

*The Career Corner is intended to highlight the 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 Career Corner profiles **Holly Miller, PhD**, Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at Sam Houston State University (SHSU). Dr. Miller is also a licensed clinical psychologist and a licensed sex offender treatment provider and does forensic private practice work in Texas.*

Dr. Miller received her PhD in Clinical Psychology from Florida State University and completed her clinical internship at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, TX. One of her primary research areas is the assessment and treatment of individuals who have committed a sexual offense.

Peony Wong, a 3rd-year Clinical Psychology PhD student at SHSU and 2025-2026 Student Committee Diversity Liaison, interviewed Dr. Miller.

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

Dr. Miller: I first started and became interested with psychology. During my time as an undergraduate, I kept participating in various activities that gave me experiences with different populations. For one summer, I did a practicum at an emergency shelter and worked with 1-8 year olds in Minneapolis. I quickly figured out that working with children was not my niche. That helped me to decide that I did not want to work with small children. Though, I did enjoy working with adolescents.

Through these various experiences, I figured out working with people with criminal history was interesting to me. I was really interested in trying to understand what they do and wanted to know how to help them make changes, so they don't do these things again. I also became interested in assessment, because it felt like I was putting puzzle pieces together. So, understanding and learning more about violent behaviors was an intrinsic interest. My first experience in this realm was working with adolescents who were detained, and I found that to be challenging, but very interesting. As I worked in practicum placements, I was able to narrow down the area and type of individuals that I was most interested in working with: adult forensic populations.

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

Dr. Miller: I obtained my Bachelor's in psychology at Bethel University in St. Paul College in Minnesota, and then I completed my Master's as a psychology major and business minor, as I was always interested in business too, at Morehead State University. During my time in undergraduate school, I had more interest in forensic populations and assessment, specifically psychopathy assessment and personality assessment, which made me choose a master's program with that was heavy in assessment. I chose it because there were several practicum opportunities to get experiences with the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). Once I was there, I really enjoyed that work. After I obtained my Master's, I did not go to PhD right away, mainly because I did not get into the school that I wanted to go to. I decided to work for BOP to do some research, get some experience, and re-apply for Florida State. Why Florida State? I wanted to work with Edwin Megargee and Joyce Carbonell. They worked on forensic assessment profiles

of individuals in prison. I was able to work for both of them, and Dr. Carbonell was considered my major professor. Florida State also had a really good program in forensic assessment and working with competency to stand trial (CST) and sanity evaluations, as well as personality and psychopathy. Chris Patrick is also at Florida State, and he is one of the top psychopathy researchers in the nation. For all those reasons, I wanted to go to Florida State for my PhD. So I made it a point to meet them at a conference and tried my best to impress them, so they would hopefully take me into the program, and it worked!

My PhD at Florida State was in clinical psychology with a forensic emphasis. One of my placements in the doctoral program really helped set me up the trajectory for a major research focus area, and that was Chattahoochee State Hospital. At this point in time, there was only one malingering detection test, which was the Structured Interview of Reported Symptoms (SIRS). As the practicum student, I was doing all the assessments and report writing for the people we were trying to restore to competency. Florida has or had a three strikes rule for drug offenses, so after three drug-related offenses, you could get life in prison. So a lot of people were malingering mental illness to not get life in prison, AND a lot of people also had significant mental illness. I administered a lot of SIRS, and the SIRS can be a long, arduous administration, especially when the examinee has a bona fide mental illness. I called up Dick Rogers at the University of North Texas and said that it would be great to develop a short form of the SIRS, and that I wanted to do this for a dissertation. He did not go for the idea, so I decided that I would work on my own malingering screen measure for my dissertation project. I developed the MFAST, or the Miller Forensic Assessment of Symptoms Test.

So now when choosing an internship, I had a lot of forensic experience at this point. I wanted an internship that gave me new forensic experiences and had some general rotations. I chose Baylor College of Medicine here in Houston, TX. Part of the forensic experience was conducting custody evaluations, and some CST and sanity evaluations. I also ended up running a group, or a sexual offender treatment program (SOTP), with a fellow intern with men on probation for a sex offense. I began internship with the same set of stereotypes and myths of people who have committed sexual offenses, so I attempted to remove myself from that internship experience. However, the director said that group work was part of my internship learning, and after conducting the group, I became thankful for that push. The SOTP work became my most challenging and rewarding clinical work. I changed a lot of the common myths and stereotypes around sexual offending, and I came to realize that things are much different from what you think you know about this group. I was helping someone make changes in their lives to reduce the likelihood of hurting someone else, and that is rewarding. After doing a group for a year on internship, I knew that I would go back to SOTP work and forensic work after being tenured. And I have been doing private practice work since I was tenured in 2006.

AP-LS Student Committee: If you had the chance, would you change anything about your experience?

Dr. Miller: I would not change any step of my education process. The only thing I (maybe) would go back and change, is working at a university that was closer to home (Minnesota).

AP-LS Student Committee: Have you faced any major obstacles in your career? If so, what were they and how did you overcome them?

Dr. Miller: During my graduate school, I did not get much push to publish research. Thus, I had to overcome my lower number of published manuscripts when applying for academic jobs. Initially, I was planning on going into forensic practice with an agency or private practice, but I realized that I wanted to be in academia and become a professor. Also, when I started as an assistant professor in psychology, I had to overcome some difficulties at work. I had some colleagues that were not very supportive or encouraging. I'm not sure if it was because I was a woman or I didn't have enough published works at that point. I had to learn that the academic world was not always going to celebrate you. I ended up moving colleges.

AP-LS Student Committee: What are the biggest challenges in your research and clinical work?

Dr. Miller: I work in the Criminal Justice department, and because of this department, I/we have a lot of resources and a lot of great relationships with different agencies. So that has been very positive in terms of doing research. With regard to clinical work, sometimes I have a hard time finding balance. For example, I like the work that I do as a clinician, so I always want to do more of it. However, increasing private practice work can create a difficult balance for self-care, family life, and being a professor.

AP-LS Student Committee: What is the most rewarding part about what you do?

Dr. Miller: I mentioned that I do find it rewarding working with men and women who have sexually offended. In terms of being professor, I get a lot of reward in mentoring graduate students. It's one of my favorite parts of the job. In the clinical work and in the classroom, I enjoy engaging in educational opportunities to eradicate myths and stereotypes about race or sexual offense. I am asked to talk about risk assessment and treatment of individuals with sexual offenses, and that is satisfying because I can help encourage open minds in policy and in practice. For example, providing training for judges and community corrections officers, enables me to provide empirical knowledge about risk assessment, true risk situations, and what works in effective treatment.

AP-LS Student Committee: What advice do you have for undergraduate or graduate students?

Dr. Miller: If someone is still attempting to figure out exactly where they want to work in the field, try to gain as much experience in working with different populations. Try to get some practicum experience or talk to someone who is working in that field to obtain an accurate understanding of their daily work. Learn everything you can about that particular group so you can make an informed decision for your career. As an undergraduate, I obtained experiences with all ages and groups; that is how I determined that I was most interested in working in assessment and with people who had committed criminal offenses.