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## AP-LS Student Committee

### Career Corner

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*The Career Corner is intended to highlight individuals who work at the intersection of law and psychology, where they come from, how they got there, and how their experiences influence their research, teaching, and/or practice. This edition of the Career Corner profiles Dr. Samantha Slaughter, PsyD. Dr. Slaughter is the Director of Clinical Services at Fairfax Behavioral Health. Prior to joining Fairfax, she ran a group practice for 8 years and was the Director of Professional Affairs for the Washington State Psychological Association. Her specialties include psychological assessment and clinical supervision.*

**AP-LS Student Committee:** How did you become interested in the field of psychology and law?

**Dr. Slaughter:** I think that when you spend any amount of time working with clients and private practice, especially populations with trauma, you realize very quickly that there are many intersections with legal issues. This might be something as relatively straightforward as filling out someone's FMLA paperwork correctly, or writing someone a note because you are a provider and that is a legal right, up to the other extreme of conducting a (forensic) evaluation assessment. Regardless, you're going to touch forensic and legal issues regularly. Hence, it became clear to me that I needed to understand those pieces as well as I could.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** Can you briefly describe your career trajectory, starting with your time as an undergraduate?

**Dr. Slaughter:** When I decided to apply to grad school, I didn't care where I went. I was moving from Texas – because there were no PsyD programs in Texas. I knew if I was going to move out of the state, I wanted to pick someplace where I wanted to live because I was going to be there for four to six years of school. I assumed I would stay there, so I chose cities I would enjoy and ended up coming to Seattle. Very quickly, I started following specific mentors, which led me to my first practical site. There, I helped create the practicum at Monroe Correctional Facility, WA.

Once I was in the prison system, I wanted stay because I thought it would be a great experience, and I always equate presence in inpatient hospitals as the most challenging places you can work; if you can survive there, you can pretty much work anywhere. I had done residential work before my doctoral program, and so prison felt very similar in the sense that all my teenage residential kids had just grown up and were still struggling with the same issues. I worked for 2.5 years in the Monroe Facility and then in the women's state prison, Purdy. I started my private practice after graduation, where my mentor was Laura Brown. I ended up doing forensics work, including risk/violence, fitness for duty for workplaces, and mental health evaluations for the Public Defenders Association. I was also the director of professional affairs for the State Psychological Associations, which expanded my skill set so that I was not only doing clinical work in my practice but also legislative, policy, lobbying, and higher-level systemic work. Then, I moved to my current position as Director of Social

Services here at Fairfax Inpatient Hospital, where I am in a forensic setting as we have so many folks who are here involuntarily.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** What drew you to become a clinician?

**Dr. Slaughter:** I will give you the same answer I gave in my first orientation for graduate school. I remember it well because it was different from everybody else's. They went around the room, and everybody was supposed to say why are you here and why you applied. Most people said they wanted to help. I was the 7th or 8th person and did not want to say the same thing as everyone else, so I decided to be truthful. I said I like being a fly on the wall and observing people (one of my favorite activities is watching people), and what better way to do this and make a living than being a psychologist?

**AP-LS Student Committee:** From your perspective, what are the biggest challenges when working within psychology and the law?

**Dr. Slaughter:** There are a couple of challenges. For one, people need clarification on the role; you need to know what role you play, who the client is. We talk about this in school, but it's not until you get out in the real world and understand the true implications that people get confused and might lack an understanding of the boundaries between different elements within the role. The other challenge is when people confuse the difference between ethics and law. Many people will say "it's unethical," and I'm like, no, it's illegal. You're talking about two different things, and it's important to understand the difference between them and where one stops and starts. You must be very clear and understand the boundaries and the differentiation.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** What's your approach toward the supervision of graduate students?

**Dr. Slaughter:** I come from a long line of feminist psychotherapist supervisors, so I follow in their tradition, meaning that I think it's essential to work developmentally with your supervisees and meet them where they are. I collaborate with them to figure out their goals, what they want to achieve, and identify how I can help them do that. I am always looking for ways to empower and encourage my supervisees, and I am keeping in mind the things that are going on outside of the supervision dynamic that may be impacting the relationship, whether that is something organizationally or politically in the broader world context. At my core, I'm an existential psychotherapist, and so I think about those pieces as well, helping supervisees understand their responsibility and know their limits. I aim to empower and honor what the supervisee brings to the table instead of assuming that they are a blank slate and are supposed to absorb everything. We all have our own experiences and skills, and I want to know what those are so we can work on them.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** Do you have any advice, tips, or guidance for graduate students?

**Dr. Slaughter:** Find someone who is doing it now and follow them. In terms of forensics, figure out what the word forensics means to you. Do you want to dabble in many different areas like I did, or do you want to be very focused and have a niche practice? Find somebody through practical experiences or connections with other supervisors or people at school, join

the APA division or state association, shadow them, and have them be your mentor. Have them teach you what they know.