

Report on Sabbatical Project: Community-Oriented Policing in Sonoma County

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During my Spring 2025 sabbatical, I advanced my ongoing research partnership with Sonoma County's Independent Office of Law Enforcement Review and Outreach (IOLERO). The project is designed to examine how community-oriented policing is defined, practiced, and experienced in Sonoma County, with particular attention to whether the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office (SCSO) and community members share similar understandings of community-oriented policing and whether current practices align with community expectations. This work builds on my earlier research in social psychology, identity, racial profiling, and program evaluation, while also expanding opportunities for Sonoma State students to engage in applied, policy-relevant research.

The sabbatical period was a critical phase in the project, as it marked the transition from data collection to data analysis and dissemination. A countywide community survey was conducted, drawing from earlier focus groups with both community members and SCSO personnel. Although outreach was carried out in both English and Spanish, response gaps persisted, particularly among Spanish-speaking and undocumented residents. Even so, the final dataset offered substantial insight into community perceptions and provided a valuable foundation for analysis. During this period, I also completed the data cleaning process, which involved removing incomplete or duplicate responses and verifying residency through reported zip codes.

With this data in place, I prepared a Preliminary Report on Community-Oriented Policing in Sonoma County in July 2025. The report summarized key findings from the survey and addressed central research questions about definitions of community-oriented policing, perceptions of trust-building, communication methods, and fairness in deputy practices. Supplemental analyses considered variation by ethnicity, language, and region, though with caution given underrepresentation in certain groups.

The findings to date suggest that community-oriented policing is broadly valued across the county, with seventy percent of survey respondents rating it as very or extremely important. At the same time, residents reported that trust-building efforts by deputies were inconsistent and often perceived as symbolic rather than substantive. Observed engagement behaviors such as calm communication, active listening, and respectful interactions were reported, but relatively few respondents had experienced all of these behaviors together, pointing to uneven application. Communication gaps were also evident: many residents reported relying on neighbors or social media rather than contacting SCSO directly, and non-English speakers in particular were more

likely to report no direct contact at all. Perceptions of fairness, responsiveness, and respectful communication varied by race, language, and region, with White and English-speaking respondents more likely to evaluate deputies positively, and non-English speakers and some regional groups reporting lower trust and more frequent involuntary contact.

Throughout my sabbatical, I shared preliminary findings with IOLERO and the Community Advisory Council, incorporating their feedback and fostering dialogue around the results. I also presented aspects of the research at disciplinary conferences, building visibility for Sonoma State's role in community-engaged research. I am now preparing to submit articles for peer-reviewed publication and to share the findings more broadly with both professional and community audiences.

Looking ahead, I will continue advanced statistical analyses, including work on identity standard comparisons between watchman-style and community-oriented policing approaches. I will also begin developing curriculum integration strategies that allow Sonoma State students to work directly with the dataset, offering them hands-on experience in research with direct application to criminal justice practice and community well-being. Additionally, I plan to support IOLERO and SCSO in applying these findings to inform future policy, training, and outreach.

Overall, my sabbatical provided the necessary time and focus to move the project into a phase of meaningful analysis and dissemination. The work deepens Sonoma State's partnership with IOLERO, contributes to important community conversations about policing and public safety, and creates new opportunities for our students to engage with applied research that has both academic and social significance.