How did you come to work with this population?
Initially, I never wanted to work with substance issues but I realized how common it is to have comorbid concerns. I took an internship working with IOP and really leaned into better understanding addiction. There was some fear there at first, but once I was exposed to it during practicum, I was very interested. I have been in college counseling ever since. I see a lot of behavioral addiction that includes social media and gaming which I think is still really relevant and use some of the same methods of treatment as for SUDs.

What do you think is the biggest misconception about working with substance use disorder clients?
People think it is something that can be cookie-cuttered out and separated from a person. There is also a misconception about who can have an addiction. People have an image in their mind about who might suffer from an SUD or behavioral addiction. I would argue that it looks like anyone, especially with behavioral addictions. We can all have habitual issues. There is no one image of what someone dealing with this issue looks like.

Can you identify personal and/or professional attributes important for success in this field?
Patience is really helpful and an understanding that pace is not as important as the process. Let people have their own timeline and focus more on the process of supporting them through that rather than on how quickly things are changing. Also, reflecting on something you have had to change in your life to promote empathy for clients. Change is hard, so I think we all can fall into unhealthy patterns. I think the pandemic is good example of that. It is a stressful process no matter what you are trying to change.

How has this work contributed your growth as a clinician?
Really understanding clients through the stage of change and conceptualizing clients with any issues they present in counseling. It helps me understand and meet them where they are at and address what they need in counseling by understanding their willingness and readiness to change.

What do you enjoy most about your work with this population?
Knowing how people can hit rock bottom and seeing them enter counseling when they are there. It is beautiful to see the change process take place. Even if there are relapses, it is beautiful to see the power of change taking place in someone’s life.