

Applied Social Psychology Program at Loyola University Chicago
50th Anniversary Celebration, April 20, 2024

John D. Edwards, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus

I want to tell you my version of the origin of our graduate program. Please bear with me as this goes back a long way.

During the 1960s, the United States was in turmoil: the assassinations of national leaders, the Vietnam war and protests against it, the continuation of social problems of poverty, crime, discrimination, health care, education, and others. At the same time, there was a crisis within the field of social psychology proclaimed by those who argued that it was not relevant to these social problems, that it consisted mainly of testing theories in laboratories, while it should be investigating the causes and possible solutions to social problems in the real world.

In the late 1960s, there was a doctoral program in social psychology at Loyola. The faculty were Homer Johnson, Emil Posavac, and Patrick Laughlin. In 1970 Patrick Laughlin left Loyola, and Marilyn Brewer from Northwestern and I from Ohio State were hired. Marilyn departed after one year. That left Homer, Emil, and I as the social area faculty, and there were about four grad students. For a while, it was business as usual, basic theory testing research in classrooms with college students. However, we realized that our program was small and did not have a particular focus.

We needed to grow and to have a unique identity. Concerned by the turmoil in society, the crisis of relevance in our field, and the concentration of social problems in Chicago, we decided to focus on applications of social psychology in the real world. We obtained permission to hire someone to be the leader of this new program.

Who would be a good person to lead our program into unknown territory? We were impressed by the 1971 book, "Beyond the

Laboratory,” edited by Leonard Bickman and Thomas Henchy which contained articles about research in real world settings. We invited Len for an interview, liked him and what he said, and offered him the job of establishing an applied social psychology program. He accepted the job, and the program was created.

Creating a new graduate program required crafting a statement of goals, designing the curriculum and requirements, and developing new courses. This was a great challenge, but we were motivated by a vision of a practical science in the spirit of Kurt Lewin. For me, the central element of this science is our theories, as theories define our unique perspective that we bring to conducting applied research whatever the problem area. With that perspective, our students would be prepared for a wide variety of career opportunities.

In the 1970s, careers in social psychology were generally limited to academic positions. We wanted to expand opportunities by preparing students for either academic or non-academic careers. Academic jobs normally require a Ph.D., but we believed that non-academic jobs might be attainable with either a doctoral or terminal master’s degree. So, we created programs for both.

Our efforts in creating the programs were rewarded by the number and quality of students who came to Loyola because of a desire to work toward reducing the problems of society by becoming practical scientists. Since 1974 more than 125 doctoral degrees and more than 210 master’s degrees have been earned by our students.

The preeminence of our program is well recognized. In their 2017 textbook, “Defining the Field of Applied Social Psychology,” Schneider, et al. wrote, “... applied social psychology surfaced during the 1970s as a clearly identifiable field. There were several notable benchmarks (including) the founding of the first doctoral program in applied social psychology at Loyola University of Chicago in 1974.”

Since then, other benchmarks of an identifiable profession have been established such as numerous textbooks about applied social psychology, the development of graduate programs at other universities, and the emergence of publications such as the *Journal of Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, and the *Applied Social Psychology Annual* that Len started at Loyola in 1980 and that continued in the 1990s as a series of volumes, *Social Psychological Applications to Social Issues*, edited by the Loyola faculty with the assistance of our program's students.

Another aspect of professionalization is having a professional identity. If you are a lawyer, or a medical doctor, everyone knows what those professions are. But our students often reported difficulty explaining to potential employers, and their family and friends, just what is an applied social psychologist. I have always been concerned that our students attain that professional identity while in our program and retain it after they graduated and went off to their diverse careers whether in non-academic or academic settings.

A good way of gaining and maintaining one's professional identity is to join and participate in relevant organizations. I once tried to form an organizational home for applied social psychologists, but realized that one already exists, The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. Some of our students have become members and contributors to SPSSI and other psychological organizations, and I encourage all to do the same.

The fact that we are gathered here to celebrate our Golden Anniversary proves that our program has come far since the beginning in 1974. To again quote from Schneider, et al. "... a lot has happened (since the 1970s) that has reinforced the initial promise of Lewin's legacy of integrating theory, research, and practice." To those three elements, we added social policy, thus creating the four interconnected elements of our program's logo.

Another indicator of how far our program has come since 1974 is its size. Today there are nine faculty members associated with the program and about twenty-five graduate students. The early goal of growing our small program has been achieved and there is still room for more.

Before closing, I want to make some salutations. First, a huge thank you to Scott Tindale for making this event possible. I suggested the idea to him many months ago and he has done everything to make it happen. Although Scott was not at Loyola at the beginning of the program, he has been its director most of the time since. Without Scott, I doubt that the program would have survived and thrived for fifty years. Scott is retiring at the end of this year and I consider tonight's event as also a celebration of his extraordinary career as a researcher, leader, and mentor.

Finally, I must say that what we are celebrating this evening is not the program itself but its graduates and current students whose work manifests the aspirations that I and other faculty held for you.

With that, I will conclude by saying that I am happy we are together here to affirm our identity as applied social psychologists. Let us savor this special evening, and then onward to our 100th anniversary.