

Researchers analyze juvenile delinquency, employment link

March 31 2015, by Regina Broscius



Eric Connolly introduced Penn State Abington senior Marianna McBride to the interdisciplinary field of biosocial criminology, which considers biological and environmental influences. Credit: Regina Broscius

Marianna McBride said her "lightbulb moment" came last fall. The biosocial criminology course riveted her, and the Penn State Abington senior immediately knew this was the area she wanted to specialize in

when she begins her graduate studies next year.

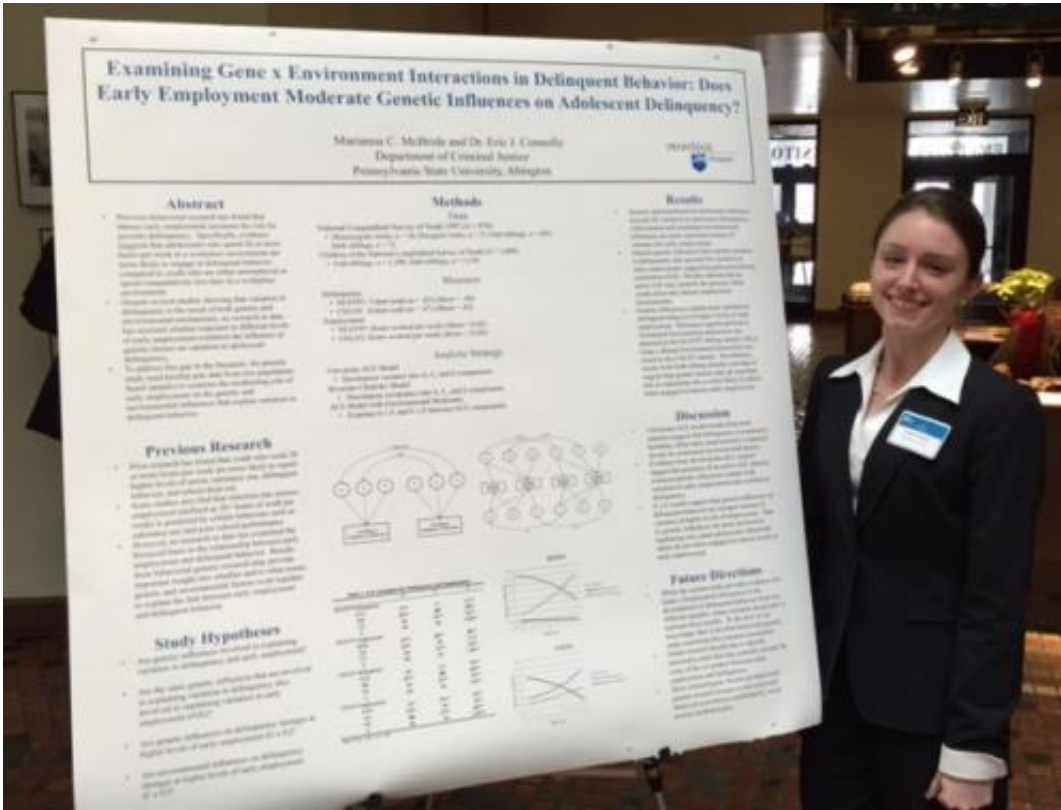
Coincidentally, Eric Connolly, assistant professor of criminal justice, noticed Marianna's insightful questions during class "made it clear she had a burning fire" for research.

And so another dynamic student-faculty research team was born at Abington. The team is so accomplished and engaged that the project McBride spearheaded on early employment and adolescent delinquency was selected for the Undergraduate Research at the Capitol conference in Harrisburg.

McBride presented her findings to state legislators and other key decision makers in the Capitol Rotunda. She and Connolly were joined by students and faculty from more than 100 colleges and universities throughout the state. Connolly mentored McBride's research through the Abington College Undergraduate Research Activities program, popularly known as ACURA.

For Connolly, who taught McBride in his first semester at Abington, it was his initial experience working with an undergraduate, and he was impressed McBride's curiosity and work ethic.

"Marianna was prepared and interested and wanted to contribute to understanding more about the link between early employment and delinquency and anything tied to biosocial criminology," he said.



Marianna McBride presenting her research to legislators and decision makers in Harrisburg.

McBride's project developed from earlier research that found adolescents who work 20 or more hours per week are more likely to wind up in legal trouble. Realizing that previous studies didn't account for biosocial (biological and environmental) factors, she jumped into analyzing data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"Why do these juveniles select into jobs where they work more than 20 hours a week?" McBride said. "We wanted to look into the influence of genetics."

With less than two weeks until she presents the research on campus at

the ACURA fair, McBride is in the process of selecting a school to pursue a doctorate in criminology. Her top choice is Florida State University, Connolly's alma mater.

"I want to benefit this field, and I wanted a mentor who is interested in the exact same things," she said of her experience working with Connolly. "And he just completed the Ph.D process that I will be going through so he has become my resource."

Learn more about ACURA, the undergraduate research program at Abington: abington.psu.edu/academics/undergraduate-research

The abstract of McBride's research:

"Examining Gene x Environment Interactions in Delinquent Behavior: Does Early Employment Moderate Genetic Risk for Adolescent Delinquency?"

Previous behavioral research has found that intense early employment increases the risk for juvenile delinquency. Specifically, contemporary evidence suggests that adolescents who spend 20 or more hours per week in a workplace environment are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior compared to youth who are unemployed. Despite several studies showing that variation in delinquency is the result of both genetic and environmental mechanisms, no research to date has assessed whether exposure to different levels of early employment condition the influence of genetic effects on adolescent delinquency.

To address this gap in the literature, the present study uses kinship pair data from two population-based samples to examine the moderating role of early employment on genetic and environmental influences that explain variation in [delinquent behavior](#) during adolescence. Results indicate that genetic and nonshared environmental factors are stronger

sources of variance at higher levels of early employment. The implications of these Gene x Early Employment findings for future research are discussed.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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