maintaining a disciplinary system that, by offering both a restorative justice program and other, harsher punishments, provides educators with the leeway to discriminate. In addressing this issue, I hope to address two broad and interrelated challenges in public education: school disciplinary climates that, on the one hand, promote racial disparities in punishment, and, on the other, expose students (and especially non-white students) to developmentally inappropriate disciplinary practices.

*Here the applicant identifies their intended theoretical stretch goals - integrating an adolescent development perspective into empirical research on school discipline. Note the applicant also identifies two mentors with the capacity to assist her growth.*

Although I have a knowledge base and experience in the sociology of education, race, and criminal stigma, I have yet to conduct empirical research into school discipline. As a leading expert on school discipline and the criminalization of youth, Aaron Kupchik will serve as a mentor to me in this area. Dr. Kupchik has conducted field research in schools, where he shadowed and interviewed school resource officers (SROs) and school disciplinarians, and he has offered to mentor me on how to navigate these areas.

A core concern animating this project is that school disciplinary practices are constructed and implemented in a way that is insufficiently responsive to adolescent sensibilities. To address this concern, I need the mentorship and guidance of someone who is well-versed in research on adolescent development. (Robert Crosnoe has generously agreed to mentor me in this area.) With Dr. Crosnoe's mentorship, and the deeper knowledge of adolescent development I plan to acquire, I hope to provide information that policymakers and practitioners can use to effectively reduce racial disparities in school punishment and, simultaneously, provide a more developmentally appropriate disciplinary climate for all students.

School discipline is a collective set of practices, involving participants in distinct roles, such as police officer, teacher, counselor, Dean of Discipline, wrongdoer, peer, and parent. Disciplinary outcomes are a product of how these roles intersect. My proposed project will create a rich data set that incorporates the perspectives and experiences of these multiple actors. I propose to observe and interview a diverse group of students (N=60), teachers, counselors, Deans (N=26), and parents (N=36) at a racially diverse high school in the local area. I also propose to sample police who serve in schools, or SROS (school resource officers) across 10 racially diverse high schools in the area (N=20). (Two of the SROs are posted to the same high school as the students, teachers, counselors, deans, and parents I am sampling.)<sup>2</sup>

There are five ways in which my project could inform policy and/or practice as it relates to broad and pressing issues in American public education. First, since the late 1990s, thousands of school districts have placed police officers in high schools (Kupchik 2010), and my study stands to provide the information needed to help SROs respond to students in developmentally appropriate and racially equitable ways. My study stands to provide the information needed to help SROs

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<sup>2</sup> Most schools in the area employ two SROs.

respond to students in developmentally appropriate and racially equitable ways. For instance, my findings could suggest the value of a continual program of SRO professional development that emphasizes the need to differentiate between work that occurs in a patrol unit and in a school, and that provides basic information about adolescent development and racial bias.

Second, my proposed research will provide critical information to educators hoping to eliminate racial bias from a disciplinary intervention that is rapidly being adopted in American public schools (Ashley and Burke 2016; Jones 2016). Specifically, it will attend to whether a restorative justice program is being delivered in a way that is psychologically “wise,” or targeted to the specific cognitive, social, and emotional needs of individuals at a particular stage of development (Bryan et al. 2016). It will also highlight how racial bias could exist within a restorative justice program.

Third, my project will identify whether there are unintended consequences to maintaining a disciplinary system that, by offering both a restorative justice program and other, harsher punishments, provides educators with the leeway to discriminate. As part of my study, I will examine how educators channel students from different racial backgrounds into different punishments. I will also examine the extent to which parents from different race/class backgrounds are successful in intervening in their children’s behalf when a serious disciplinary incident occurs. These findings could help educators and policymakers design more equitable disciplinary environments.

In Part II of the proposal, I describe the three research projects that comprise my 5- year research plan. I start with a basic description of the main study site, Franklin High School. Then, for each project, I provide a brief overview of the project’s unique contributions to current knowledge and the methods that are specific to that project. In Part III, I highlight how the proposed projects will expand my expertise, and in Part IV, I discuss my mentoring plan. The Appendix includes more detailed information on the proposed methods, including sample selection, recruitment, and data analysis.

## **PART II: RESEARCH PROJECTS**

*In this section, the applicant impressively integrates perspectives of police, students, and parents to develop an integrated framework that draws on deep knowledge about the disciplinary practices in urban schools. This responds to statements earlier in the document about the need for information--from multiple perspectives--about how disciplinary environments are being responsive to adolescents.*

My primary research site, Franklin High School (FHS) offers several advantages for a study of how adolescent development, school discipline, and racial and socioeconomic inequality interact. First, FHS is a grade 9-12 high school, so it offers the opportunity to examine students who are arrayed along the developmental spectrum of early to late adolescence. Second, FHS has a strong law enforcement presence (with two police officers and numerous security guards). Third, the school is unusually racially diverse; over 40 % of students are White, 30% are Black/African American, less than 20 percent are Hispanic/Latino, and roughly 5% are Asian. The racial and economic diversity of the large FHS student body (with a student population of roughly 3,000) will provide me with many opportunities to observe and analyze in-school processes that may contribute to disparate punishment outcomes among

students belonging to different race and SES groups. FHS is also unique in that it includes large numbers of students who belong to both ends of the economic spectrum. While over 40% of students are eligible for free or reduced priced- lunch, many other students are from upper-income families.

### *PROJECT 1: POLICE IN SCHOOLS*

Since the late 1990s, thousands of school districts have placed police officers in high schools, with an estimated 14,000-20,000 police officers serving as school resource officers, or SROs, in U.S. public schools.<sup>3</sup> These SROs are trained, supervised, and evaluated by police departments, rather than by school officials (Kupchik 2010). In fact, when school is not in session, SROs typically work within a patrol division of the local police department, where they enforce criminal and traffic law. SROs are taught to cultivate respectful and trusting relationships with students, parents, and school staff, in part by adhering to ethical standards of impartiality, and in part by being sensitive to the developmental needs of students (NASRO Testimony before Senate Committee 2012).

Research and scholarship suggests that, although they are intended to provide a safe learning environment and to offer additional teachers/guest speakers and informal counselors, SROs sometimes instead create hostile environments for youth. Indeed, scholars have documented a mismatch between the stated goals of having SROs in schools, and the everyday reality of SROs in schools (e.g., Kupchik 2010). In New York City and other cities, for instance, researchers have found that SROs routinely subject students to offensive comments, unwarranted and intrusive searches, unlawful confiscation of belongings, sexual attention, physical abuse, and arrests for non-criminal misconduct (Mukherjee 2007; Kupchik 2010). Researchers express concern that SROs, like other school staff, treat Black and Latino boys and girls with disproportionate harshness, treating them like criminals (Morris 2016; Perry and Morris 2014).

This is problematic in light of research showing that adolescents are prone to respond with suspicion and mistrust when they perceive that adults unjustly disrespect them and are trying to restrict their autonomy (Bryan et al. 2016; Hurd et al. 2012). In addition, during adolescence, the socioemotional and cognitive control systems develop at different rates, intensifying teens' susceptibility to risky and impulsive behavior in the presence of peers (Albert, Chein and Steinberg 2013; Somerville 2013). For most, risky, rule-breaking behavior is age-specific and does not predict future delinquency (Monahan, Steinberg, Cauffman, and Mulvey 2013). Thus, treating adolescent misbehavior as criminal may exacerbate, rather than stem, inclinations to act out.

Why do these problems occur? One possibility is that police socialization and subculture fail to equip SROs with tools that will help them deal with adolescent students, because so much of the emphasis within this subculture is on preparing officers to deal with dangerous adults. Indeed, police socialization prepares recruits to embrace a dangerous job that requires constant readiness to exert coercive authority (Waddington 1999). This preparation seems particularly ill-suited to dealing effectively with adolescent students, who have a strong need to feel that adults respect their autonomy and decision- making capabilities, and will react negatively to adults who they

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<sup>3</sup> <https://nasro.org/frequently-asked-questions/> (last accessed 6/28/2017)

feel “talk down” to them (Yeager et al. 2017). For adolescents, it is often more effective to create an environment in which, even in the midst of behavioral criticism, authority figures show respect for the student by emphasizing the students’ capacity to meet high standards of behavior in the future (Yeager et al. 2017).

There are several other challenges associated with being an SRO that could reduce SROs’ capacity to engage with adolescent students in a “psychologically precise” (Yeager et al. 2017: 4) ways. First, it may be jarring for SROs to go back and forth between their work with adults in the community during the summer, and with adolescents in schools during the school year. Second, SRO training may offer inadequate preparation for how to treat adolescent students in developmentally appropriate ways. Third, previous research suggests that low prestige and status are associated with a propensity to violence among law enforcement officials (Kop, Euwema, Schaufeli 1999; Lerman & Page 2012; Tracy 2008). SROs note that being a “kiddie cop” is a low-status and undesirable assignment, unlikely to be rewarded by law enforcement superiors (VanZandt 2009). SROs who feel disrespected and isolated by their law enforcement peers may be especially unlikely to treat adolescent students in a respectful manner.

*Throughout this section, the applicant highlights how the use of qualitative methods will enable the exploration of a theoretical puzzle in the school discipline literature. The applicant's experience with qualitative methods is an asset that allows her to identify potential methodological oversights within the current literature.*

To date, scholarship has yet to uncover fully why SROs sometimes treat adolescent students as adult criminals. One possible reason is methodological: in-depth, qualitative studies of SROs typically only examine the one or two SROs posted to a particular school. By contrast, in this study, in addition to the two SROs posted to Franklin High School, I also propose to sample SROs across 10 racially diverse high schools in the local area (total N=20). In addition, I will sample non-SRO police officers to learn more about how police subculture and socialization could relate to SRO-student relationships.

***Project 1 is anchored by the following research questions:***

1. How do students at FHS describe and experience their interactions with SROs?
2. How do SROs at FHS treat students from different race and gender groups? Are they more likely to treat Black and Latino male and female students harshly than other students?
3. What is the nature of SRO training, and how well does it prepare SROs to interact with adolescent students in developmentally appropriate ways?
4. How, if at all, do SROs distinguish between their work with adolescents in schools and their regular patrol-duty work?
5. How do police officers who are not SROs regard the SRO role? Do they report that the SRO role is a low-status and undesirable assignment? What kinds of police officers do they believe should serve as SROs, and how do they describe the process by which police officers are assigned to the SRO role?

## OVERVIEW OF METHODS FOR PROJECT 1: POLICE IN SCHOOLS

**Interviewing Students at FHS about their Perceptions of SROs.** I will interview students (N=60) and staff at FHS (N=26) about their experiences with, and perceptions of, the SROs. I will examine whether and how students from different subgroups perceive the SROs. I will also ask students directly about whether they feel the SROs are “fair” and “unequal” in their dealings with students. These probes are likely to reveal whether students believe that SROs are racially biased and also, whether they feel that SROs treat students respectfully. I will ask school staff to describe the kinds of interactions they have observed between SROs and students, and how they think the SROs can shape the experiences of students at FHS. I will also ask school staff about how and when they have been instructed to call upon SROs for assistance with a student.

**Observing SRO training.** To examine police officers’ preparation for the SRO role, I will observe SRO trainings, which are delivered at an annual ISROA (<STATE NAME> School Resource Officers Association) conference. I will pay special attention to whether and how, at this conference, SROs learn about the unique needs of adolescents. During the training, and at the conference, I will document and compare the time and resources (e.g., guest speakers) that are devoted to law enforcement activities like arresting students or placing them under restraints, and how much are devoted to improving SROs’ ability to teach and counsel youth in developmentally appropriate ways.

**Interviewing SROs.** In addition to the two SROs at FHS, I will also recruit 18 SROs, also serving at racially diverse high schools in <STATE NAME>, at the annual ISROA conference for in-depth interviews. During in-depth interviews with SROs (total N=20), I will ask SROs who I recruited from the conference questions like, “What did you take from this training?” “What tips did you receive, that you think are most doable for you when you’re working in school?” “I will also ask SROs about the potential for SRO training and conferences to provide them with a unique and alternative set of practices to the ones that are regularly used in police work. I will ask questions like, “Tell me how this is different from what you learned in the police academy?”

I will ask the SROs recruited from the training sessions, as well as the SROs at FHS, about how their official SRO training prepared them for the SRO position. I will also use these in-depth interviews to learn how SROs view an “ideal” interaction with an adolescent student, and to learn more about how they distinguish between their work with students in schools and their work with adults in the community.

**Observing SROS at FHS.** I will observe SROs on their daily rounds at FHS. A basic, overriding question to be pursued is the extent to which SROs’ interactions with students are respectful and developmentally appropriate. In the first stage of this project, I will establish when and with whom SROs provide explanations for their decisions (such as conducting searches), inform students of their rights, show respect for students’ privacy and autonomy (for instance, by not engaging in random locker or backpack searches), speak to students in a respectful manner, and avoid giving students direct commands. To examine whether students from different race/gender groups are treated differently by SROs, I will analyze my observations of SROs at FHS on their daily rounds. Prior research suggests that SROs spend much of their day patrolling hallways and

doing paperwork (Kupchik 2010). With a research team, and throughout an academic year, I will conduct observations of the two SROs at FHS on their daily rounds. My observations will likely capture thousands of interactions with students and staff members.

During these observations, my research team will record all SRO-student interactions, analyzing them later to see if there is systematic evidence of a pattern in which SROs treat students from different demographic subgroups differently. For instance, for a similar rule infraction in the hallway, are SROs more likely to notice and choose to get involved when the offender is a student from a non-dominant group, as compared to a student from a dominant group?

I will use the interviews with SROs at 9 other racially diverse high schools (N=18) to assess how typical the behavior of the SROs at FHS is, and to investigate potential differences in how SROs treat students across school contexts. (These additional 18 SROs will have been recruited from the annual ISROA (<STATE NAME> School Resource Officers Association) conference, as noted above).

#### *DATA ANALYSIS FOR PROJECT 1: POLICE IN SCHOOLS*

Using techniques I have used in the past, I will analyze my data using a modified version of grounded theory, one that emphasizes the utility of moving between inductive and deductive modes of analysis (Fine 2004). In the first stages of coding, I will label elements of data that speak to participants' experiences and understandings. With a research assistant, I will then write memos on each participant. In subsequent stages of data analysis and writing, I will first work with the analytic memos that emerged from my earlier rounds of coding and with the memos written on each participant. Then, I will develop secondary, or focused, codes. Following that, I will conduct theme or pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Overall, the use of inductive techniques of data analysis will assist me in developing a theory about the underlying logic that guides various actors' perceptions of school discipline and their everyday practices. This will alert me to processes that previous literature may not have systematically described. Similar techniques will be used for the second and third proposed projects.

#### *UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION OF "POLICE IN SCHOOLS" PROJECT*

Schools are the primary extra-familial institution for adolescents (Schneider and Coleman 1993). As the central institution that organizes adolescents' peer contexts (Crosnoe, Pivnick and Benner 2017), schools are also places where adolescents' attraction to risky behavior as a way of gaining social status (Steinberg 2008) can become salient. It is especially important that SROs, as agents of the law who are placed in schools to help maintain order, treat adolescents' risk-taking behavior in ways that align with adolescents' heightened need to feel connected, respected, valued, and autonomous (Bryan et al. 2016; Yeager, Dahl and Dweck 2017).

*The applicant concludes this section by returning to the theoretical puzzle motivating the study to emphasize the importance of accounting for developmentally appropriate discipline strategies in schools.*

Previous research highlights the importance of teachers' empathic mindsets regarding student misbehavior and discipline for reducing suspension rates (Okonofua, Paunesku and Walton 2016). This finding, coupled with troubling trends in SRO



behavior towards students (Kupchik 2010), strongly suggests the need for more research on the kinds of mindsets that SRO training and socialization encourage in SROs.

Overall, my study stands to provide the information needed to help SROs respond effectively to students. For instance, my findings could suggest the value of a continual program of SRO professional development that emphasizes the need to differentiate between work that occurs in a patrol unit and in a school, and to provide instruction on how to interact with adolescents in a developmentally appropriate and racially equitable manner.