

Diana Prescott, Ph.D.

1. The mission of AP-LS/Division 41 is to “enhance well-being, justice, and human rights through the science and practice of psychology in legal contexts.” In what ways, if any, do your plans for your presidency intersect with this mission?

A review of our website (dianaprescott.com) reveals a specific intention to prioritize social justice as a pillar of the campaign. Serving on the APA Board of Directors during the Independent Review, I really came to understand in a very personal way the importance of prioritizing human rights in all we do as psychologists and as an organization. I would maintain that focus as President-Elect of APA. I was trained by Dr. Jim Cole at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, a forensic psychologist who developed a model of dispositional assessment. He believed as a psychologist, our role was to try to help people with their “context of problematic involvement.” I have maintained this lens in my clinical work and would do so in the presidency. Serving on the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors, I supported APA looking at the ways it has historically contributed to racism. I agree that justice needs to be added to equity, diversity, and inclusion in all that we do, including in our science and practice of psychology in legal contexts. Our campaign advocates for broadening APA as an organization, so that our large umbrella includes all APA psychologists with the variety of opinions that are present in a large organization like ours, the largest psychological organization in the world. In this way, my presidency will enhance well-being, justice, and human rights.

2. Vastly disproportionate numbers of those in the criminal legal system have substance use and mental health issues, and minoritized identities. How do you think APA should address those needs within forensic settings generally?

This is a great and very important question. If we are going to “enhance well-being, justice and human rights...in legal contexts,” we need to take a hard look at how people with substance use, mental health issues, and minoritized identities are treated in the court system. I believe APA should pay close attention to state, provincial, and territorial news to step in and provide a voice, when these issues play out at the local level. I support the ways the courts across the country have tried to move “offenders” with substance abuse problems to “drug courts,” streamlining a way for people to get treated instead of punished. As psychologists, we need to be both present as forensic psychologists who evaluate persons charged with crimes but also in positions to consult with corrections to help move people from incarceration to more appropriate mental health and substance abuse intervention. Targeting those with minoritized identities with legal violations is personally infuriating to me. It would be important for our DEI staff at APA to combine forces with Legal and Regulatory and Division 41 to form strategies for identifying and addressing racism as it occurs in the legal system. As APA President, I would be seeking the help of Division 41 with these critically important issues in forensic settings to strategize about stepping in with a systematic response, when these issues occur.

3. APA has recently recommitted itself to giving psychology away through its amicus brief program. How might you help nurture this recommitment and what issues before the courts do you believe APA should consider addressing? Apart from submitting amici briefs to

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appellate courts, what would you like to see APA undertake to foster the adoption of practices in the legal system which benefit from psychological science?

I believe from my clinical training the forensic psychologist plays a critically important role in educating the court system about psychological science and practice. I am very supportive of the amicus brief program and have served as a supporter of this program in my service on the APA Board of Directors. This program has historically been a way APA has helped inform, educate, and influence psychologically healthy jurisdiction. Current issues that especially concern me in the court around the country right now include reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ marriage, rights, and freedom, and immigration and the needs of migrants and refugees. APA has been involved in these issues in the past, and I would strongly encourage our continued involvement in them in the future. As we know, there are current threats to both issues existing throughout the state and federal court system. I wonder if there is a way for APA to support creating a system for involving forensic psychologists as a requirement for adjudicating these kinds of cases. I would look to Division 41 to enlighten me as to how this could potentially be standardized and required.