

2/11/20 Psi Chi General Body Meeting

Dr. J: Supervise doctoral and practicum students, licensed mental health. Worked with athletes with eating disorders, but when that didn't work out I became interested into the psychological aspects.

Nicole Silverio: Licensed mental health therapist with master's in counseling. We provide health education to low-income families, my experiences are in providing services to individuals. I've also worked in private practice in Lake Nona.

Dr. Saunders: Associate lecturer at UCF and licensed therapist. Started career at federal bureau of prisons. Private practice in Clermont and lot of experience in Forensics

Matt: At the undergraduate level, did you expect to be where you are during this time in your field?

Nicole: Psychology undergraduate and knew I wanted to be a therapist, but I realized I didn't just want to see back-to-back clients. Right now I oversee people who work with clients in a managerial position.

Mrs. J: Nope! I had just done Psychology 101 and had to go back to community college - after getting involved with a few labs I applied for my Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology

Dr. Saunders: Good eating and exercise are some of the most underutilized treatments for depression, etc. I'm very much the same, I did a lot of partying (theater minor). Forrest Gump'd my way into graduate school, I was signed up for a school in sailing - when I got into college in Springfield MA and went for mental health counseling. My absolute best academic experience was in my Master's, and I almost made straight A's as opposed to my undergrad. I went to Illinois for my Doctorate but the hardest part was right after graduating with my Ph.D. After getting the degree you're not quite licensed and it's a difficult time as you can't get a job or residency. I was at the APA convention in Toronto and I talked to the federal bureau of prisons, where I was recruited for 7 years. I never intended to get my doctorate in my undergrad or go into forensics, but I've enjoyed my career.

Student: What did you do in Coleman with forensic psychology?

Dr. Saunders: I was mostly a clinical/counseling psychologist, and I was in charge with the sex offenders and chronically mentally ill. I put together groups and treatments for different populations, cognitive behavioral therapy and dialectical behavior therapy, forensics assessments (competency for in-jail crimes). That's how I got my feet wet on forensics.

Student: What part of the prison did you like?

Dr. Saunders: I liked working with the inmates, you're working with people at their rock bottom. A lot of them were really ready to work on themselves. I worked to help create a re-entry program that became a national model for prisons. The war on drugs created a drastic influx of inmates being released, and Florida is currently undergoing the same thing. I helped advocate for computers in prisons, such as using a mouse and keyboard - Nixon was around some of the last times these guys were out?

Jackie: Has there been a time where you're stuck between multiple ideas and want to get out of the bubble?

Nicole: Yes, finding the right population to work with that felt really fulfilling and it's still ongoing. I am going on to a doctoral program this year, and I find that identifying my values and making decisions off them is the right direction for me to take. So I prioritize which things are right for me and get me closer to those values.

Dr. Saunders: I always have a lot of interests in things, and all my training in my graduate school years was with children and adolescents. After work with my prison, I worked with adolescents 1-2 days a week. Some of my forensics clients are also adolescents and need therapy - and I find that work very rewarding. To me that's a great change from working with criminals and prisoners. The one thing about the mental health field, is that it's so broad, depending on your population and focus. My colleague who is a pediatric neuropsychologist just does neuropsych evaluations for 10-15 year olds, and having that niche is really interesting.

Dr. J: When I entered in psychology I had an open mind and wanted to try working with every population, kids, adults, families, and I fell in love with college counseling. In college counseling you see everything, so you will be exposed to everything and still have areas of specialty. At one time I deal with grief, psychosis, students missing their parents, etc.

Student: In your practicum, do you get to choose what you want to do?

Dr. J: For practicum, I did mine in California which was heavily populated - we had to apply to different ones to get selected and there were times I didn't get my first choice. There were places I didn't want to go or populations I didn't want to work with, but I wanted to have the experience with every group. Every experience will serve you at some point.

Nicole: The practicum in UCF's program, you're doing your sessions in a very supervised environment. You have an earpiece in case you need instructions with your client. You get a lot of great feedback! And then you can go into an internship which can help narrow down the population you'll deal with.

Student: I want to consider applying to a clinical program, what would I need to do in my undergrad to get there?

Dr. Saunders: Different programs look at different things, but a Ph.D. in an academic setting, it's going to be highly competitive and study your GRE and keep your GPA's as high as possible. Things like having some research experience at all looks good on your application, volunteer work too. The programs I initially volunteered for I consider my first counseling experiences. I have a Psy.D., and some schools are getting ridiculously expensive. Whether it's a master's in yada yada, it can shape up to be a great career choice.

Nicole: You'll want to go to an accredited program, but master's programs provide a lot in terms of clinical schools. Training for academia you'd get in a Ph.D.

Student: Do you need a Master's to get a Ph.D.?

Nicole: For social work you need your master's first, but for clinical psychology you can go straight from bachelor's to doctorate. Nobody is as bitter as the doctoral school dropout and I've had a few of them in therapy. Careful with that road.

Sam: My main career goal is academia but I want to see clients on the side. Do you have to hire out or meet the right people?

Nicole: For me it was a new world because I'm not a business-type person, but I was paired with someone like that and taxes and employee identification numbers are all a part of starting the business. I haven't been in private practice and academia in the same time.

Dr. Saunders: I wanted to put a floor on my salary, and Clermont is a tiny town and we had nothing. Now it's 60,000 people and my private practice has grown along with it, as well as forensic work with the industrialization and crime, etc. I was fortunate to grow up in a family with entrepreneurs. When you're running a psychology practice there are extra steps like liability, contractors and employees are covered, and it's a lot of stuff to juggle. You have to make payroll and you'd better make sure of that. My grandfather always told me, the business owner is the last to get paid. I think a lot of solo therapists have a singular practice and book their own clients, answer the phones, and they were the best models for individual people. On occasion I see at least a few clients a year but it can be difficult. It's either feast or famine depending on clients coming in, but I like that with private practices I have freedom to choose who I want to take and how many people I want to take.

Nicole: From what professors have told me, a lot of them are teaching and seeing clients on the side.

Student: How did you approach the financial aspect of the Psy.D.?

Dr. Saunders: Back then I had a job on the side (30 years ago), and I was fortunate enough to pay as I went. We were living frugally and I never drove my car around. My wife and I worked on the side and I won a few grants and school things, but back then the Psy.D. was inexpensive. There are some PsyD programs that are attached to state programs, and some of them do grants/work study, and some of them have pretty good research grants like Nova University. It depends on the program you go to.

Dr. J: A lot of my coworkers did there PsyD or went to a Master's, so if you work for the government for a certain number of years you can get your loans erased.

Dr. Saunders: The Indian Health Bureau, VA, military, will erase your loans. One of the most interesting jobs I saw was a psychology position with the forestry service, and I called them up. A lot of the forest rangers live remotely deep within national parks, and there was a hike in suicides over the years. So you hike out to the rangers' homes and do assessments. I had a colleague in the Navy and she was stationed as a lieutenant in the Navy!

Student: What is the hardest part of the journey?

Dr. J: For the PhD there are several, and for me the dissertation was the hardest part of it all. If you are going to pursue a PhD you need to make sure you mesh with this person - I had to change dissertation topics 3 times and almost gave up. Fortunately the last advisor I had was wonderful. I felt that she was there for my growth and available, which made a huge difference. In clinical psych there's oral examinations and internship matches, and you have to travel all over the countries at these interviews. There's also the final licensing exam, but the dissertation was for me.

Nicole: In every part of my journey, I felt it was all intimidating and hard, especially with sitting in front of an interview panel, or sitting with a client with someone in your ear - but going outside your comfort zone lets you grow even more. I recently did PhD applications and the GRE and interviews were super stressful.

Dr. Saunders: One of the most important things is that I was blessed to get connected with professors who shared my values but also shared my goals. When I wanted to undertake my dissertation, this professor shared my goal of finishing it in a year and thankfully I finished my dissertation and graduated. When you're in graduate school, mental illness is present in faculty and you'll occasionally get borderline or narcissist professor. The worst thing is to get stuck with someone who doesn't share your goals, wants to keep you around, or wants to keep power over you. And I wasn't always successful.

Jade: The goal of graduate school is to get out of graduate school! My friend once told me that.

Jackie: How long did it take to finish grad school?

Jade: I took 2 years for master's and 6 year's for PhD due to different criteriia for internships. They wanted to make sure you were gonna get matched, so 6 years total.

Nicole: I took 2 years for my master's and the PhD was designed for 3 years.

Dr. Saunders: 2 years for master's and 6 years for doctorate.

Gabby: What skills do you use to not get emotionally invested in patients?

Jade: Having a good self care plan and leaving things at work. We don't receive emails or communications on the weekend and we set those boundaries. Consultation is huge that I can talk to colleagues and get advice is very helpful.

Nicole: Self-care! Make sure you do everything you can to fulfill your needs and you can only be your best for a client if you're taking care of yourself.

Dr. Saunders: One thing I do for myself is, twice a year, ask myself, am I living my best life? If the answer is no, I rethink and add a hobby, spend less time at work, or more time with the family - you need to have work-life balance!

Student: I'm high-maintenance, how hard is the monetary struggle after grad school?

Dr. Saunders: When I got to the point where I could afford a hot tub and watch the sunset - and I had that and thought - I finally made it! We have our own personal goals and we live below our means and save up to get out of debt and afford a nice life. You absolutely can make money in this field, but a lot of people aren't doing what it takes to have a thriving practice or fulfill their goals. For me it meant being able to take my family on vacation, pay for our house and have a hot tub. There is life after the poverty of graduate school!

Dr. J: One thing is true is that the field of mental health is underpaid, I'm not poor but we are all very underpaid in college mental health. However, I'm not in this field for the money and different settings will have higher pay like hospital and VA work and private practices can make more than college or school counseling. Mental health is not as valued as we'd like.

Nicole: In my experience in counseling, after you graduate you're not licensed so you have to do work in community health but it takes a couple of years to get your license after grad school.

Dr. Saunders: I've had colleagues that write books and have weekend retreats, and the books are \$25 and she makes as much on books and her weekend retreats than her private practice! I've been on NPR, Fox News, etc. and my website lights up with appointments when i do those "infomercials." You jsut have to be creative about you make money!

Student: When you pursue'd your master's degree, were you able to have a job when you had your bachelor's degree?

Nicole: I was able to get a graduate assistantship when I got here so the stipend and health insurance helped out a lot. They're competitive but it helped me a lot, and some people have to work full-time on the side.

Dr. J: Most of my students work full-time and have classes on the side.

Student: It's my last semester and i didn't think I was qualified for any jobs.

Dr. Saunders: Think on your resume and what you're qualified on, because you may not even think about it! Even things that aren't necessarily related can go on your CV! There are all kinds of things you can do that got me in the door. You may get more than you think!

Student: I've had to work full-time the whole way, and I haven't been able to participate.

Nicole: It can seem discouraging to put out resumes and resumes, career services has tons of resources for things related to your needs, but even being a part of an organization can help you transition into work. A lot of people who came in asking to volunteer became case managers, etc.

Dr. J: Show up and meet them! Making an impression is the best way to get into those kinds of positions.

Dr. Saunders: Any baker-act receiving facility, and every county has one in Florida, will be very eager sometimes to hire bachelor's level students.

Gabby: What final motivation would you give to someone who wants to pursue graduate school?

Nicole: Stay connected! Regardless of stress and financial struggles, the mental health field is a beautiful field and you have the position to help someone in a deep and intimate way. Everytime I walk around there are hundreds of people and you grow along with the people you see and can self-actualize alongside the people you see.

Jackie: What's some advice for keeping in touch with faculty I work with after taking a gap year to get a letter of rec?

Dr. Saunders: Get a commitment right now. Mention everything you did with them and ask for a letter of recommendation. Save that email and reply to that email from a year ago when it is time.

Dr. J: Or you could have them write it for you right now!

Dr. Saunders: Write it in the 3rd person! I never say no to letters of recommendation and I always make it a point to write a good one because I was fortunate to have good faculty members. Even someone who comes to my office and sits down and talks with me face to face is better than a student who was in my online class, etc. Don't be afraid to promote yourself! She promoted herself as having a child during college, etc., and it had me crying!