

Meet & Greet with Senior Vice President Dr. Sarah Desmarais

Wednesday, February 9, 2022; 3:00pm EST/12:00pm PST

Dr. Sarah Desmarais Biography

Sarah L. Desmarais, Ph.D. has been a Senior Vice President at Policy Research Associates, Inc. (PRA) since 2021. She is responsible for developing and providing oversight on research projects, as well as administrative and management duties in support of a variety of other projects. Dr. Desmarais received her Master's and PhD in Forensic Psychology and Law from Simon Fraser University in 2005 and 2008, respectively. She completed a postdoctoral fellowship in the School of Population and Public Health at the University of British Columbia in 2010. Prior to joining PRA, Dr. Desmarais was a tenured Professor of Psychology and University Faculty Scholar at North Carolina State University. There she held leadership positions including serving as Director of the Center for Family and Community Engagement and Coordinator of the Applied Social and Community Psychology Graduate Program. She also was a member of the NC State University Research Leadership Academy and Academy of Outstanding Faculty Engaged in Extension. Before that, she was an Assistant Professor at the University of South Florida with joint appointments in the Department of Community and Family Health and the Department of Mental Health Law & Policy from 2010 to 2012.

Dr. Desmarais works on issues at the intersection of public health, community safety, and social justice. Her current research is focused on evidence-based practices for reducing detention rates, especially among people with behavioral health needs. She provides technical assistance, evaluation services, and consultation to behavioral health, criminal justice, and intelligence agencies throughout the United States and abroad on problems and solutions for implementation, policy, and practice. Dr. Desmarais has authored more than 130 peer-reviewed publications in journals including the *American Journal of Public Health*, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, and *Law and Human Behavior*. She has served as principal investigator and co-investigator on more than \$10 million in grants and contracts from foundations and government agencies including the National Institutes of Health, the National Institute of Justice, and the National Science Foundation. Her work has been featured in national media outlets such as the *Washington Post* and *HBO's Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*.

Dr. Sarah Desmarais Information

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Questions asked during Meet & Greet with Dr. Sarah Desmarais

Background

1. Can you describe your background and the impetus behind your path.
2. We know your doctoral degree and post-doctoral work are in two different subject matter areas. And, you take a heavy interdisciplinary lens to your work. A lot of policy evaluation, behavioral health, social science, and justice system(s) work is very multidisciplinary. Why did you take a interdisciplinary pathway? And, what benefits do you see from this type of education?

3. You have held a few faculty positions within the University setting, both housed within a degree-granting department and a portion of the university that was non-degree granting. Can you walk us through the differences of these types of departments? And, how does research work in both spaces? Is it similar? Different?
4. You've mentioned before that you disagree with the myth of "having to pick a subject matter lane" and instead you jumped around a bit to find positions that would help you do the work you were passionate about. Can you talk to us through how you've built a thread through all the work you do even when it appears different?
5. Prestige is something we talk a lot about, too. Any words of wisdom around the concept of "prestige" as it relates to finding a position that is the best fit for the individual?

Current Work Space

6. Another myth we hear a lot about AltAc spaces is the myth you cannot do your own research or that you do not have much agency over your research agenda. Can you reflect on if you feel like that's true and what your experience has been moving from university to alt ac spaces.
7. Can you give us an example of some of the important projects that you and your colleagues at PRA do? Do you focus mostly on contract work and policy evaluation, or training, technical assistance? How are the projects at PRA initiated?
8. We know that you are Senior Vice President of PRA, but I believe there are research-intensive positions within the organization that are not at the executive level. Can you share a bit about what the day-to-day of a researcher at PRA looks like?
9. What about dissemination. How does this occur? What do deliverables look like?
10. As somebody who hires, what kind of advice would you have for students who are interested in entering this sort of workspace? What skills are you particularly interested in for a candidate?