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Sahuarita, Arizona

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Describe the site where you work and how you decided on this type of placement.

I am currently employed at a high school in Sahuarita, Arizona, a town about 20 miles south of Tucson.

My initial goal during graduate school was to pursue a career in academia, as I have always really enjoyed teaching and research. During graduate school, many of my practicum experiences and my internship experience were within community mental health agencies, so I had somewhat limited experience working within a school system until my postdoctoral training, which was completed in both Sahuarita Unified School District and in Pima County Juvenile Court. My experience as a school psychologist that year really illustrated the unique, fulfilling, and diverse roles school psychologists play within their schools and the many opportunities to meaningfully support students, parents, and staff and to enact systems-level change. While the setting in which I work is different than what I had anticipated in graduate school, my role as a school psychologist has allowed me to engage in teaching and research, just as I had always hoped.

Tell us about your experiences in developing interdisciplinary practices.

I am fortunate enough to have had incredibly rich and diverse practicum and internship experiences during graduate school, which allowed me to learn from and work side by side with a variety of individuals from other disciplines. The connections I made with these individuals during graduate school continue to enrich my career to this day.

Since becoming a school psychologist, I have also been blessed with opportunities to collaborate with a number of school personnel, community health and mental health agencies, and religious and government organizations in order to try and coordinate services and increase access to needed supports and resources. My experiences working alongside these individuals over the years have inspired me, taught me, and given me such a great respect for the knowledge each contributes. Working as part of a team is truly one of the things I enjoy most about being a school psychologist.

What led you to supervising practicum students? What is that like as an early career professional?

Teaching and mentoring has always been very important to me. So much so that my bachelor's degree is in elementary education, and I worked as a teacher for 3 years prior to graduate school. Supervising practicum students is truly such a joy! I love the knowledge and enthusiasm they bring. As an early career professional, I can vividly remember the experience of being a practicum student myself, and I seek to use my recollections of this experience to normalize the experiences and emotions practicum students may be experiencing and also to discuss the progression of skills and confidence that practicum students may experience as they complete their training and begin their careers.

What is your area of expertise? How have you developed skills in this area?

My practicum and internship experiences provided me extensive opportunities to provide parenting support and individual and group therapy to children and young adults, and these skills have been helpful throughout my career. More recently, I have sought to deepen my understanding of social-emotional learning principles, programs, program design, and implementation in order to guide districtwide programmatic design of responsive interventions based on students' social-emotional needs. As part of this work, I have sought to design and deliver targeted instruction to teachers and school staff to support their own mental health and wellness, which is partially rooted in both my previous clinical work with parents, as well as previous research I completed on professional impairment.

What specific aspects of NASP membership and involvement have benefited you in your career thus far? Why is membership in NASP important to you?

Being a member of NASP is important to me because the role that NASP plays in bringing awareness to and advocating for the field is crucial to create conditions under which school psychologists are able to deliver the full range of services we are trained to provide, which are so needed by our students, staff, families, and communities. In addition, being a member of NASP helps me to feel part of a larger community of individuals who can understand the joys and challenges of being a school psychologist. Finally, being a part of NASP provides important opportunities for ongoing, targeted, and timely professional development and learning opportunities.