

# GOOD COUNSEL

Burlington Industries Excellence Professor L. DiAnne Borders is our 2019 Senior Research Excellence Award winner. She is a leading figure in the field of counselor education, both nationally and internationally – in fact, with over 100 peer-reviewed publications and 20 books and chapters, Dr. Borders is Google Scholar’s second most-cited researcher in the area of counseling and supervision. She is also a Fellow of the American Counseling Association, the editor-in-chief of *The Clinical Supervisor*, and a recipient of Lifetime Achievement, Supervision, and Legacy awards from the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision. In 2018, the Southern division of that association launched the L. DiAnne Borders Clinical Supervision Award in recognition of her body of work, which is lauded not just for its breadth but also for its methodological rigor and complexity.

## COACH’S COACH

“The ultimate goal of all my research is at the end of the supervisor-counselor-client chain – more effective services for clients. But to get there, you have to start at the top, with clinical supervision.

“Good basketball players are not necessarily good coaches. The same idea holds true in the mental health world: Good therapists are not necessarily good supervisors. Clinical supervision is an entirely different skill set. And that is what I study: the mindset, observation skills, and decision making of really effective clinical supervisors. How they break down what they know about being effective clinicians, and then help student counselors understand and apply that knowledge with their own clients – in the thousands of nuanced scenarios a counseling session can take.

“I spend a lot of time analyzing supervision session recordings. What do expert supervisors prioritize that novice supervisors miss? What interventions help novice supervisors steadily move toward expertise? And how is novices’ development influenced by their identities, personal histories, professional experiences – even their thoughts about being in an evaluator, or gatekeeper, role.”

## FACING WHAT YOU FEAR

“Interpersonal process recall, or IPR, is a great tool for supervisors. There’s a lot of data going through our brain, and, in the moment, we choose things to pay attention to – often things we’re most comfortable with and are willing, or able, to ‘hear.’ So a supervisor will say to the counselor: ‘Let’s go back to that session as if you were there. What were you thinking at the time? Was there something you wanted to say that you didn’t? What stopped you?’

“It helps determine where counselors are uncomfortable or unsure. For example, trauma is very scary to new counselors. Expert supervisors know they must help novices handle their own reactions to a client’s story before they can develop a plan for working with the client. Cultural issues are also often scary, especially for White counselors, and we’ve found that IPR is a useful method for growing multicultural awareness. I’m blessed to be able to keep learning, constantly, from colleagues and doctoral students. Right now, I’m working on a new trauma-informed supervision framework.”

## THE ART OF TEACHING

“Everybody talks about clinical supervision as the signature pedagogy of the mental health professions. But we don’t talk enough about the basics of how people learn. Over the years of practicing and teaching supervision, I became aware of how much I was drawing from my teacher education background in this work. So few people in the mental health professions have a pedagogical background. So they draw on what they know – their clinical background. But people who do supervision well recognize it’s inherently an educational process.

“I’ve seen supervisors focus entirely on the client: ‘Here’s what I would do’ or ‘Do more of this.’ Just telling – that’s not the best approach to teaching, right? There’s a real art to corrective feedback. Supervisors need strong clinical skills and strong pedagogical knowledge. The question is: How do I help my doctoral student supervisors give their counselors what they need, so they in turn are able to go back and give their clients what they need? The complexity of all that continues to fascinate me.”

## GROWING THE FIELD

“When I did my dissertation on supervision in counseling, I read everything that had been written. I can’t keep up anymore. Awareness of the importance of supervision is just exploding, not only across disciplines but globally. Early on, I was involved in helping clinical supervision be recognized as a specialty within my field. We didn’t have standards for practice or an ethical code for clinical supervision, so I worked on task forces within the profession to help create those. And now? I provide clinical supervision. I teach it. I study it. It’s a dream job.

“Our counseling program is consistently ranked in the top five in the nation. At the doctoral level, we graduate people who are truly prepared to be professors, skilled in teaching, supervision, and research. Because of our doctoral program, our master’s students receive much more supervision, so they likewise are well prepared. Our faculty model is to be involved in making a difference. That’s part of our message to our students as well: How do you want to give back to the profession and have an impact?”

by Mike Harris and Sangeetha Shivaji • learn more [go.uncg.edu/borders](http://go.uncg.edu/borders)

