3/28/17

Focus on Forensic Psychology

Dr. Mario Scalora

Announcements

* Psych Department Awards Ceremony/Psi Chi Induction is on Monday, April 10th, at 3:30-5 in the Union Heritage Room

Dr. Mario Scalora’s Journey

* Does both practice and research, which is rare unless you work in a medical setting
* “If you don’t like law, don’t go into forensic psychology” forensic psychology= intersection of psychology and law
* He worked in animal research labs, but stopped because he was allergic to rats
* Attended UNL’s forensic psychology program
  + Note- admission rates are very competitive for graduate programs
* After his 4 years of grad school, he did an internship for a year in Oklahoma
* He first worked with youth, but then switched to the adult side
  + Note-You have to understand you will hear horrifying things in this area, and you will have to learn how to separate your emotions from what needs to be done
* Did post-doc work at University of Massachusetts Medical Center
* He does most of his work on the criminal and risk assessment side of forensic psychology
  + Example-what kind of risk to the community does a person pose when they leave treatment
  + He deals with higher risk and higher liability cases than many of his colleagues
  + His clients most likely do not want and do not value his service
    - He has been assaulted 3 times, and has had 2 colleagues that have been murdered, and has had his life threatened
    - He has limited social media, and is not on his children’s social media to protect them from harm
    - This is what you have to be prepared for if you plan to work in this field
* If you want to be successful, it’s more beneficial to go into the field with a wide range of training
* “I have to approach life like a lawyer is always second guessing me, because they are”

Graduate School

* Things to consider when applying:
  + Forensic psychologists are not profilers. They can, however, help profilers understand the mental health problems related to the situation
  + Most programs are pushing you to learn research and clinical work
  + Read the program’s website to see if you are actually a good fit
  + You aren’t just applying to the program, you are applying for a mentorship
  + Dr. Scalora has turned down many promising individuals just because they do not fit his program well
  + You have to understand the odds are low of getting into graduate programs, and you need to prepare yourself for this
    - Everyone gets good grades
    - Highlight what shows you are a good fit and a good investment

Questions

* Did threats bother you when you started?
  + It always bothers him, but you can’t show fear to clients
* Do you ever talk to witnesses, and is there anything specific you ask them?
  + Yes, sometimes, but usually it’s cops or other people. But if I do, I ask about behaviors and observations.
* What specific area do you work with?
  + I work with a wide array of things, more now with workplace violence and counter terrorism
* How has the field changed since you started working?
  + A lot of stuff is the same, but now you see a lot more social media
  + Also, a lot of people trying to copy-cat or mimic crimes, because they can get a lot of information about these things online
* Do you do much with historical archives?
  + Most of that has to do with profilers, but I will do some archival research
* Do you do just prosecution, or do you also do defense work?
  + I do 50/50; it’s important to be balanced, but who hires you can influence your work
* Is the work you do right now only for Nebraska area?
  + I fly all over the place; also use video-conferencing
  + Some data and conferences are international
* How does working in a hospital compare to a prison?
  + Prisons have been some of the safest places I’ve worked
  + Don’t watch tv to see how prisons and hospitals are, because they aren’t accurate
  + His colleagues that have been murdered were in state hospitals, but these places can still be very safe
  + The environments and rules are very different; hospital is more mentally ill, but there are still some in jail
  + Both are very structured and secure places
* What specifics do you look for when taking in grad students?
  + Good grades, good/decent scores, good letters, good fit, prior research experience, good personal statement-run through professors, it's not just if you write well, it's what you write in it, know why you want to work with him
  + He gets many people asking to meet with him, and he can’t meet with everyone
  + Visiting a place before hand doesn’t necessarily help you, it can actually hurt you (it can be annoying for him) so just do your own research to learn about him
  + Few faculty have time to help you figure out what you want to do
    - Use the faculty that you do know, don’t approach those that you don’t know for advice
* What kind of settings do your students tend to work in?
  + Academia, prisons, state hospitals, medical centers, all over the place
  + \*Good question to ask when researching programs
* Are you ever on call?
  + Yes, I don’t do crime scenes but I may have cops calling me, depending on what you are working with
* Is every case a huge commitment, or do you ever answer just with advice?
  + Sometimes they can be just quick answers, but other times not. Again just depends on the situation
* Are you typically at work, or is it more flexible
  + I can be pretty flexible, but some people don’t manage time well
  + Since I am an academic as well that adds to the load
  + Sometimes things need to be acted on immediately
  + Sometimes I take my work home; but this can be physically AND mentally
* Is your job every challenged by bureaucracies?
  + Always, all big organizations are bureaucracies
  + This is for all employees of big organizations
* How can you tell if you are able to handle this job?
  + There isn’t an easy answer. Look at your life and how you handle situations and what bothers you. Everyone is unique in that regard
  + Can’t be easily offended, have to handle ambiguity, not everything will be black and white