# DCS Fall 2023 Newsletter

# Division Chair's Corner

**Shelley Johnson**
**DCS Chair**

We hope you enjoy the Fall 2023 newsletter! It is jam-packed with information about important events and interesting research notes. We are looking forward to our upcoming conference in Philadelphia. We have several sponsored events that include an off-site social on Wednesday evening, our business/breakfast meeting on Thursday morning, and several featured panels. More details about these events can be found on pages 4 - 6 of the newsletter.

We are also excited to announce that we are partnering this year with ASU's Center for Correctional Solutions {Ink}arcerated program to shine a light on their innovative work with the Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation, and Re-entry. The

# AltAc Corner

We are excited to bring a couple of new sections to the AltAc Corner, including "Exploring the Space," "Ask an AltAc Expert," as well as providing a resource spotlight, and our AltAc Series Stats!

## EXPLORING THE SPACE: FOR-PROFIT RESEARCH & CONSULTING

**Defining the Space:** Professionals working at for-profit research or consulting firms provide specialized expertise to assist clients (e.g., businesses, non-profits, government) in making informed decisions and solving complex problems. These firms generate revenue by offering evidence-based insights, strategic advice, and innovative solutions tailored to meet their clients' needs. Consultants conduct research and program evaluations, offer recommendations, and contribute to industries' growth and development.

### QUICK FACTS

- **Pace of Work:** Fast-paced
- **Compensation:** $$$ - $$$$$
- **Job Security:** Soft money; contracts; grants
- **Work Schedule:** Hours vary, not strictly 9-5; Remote/hybrid work possible; Travel possible
- **Examples from Our Rockstar Career Series:** Zach Drake, Senior Research Scientist, Thomson Reuters Special Services

## ASK AN ALTAC EXPERT: Dr. Shawn M. Flower

Shawn M. Flower, Ph.D., is the principal researcher of Choice Research Associates, providing criminal justice research services employing rigorous methodologies that focus on issues of prisoner re-entry, female offenders, community corrections, and program evaluation. Dr. Flower provides research services and policy and strategic planning support to state, local, and national criminal justice agencies. She consulted on the National Institute of Corrections Women Offender Initiative in Washington DC, the Montgomery County Maryland Dept. of Corrections & Rehabilitation in Rockville, and the Salisbury City Police Department. In 2013, funded by the Baltimore City Mayor's office, Dr. Flower completed a comprehensive data-driven review of the Baltimore City jail to provide reentry strategies based on evidence-based practices and offender length of stay and risk level, including stakeholder considerations. As a research associate with the Justice Research and Statistics Association, Dr. Flower was the principal investigator of the "Seeking Alignment between Evidence-based Practices and Jail-based Reentry Services" in the District of Columbia, a joint project with The Moss Group. Dr. Flower is also a senior research associate with the University of Maryland Institute for Governmental Service and Research, where she has directed several projects related to violent crime reduction. She has worked as a program evaluator in the field of criminal justice research since 2002 and has a solid foundation working with program administrators, direct service providers, and funding agencies. Dr. Flower earned her Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, College Park.



**Dr. Shawn M. Flower**

**What We Do:**
Choice Research Associates (CRA) provides quality criminal justice research and evaluation services, while being cost-effective and highly responsive to client needs, including:
- Program Evaluation
- Primary Research
- Secondary Data Analysis
- Policy and Planning Support
- Database Support

**Examples of Clients:**
- Community Mediation Maryland Prisoner Re-Entry Program (Program Evaluation)
- Network for Victim Recovery of Washington, DC (Evaluation Consultant)
- House of Ruth of Washington, DC (Data and Systems Administration Support)

**What was the focus of your dissertation?** I collected original data from the Montgomery County Pre-Release Center (PRC) and studied whether the assessment tool they developed was predictive of an applicant's performance while engaged in the program, over and above demographic and criminal history factors alone.

**How did you get into consulting?** While in graduate school, I realized that I was not headed toward academia and wanted to explore where else my skills and interests might fit. So, I began networking with folks in the field. At an Urban Institute conference on jail reentry, I met someone from the Abell Foundation, a philanthropic organization based in Baltimore City, MD. I asked for an informational interview and was invited to their office where I met the President of the Foundation. After a 30-minute discussion about the criminal justice system, I was offered the opportunity to study jury trial outcomes in Baltimore City vs. nearby jurisdictions. I didn't want to provide my social security number, so I created my own consulting company! At that same conference, I connected with representatives from the National Institute of Corrections, which also resulted in several research projects. Over the years, through word of mouth and networking, I've continued to find interesting work and have expanded my company to include several full and part-time associates.

**What do you love about your work? What's one challenge of the work you do?** There are positives and negatives to any career choice, but for the most part I do love my work. First, I love working with community-based organizations to help them tell their story more effectively through data and evaluation. I went into this field to help people, so when I'm able to help sustain a program by providing evidence of its effectiveness, it is truly a wonderful feeling. Second, sometimes when I'm deep into the cleaning and analysis of a data set, I feel a sense of wonder and joy that I am able to navigate and tease out the answers presented by data puzzles. I feel a level of satisfaction when I have a data set that is clean, well-labeled, and ready to be utilized to help others. Third, I love the variety of my work. I get to work with all different types of programs, addressing a myriad of problems. There really is never a dull moment.

One of the challenges of my work can be the lack of stable funding. The reality is that one must be ready to live on an income that is not always predictable. I've been fortunate to have several long-term clients, and there have been times when I've had to turn down opportunities because we had too much on our plate, but there are also times when it's leaner. Being flexible, creative, and open to opportunities is the key.

**This industry space is a good fit for you if...**
You like to work independently, can manage multiple tasks, and are not risk-averse. You need to enjoy taking a project from beginning to end. In addition, you need to be able to work with clients to address their concerns in a way that maintains your integrity while helping them to understand scientific rigor. In this line of work, you will spend quite a bit of time educating clients on the value of data, the evaluation process, and why it all matters.

**Advice for graduate students interested in this work:**
Network as much as you can! Ask for informational interviews, then ask who else you should talk to, and follow up on the suggestions. Be prepared to do volunteer work to get your foot in the door. Find an issue you care about and bring your valuable skills to the table – in most cases, you will be welcomed with open arms.

**Wisdom for faculty considering this work:**
One of the most important elements of consulting work is building partnerships with others. You can start building these relationships while you're still in academia to help set you up for future consulting work. Once you get to know folks out in the field, you can propose grants and projects as the research partner and work from the beginning of an idea, to writing the grant (but only write the research section – remember, you are a partner, not the only one working to get this done), to adjusting to realities (what you proposed and what happens on the ground don't always align), to completing the project and working with your partner to let others know about your efforts. Then do it all over again! Above all, stay teachable. I've learned so much from the organizations I've worked with over the years.

**To Contact Dr. Flower, please visit:** https://choiceresearchassoc.com/

## ALTAC SERIES STATS

**We currently have 255 registered members from across 73 universities:**
- 25% PhD students who are in the early stages of their program
- 21% ABD doctoral students who are on the job market
- 15% PhD students working on their dissertation proposal
- 15% ABD doctoral students in the early stages of their dissertation
- 15% Working on Master's Degree/have terminal Master's Degree
- 5% PhDs (faculty or not) who are currently looking for new careers or positions
- 1% undergraduates who are on the job market

**We've hosted 26 events to date:**
- 18 meet & greets with "Rockstar Researchers" from federal, state, and local government, non-profits, and for-profit companies
- 4 roundtable discussions on applying for the NIJ Graduate Fellowship, unpacking different industry spaces, big data science careers, and navigating the alt-ac job market
- 4 skill-building workshops, such as transforming a CV into a resume, applying for post-doc positions, transforming a dissertation into a book, and creating a LinkedIn presence