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June 2019 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Amanda K. Gatewood, M.P.H., Ph.D.

2018-2019 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

AUTHOR

Amanda K. Gatewood, M.P.H., Ph.D.

In September 2018, I began my year as a SRCD Policy Fellow at the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Department of Health in Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF). OPRE is an independent research and evaluation office that studies ACF programs and the families that use these programs. OPRE is concerned with supporting and improving services for families so that families can achieve the best possible outcomes. To that end, OPRE seeks to inform policy decisions by helping programs understand their implementation and impact on their communities.

I was delighted to be selected as a SRCD Policy Fellow to serve the Division of Child and Family Development within OPRE, which primarily focuses on child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, and child abuse and neglect. At OPRE, we develop, manage, and serve as technical assistance for research and evaluation projects. Much of OPRE's work is accomplished by creating and awarding competitive grants and contracts throughout a robust national network of contractors. Internally, we also meet with senior program officials

to take a bird's eye view of the most current available evidence to determine what gaps exist. Then, in consultation with program partners and leadership, we work to fill the most crucial gaps in our understanding.

I knew that the chance offered by SRCD to meaningfully influence research priorities at the federal level was a rare and precious professional opportunity. My background was as a public health epidemiologist and implementation researcher with experience in both state agency and academic settings. I anticipated a steep – but rewarding – learning curve about federal procurement processes and priorities at OPRE. As a result, though, I am much more knowledgeable about the iterative exchange between research, policy, and practice at the federal level.

In the past year at OPRE, I have been able to:

- review and contribute to reports about child care access and subsidy use;
- lead analyses and dissemination efforts for briefs and reports in service of Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start;
- serve as an expert for consultations about the new Early Head Start Baby FACES survey materials and selection of observational coding measures;
- assist with in-house analyses and dissemination for the Office of Head Start about strategies to combat opioid use;
- participate in the design and administration of federal grants and contracts; and
- contribute to the direction of research projects within the Offices of Child Care and Head Start.

SRCD Policy Fellows also traditionally take the lead in the solicitation, review, and award of a dissertation award grant for doctoral students. I have learned a tremendous amount about federal processes through reviewing progress reports and processing grants continuations and funding extension requests for current grantees. I assisted in planning for the future of the award by preparing the Federal Opportunity Announcement for publication, preparing for the panel review process, and helping OPRE disburse funding to the new grantees. It has been a distinct pleasure to support the development of early career scholars who are committed to serving families and children.

SRCD's support of my professional development goals has played a large role in determining my next steps. As a fellow, I was able to attend conferences and to access interdisciplinary resources far beyond my

previous vantage. While attending a conference (through SRCD's support and OPRE's encouragement), I was able to meet with some extraordinary thinkers and visionaries at the Population Health Institute (PHI) at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. I will be leaving the SRCD Policy Fellowship soon to take a position at PHI, but I know that I will carry the lessons I have learned as a fellow with me across my career. Some of these important lessons include:

- to be gracious and welcoming of unforeseen opportunities;
- to build personal and professional relationships across disciplines, projects, and roles;
- to serve widely as a resource and source of professional expertise;
- to develop and sustain a regular writing practice; and
- to seek to mentor and be mentored by inspirational people in – and beyond – my field.

I am incredibly grateful for the many ways in which I have been influenced by SRCD and OPRE in this past year. Like many others, my life has been indelibly altered by the mentorship of outgoing SRCD Director for Policy, Marty Zaslow. Through regular professional development meetings and monthly gatherings of researchers, scholars, and SRCD Policy Fellows, Marty has served as a model of thoughtful, gentle kindness and mentor for each of us. It is with bittersweet joy that I transition out of the fellowship at the same time as Marty. However, it is with great happiness I wish Dr. Kelly Fisher the best as she steps into her role at SRCD and with the new SRCD Policy Fellows.

As I reflect on my time at OPRE as a SRCD Policy Fellow, I am humbled by how much I have learned and by how much more I have yet to learn. I remain grateful for the many opportunities provided by SRCD and OPRE to learn, to teach, and to serve this past year. Best wishes for many years of SRCD Policy Fellows to come!

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