

External Reviewer's Report
Criminology and Criminal Justice Studies
Sonoma State University

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Introduction

The Criminology and Criminal Justice Studies (CCJS) program at Sonoma state is academically strong, with a well-qualified and dedicated faculty. It offers a curriculum unique in the CSU, yet well-suited for the discipline. The program is also strong in terms of enrollment. The decision to declare impaction appears to have strengthened the program and allowed the department to deal effectively with limited resources. In this report I will highlight some of the program's strengths as well as describing some of its challenges and potential areas for improvement.

Faculty

Members of the faculty of the CCJS demonstrate an impressive degree of scholarly achievement as well as a good range of research interests. As is common for faculty within this discipline, they have published their work in journals in a variety of fields, including law, criminology, criminal justice, and sociology. They are also actively providing service to the university and community. Perhaps the one shortcoming of the tenure-track faculty members is that few of them have experience as criminal justice practitioners. However, such experience isn't vital; also, most of the adjunct faculty are practitioners, which provides some balance in this regard.

Students report that their professors are approachable and understanding. Students said that adjunct faculty varied somewhat as to quality, with some of them tending to get off-track regarding course content. But the tenure-track professors, according to the students, are organized, knowledgeable, and interesting to learn from.

As far as I could tell in a brief visit, department cohesion and collegiality among faculty members is high. Junior faculty said that their senior colleagues and chair are very supportive; junior faculty feel as if the department has their backs.

The members of the faculty also said that they feel the RTP process is clear and fair, and that the department's scholarship requirements strike the right balance between specificity and flexibility.

The biggest challenge the department faces respecting faculty is obtaining permission for new (or, in some cases, replacement) faculty lines, and attracting and retaining strong candidates when positions open. Concerning the latter issue, the problem lies not with the department itself, but rather with the extremely high cost of living in the area, especially compared to new hires' salaries. Unless candidates are relocating from another expensive location or have a strong personal tie to the region, affordability presents a serious barrier. This is a problem facing nearly every campus in the state, however, and solutions aren't clear.

Although the department has been able to hire some new tenure track faculty in recent years, they have also had some retirements and departures. The total number of tenure-track faculty remains small compared to the number of majors. This has several consequences: the department must rely more heavily on part-time faculty; fewer electives can be offered; and tenure track faculty have increased burdens for service and advising.

Suggestions:

- 1. Create a centralized “home” in the department.** This would be a place where shared items could be stored, but also a place where members of the faculty would have the opportunity to socialize more easily. Socializing like this is important for support of new faculty and can help forge new directions in curriculum and research.
- 2. Provide better guidance for new faculty on navigating the system.** This could include assistance with the RTP process, advice on participation in university affairs, and so on. One way to achieve this might be to assign each new hire a more senior mentor.
- 3. Provide better support and encouragement for participation in brown bags and other campus community events.**
- 4. Actively pursue additional tenure-track positions.**

Curriculum

Criminal justice and criminology departments tend to have wide variation in curricular requirements, even within the CSU. In part, this reflects the nature of the discipline, which is relatively new and has been influenced by many other fields. The variation is also a strength; rather than simply duplicating a curriculum from campus to campus, programs can offer unique curricula to meet student needs and interests.

The CCJS program at Sonoma State, however, stands out even among this diversity. Virtually all other programs require certain lower division classes—almost always Introduction to Criminal Justice and Criminal Law, but sometimes other courses as well. These courses are typically articulated with the community colleges. Sonoma State, however, requires no lower division classes in the major aside from CCJS 201 Criminal Justice and Policy, which is not articulated.

The other distinction of the CCJS program is that all of the courses are 4 units. In most other programs, most if not all of the classes are 3 units. Because the total number of required units in the major at Sonoma State is similar to programs elsewhere, a consequence is that Sonoma's curriculum entails less breadth but greater depth.

CCJS faculty have expressed a universal desire to improve student writing—a sentiment shared by nearly everyone in the discipline. It's an especially important goal because CJ agencies

repeatedly tout solid writing skills as one of the most important factors they look for in job candidates. To achieve the goal of improving writing, CCJS has recently made CCJS 370 Seminar in Research Methods a Writing Intensive Course. This is an excellent idea, and one that coincides with what some other programs do, but it's also somewhat problematic because a great many students wait until their senior year to take this course. Ideally, writing should be addressed much earlier in their academic career.

CCJS has been discussing the possibility of expanding its offerings in research methods, perhaps by offering a second methodology course. Obviously, knowing more about methods is valuable to students. However, the department should consider how such a change would fit in with the curriculum as a whole. Would the class be required or an elective? If it's an elective, how will students be encouraged to take it, since it's generally not a popular topic? Making it attractive can be a challenge. If it's required, will it replace a current required course; if so, which one? How will resources be allocated to teach it? What prerequisites, if any, will be involved? When and how often will the class be scheduled? Is it the most important use of limited resources or would a different class be more valuable?

In general, Sonoma State's courses focus on theory, policy, and the general issues of social justice, rather than on specific areas of practice. This is a legitimate curricular choice. To some extent, it is also balanced by the requirement that all students participate in an internship.

Both students and faculty members praised the internship program. Although students did have some complaints as to the number of hours of work required, those requirements are consistent with what other programs require and what WASC accreditation standards call for.

Suggestions:

- 1. Consider a new course that's writing intensive and that serves as a prerequisite for other courses.** This will ensure that the students take the course earlier. The course might also introduce students to basic research methodology and/or basic concepts of criminal law.
- 2. Continue to explore additional ways to support writing within the curriculum.**
- 3. Consider a required course in criminal law.** The department offers an elective course on this topic but not all students can or will take it. The students I met with did express a desire to learn more on this subject.
- 4. Explore ways to offer more electives.** Both students and faculty members expressed a desire for more electives, but current resource limitations tend to preclude this.
- 5. Consider ways to allow students to complete more than one internship placement.** Students expressed a desire to explore more than one placement. This could be done by splitting the current hours between two placements or allowing students to complete a second internship as an elective. Either option would, however, require more resources for the faculty internship coordinator.
- 6. Obtain more resources to assist the internship coordinator.** Currently, Dr. Jackson does an exemplary job, but at considerable sacrifice. In the future, he and his successors may not be willing or able to carry such a burden. And the burden is becoming heavier, especially as risk management requirements become more complicated. One possible way to handle this would be to hire a student assistant who could help with the considerable paperwork that's involved.

Students

In 2012, in response to increasing enrollments and dwindling resources, CCJS declared impaction. In 2014, the required GPA for admission was raised to 3.0. Consequently, total enrollments decreased from 456 majors to 300. Thus, while the program remains numerically robust, its classes are smaller and its students better prepared. Persistence and time-to-graduation rates have improved after impaction and are consistent with the School and University rates.

Institutional data reveal that impaction hasn't adversely affected student diversity. In Fall 2017, a majority (54%) of CCJS majors self-identified as underrepresented minorities. This is a higher proportion than the School of Social Sciences as a whole.

Students report that they are able to access the CCJS classes they need to graduate (which is not always the case with GE classes). They say that they receive good individual attention from their CCJS professors, and over all they are highly satisfied with the quality of the program.

I heard very little about students collaborating with faculty on research, but I don't know if this accurately reflects the situation. If so, CCJS might consider exploring more ways of engaging students in research.

With respect to students, the one area that seems most in need of improvement is advising. Students report that they often received inaccurate or incomplete information at orientation, a problem perhaps compounded by the fact that students can opt to complete their orientation online rather than on campus. Moreover, while CCJS assigns faculty advisors to students, students are not required to seek advising. And because of the nature of the program, students often don't receive advising from CCJS faculty until they become upperclassmen. Furthermore, the degree progress and unit degree audit software are often inaccurate (something I've experienced on my own campus as well).

Finally, students expressed a desire to receive more guidance on career planning and what to do after graduation. This may be especially important in this discipline, since decisions made early in the academic career—e.g., debt accumulation, drug experimentation, careless use of social media—can later disqualify students from most jobs.

Suggestions:

- 1. Explore ways to improve student advising, especially for freshmen and sophomores.** My own department has mandatory advising for every student every semester, but this entails an enormous time cost to faculty members and staff.
- 2. Also explore ways to improve student career planning.** One way to do this would be to offer a lecture series on the topic, perhaps with guest speakers from various agencies. My department has a 1-unit required lower division course that covers career planning, academic advising, and various other topics such as avoiding plagiarism. Faculty members report that students could use more help with time management and stress management; these topics could be integrated as well.

Prelaw Program

CCJS houses the campus prelaw program, with Dr. Williams serving as its advisor. While prelaw programs aren't always placed in CJ or Criminology departments, such departments do serve as a natural base for them. The only problem, then, is that neither Dr. Williams nor the department receive any resources to support the prelaw program.

With appropriate resources, the program could do a great deal, such as offer increased mentoring and writing development to students who want to go to law school. Other options would be moot court, guest speakers, and opportunities for job-shadowing or service learning in legal settings.

Suggestion:

1. **Provide resources to the prelaw program.**

MACJ Program

In the last program review and external review report, there was some discussion about CCJS looking into developing a Masters program. Thus far, CCJS has declined to pursue this route, which makes sense in light of limited resources. If the department chooses to consider this in the future, I have a few words of advice.

First, consider a needs assessment first. People might say they like the idea of an MACJ program, but in reality they may decide that other programs, such as MPA, meet their needs. Second, do keep in mind that an MA program is much more expensive to run than an undergraduate program and requires considerable faculty resources. I don't think CCJS would be able to sustain one without several new tenure-track lines. Third, if such a program were to be created, CCJS would have to think carefully about the program's goals. For instance, will it be aimed primarily at practitioners who want to move into management or at students who intend a career in academia (probably after going elsewhere to earn a doctorate)?

Assessment

CCJS has identified several Program Learning Outcomes that reflect WASC core competencies and that are appropriate for the discipline. The department has done an excellent job mapping out how these PLOs are addressed within the core curriculum. It appears as if the classes more than adequately cover the PLOs. For instance, critical thinking and analysis skills are addressed in every class, and written and oral communication skills in all but one. Furthermore, every class fosters an appreciation of ethics—a key objective for professionals in this field. PLOs are thoughtfully integrated into each class by means of related SLOs, and these are articulated in course syllabi and assignments.

The primary method by which CCJS has evaluated progress on PLOs is via a student exit survey. This survey asks detailed and appropriate questions, and CCJS has carefully looked at the results. The limitation of this survey is the very small sample size—in Fall 2017, 13 seniors completed the survey. It's possible that the small sample size is an artifact of administering the survey online; while an online survey makes data collection and analysis much easier, these instruments generally have low response rates (a pattern also reflected, incidentally, in the online teaching evaluations CCJS administers). It's nearly impossible to draw strong conclusions with such a small n.

Other assessment data is collected via a review of student internship documents. This review is apparently informal and qualitative in nature.

These efforts show that CCJS has put considerable thought into goals and assessment.

Suggestions:

1. **Expand assessment efforts.** Some potential options include a pretest/posttest of students, a more formalized review of student work, and surveys or interviews with agencies that employ students or graduates. The department might also explore ways to increase the number of seniors who participate in the exit survey. None of these methods is perfect, but a combination of them will give a more complete picture.
2. **Increase resources for assessment.** Careful, meaningful assessment takes considerable time and effort. To foster such a task, the department might consider formally appointing an assessment coordinator, and the School might reimburse the coordinator with course release time or a stipend.

Other Suggestions

1. **Improve communication with CCJS graduates.** The department currently has limited interaction with its graduates. With support from the university, CCJS might find ways to reach out more directly. Benefits of this could include new methods of program assessment, increased information for student career planning, and acquisition of ideas for future curriculum planning.
2. **Consider creating an Advisory Board.** Several years ago, my department created an Advisory Board—an idea we stole shamelessly from another program. Board members are heads of local, state, and federal criminal justice agencies within our service region. We meet once a year for 90 minutes, and generally a dozen or more board members attend. This is a relatively inexpensive and low-effort way of improving ties with the community. We get ideas from them that can help us improve our program. The board has also proven an excellent way of helping foster cooperative research projects with our faculty, our students, and the agencies.
3. **Consider additional General Education courses.** The criminal justice system impacts everyone, and CCJS courses can prove a valuable addition to the general education curriculum. The department might consider whether one or two current courses would make GE offerings, or perhaps a new course or two could be created. Of course, the feasibility of this option is contingent on the CCJS having sufficient faculty resources not just to meet the department's needs, but to offer additional classes as well.
4. **Increase support to The Forum, the CCJS student club.**
5. **Increase support for faculty travel.** While travel for conferences and research is essential, especially for newer members of the faculty, current support is limited and somewhat unpredictable.
6. **Increase other support for faculty research.** Faculty members report that course releases would be more helpful than small grants.
7. **The university ought to provide training and protections for active shooter situations.** Unfortunately, active shooters on campus are a real risk, and it doesn't appear as if the university has taken precautions in this regard.
8. **Consider strategic summer course offerings.** In many departments, summer offerings tend to be influenced primarily by who's willing and able to teach. CCJS

might consider if summer offerings could help with potential bottlenecks or provide ways for students to obtain a wider range of electives.

- 9. Engage in strategic planning.** While CCJS has found creative ways to deal with enrollment and resource pressures and to address specific curricular needs, it doesn't appear as if a more holistic, long-term approach has been made. This may be because the chronic lack of resources during and after the recession made such planning feel futile, or perhaps the department is simply satisfied—at least mostly—with the status quo. But especially with new faculty members on board, a broader process might be in order.

Conclusion

As is evident from many of my suggestions, the most pressing need for CCJS right now is additional resources. While these resources should come in a variety of forms—e.g., increased travel and research funding and increased assessment funding—the most important need is for additional tenure-track faculty. This would improve the balance of TT-to-adjuncts, allow for better student advising, and permit CCJS to offer more courses, including more electives. More tenure-track faculty would also help the department to offer small class sizes, which better enable student writing development.

Despite limited resources, the CCJS program is strong overall, with dedicated faculty offering a high-quality and appropriate curriculum. Relationships within and without the department are positive. Enrollments, although reduced to more manageable levels due to impaction, remain robust. Faculty members are engaged with students, the university, the community, and the discipline as a whole. Recent curricular changes have been responsive to need. The department has made thoughtful efforts at assessment. I hope that the department can be supported in its continuing efforts to improve.