

ASU West
Annual Degree Program Summary
Student Outcomes Assessment and Evaluation

Program Name: Criminal Justice and Criminology

Academic Year: 2004- 2005

I. Institutional and Program Context for the Annual Report

This report summarizes the various efforts related to student assessment and evaluation in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology. The focus of this report is the assessment process in place for both the undergraduate and the graduate programs.

Mission - Undergraduate Program

To ensure that students are provided with the appropriate skills required to fulfill the needs of criminal justice agencies, the Criminal Justice & Criminology program provides students with an interdisciplinary perspective to the study of criminal justice. Upon completion of the program, students should have an understanding of the policies and practices of such agencies, theoretical perspectives on criminal activity, and special topics affecting the administration of justice.

Mission - Graduate Program

The Master of Arts in Criminal Justice (MACJ) is designed to provide criminal justice agency professionals advanced training in planning, analysis, research, and evaluation. Upon completion of the program, students will have high-level skills in agency data analysis, policy analysis, program planning, and program evaluation that will enable them to apply scientific criminology to crime prevention and criminal justice practice.

Learning Objectives - Undergraduate Program

Students within the program will be able to:

- 1) Understand the structure, organization, and function of the criminal justice system
- 2) Understand the policy implications of respective theories of crime
- 3) Develop research skills

Learning Objectives - Graduate Program

Students graduating from the program will be able to:

1. Successfully engage in strategic planning process
2. Develop successful crime reduction and prevention strategies
3. Analyze the effectiveness of reduction/prevention strategies using statistical, database, and planning evaluation skills

In order to guarantee that students fulfill the above learning objectives, graduates of the program must be familiar with criminal justice concepts and issues. Moreover, students will have knowledge of the operation and practices of criminal justice agencies. Students will have the necessary skills needed for employment in criminal justice environments. Finally, graduates will be prepared for advanced degrees in law and in crime related fields.

Presentation of Learning Objectives

The learning objectives for the Criminal Justice & Criminology programs are presented to students in various ways. Students are exposed to these objectives upon review of the program's brochure, web pages, and course syllabi. Through these information outlets, students are made aware of the skills graduates from the programs acquire and how such knowledge can be applied within criminal justice agencies. In the development of course curriculum faculty integrate objectives from the program, college, and university into core requirements and electives. The department web page and brochures reflect learning objectives as they relate to the college and university goals and the opportunities awaiting our graduates in the field of criminal justice.

II. Learning Assessment Measures

Undergraduate Program

- Internship Evaluation
- Graduating Senior Surveys and Exit Exam
- Alumni Survey

Graduate Program

- Descriptive Data
- Policy Paper
- Alumni Survey

In order to obtain data for the initial assessment of the undergraduate program, several efforts were pursued. Data gathering on assessment tools began in Spring 1999. Graduating senior surveys and exit exam responses were gathered from students graduating that semester. Data on internship evaluations from Fall 1997 through Spring 1999 were also used. An alumni survey was sent to all graduates of the Administration of Justice program (now criminal justice and criminology) at ASU West, which had its first graduating class in Spring 1993.

Based on the findings from the initial assessment report, assessment tools were enhanced and data collection efforts continued every semester since the completion of the initial report. To measure more accurately the department's learning objectives, the exit exam that was created in-house was changed during Spring 2000 to include questions from both the Research Methods (CRJ 302) and the Statistical Analysis (CRJ 303) courses. In August 2001, the Student Assessment Committee recommended that the Educational Testing Services's Major Field Exam in Criminal Justice be adopted and serve as the exit exam for students in the undergraduate program. The Committee also decided to mail alumni surveys every four years. The inception of the graduate program led to creation of a tracking system for all applicants to the program. Also, an alumni survey for graduate students was mailed to program graduates.

During the 2001 academic year, the Criminal Justice & Criminology Department underwent its Academic Program Review. Assessment data was provided to the program reviewers who reviewed and identified program strengths and weaknesses, along with areas for improvement. Recommendations that specifically apply to student assessment included the development of a capstone course and encouraging students to develop or strengthen Spanish language skills. In light of these recommendations, faculty committees were created to explore the feasibility of implementing these recommendations.

A capstone course was developed and approved by the campus curriculum committee. A departmental committee designed to explore incorporating a Spanish language requirement to the major found that such a requirement would not be feasible at this time given how few Spanish courses are offered at the ASU West campus. The development of such language skills will be

reexamined at some future date, pending the expansion of language course offerings at the West campus.

In order to ensure that the assessment process captures an array of students' skills, the department's library liaison has also collaborated with the student assessment process in the department to develop an information competency component to the assessment process. Discussion on this issue began in Spring 2003 and the first assessment exam was administered in the Spring 2004 semester.

III. Data Analysis/Interpretation

Undergraduate Program

Results from ongoing assessment activities indicate that the Criminal Justice & Criminology Department is meeting the specified goals outlined by the strategic plan. At the undergraduate level, evaluations from supervisors of former interns indicate that students have developed the necessary skills needed for employment in criminal justice environments. Evidence also suggests that students have an understanding of the structure, organization, and function of criminal justice agencies. The information competency assessment indicated strengths among students in identifying overviews and empirical articles on a criminal justice topic, in using appropriate databases, in evaluating the overall quality of an information source. Students were less successful at using legal databases and locating statistical information in a primary source.

Indirect evidence reveals that while students are satisfied with the program, increased student mentoring on employment opportunities would be welcomed. For example, students within the program would like to receive additional information on employment opportunities than is currently being provided. The changes in the internship program and the Faculty Mentoring Program should help to address those concerns. It is too early to know whether these changes have made a difference, but their impact will be monitored and reported in future assessment reports. Descriptive evidence shows that faculty within the program enhance student learning by informally advising students on opportunities regarding independent studies, internships, and, selection of a specific minor. Evidence also indicates that faculty encourage student participation on an array of research projects.

Graduate Program

Students who were in the first few cohorts expressed frustration about not receiving enough guidance on their program of study and the policy analysis paper. Students who enrolled one year after the implementation of the program stated that they received proper assistance. In an effort to respond to some of these problems the program changed its method of advising so that all faculty are responsible for advising a select few students rather than the graduate director having advising responsibilities for all students—as in the past.

All of the respondents stated that the classes were scheduled at convenient times, but it was noted by a few alumni that there were not enough electives offered. Almost all of the students stated that they were satisfied with the course content offered by the program, and all but one of the students stated that the policy paper was a beneficial part of their experience in the program. Most of the students noted that they thought that the program would be helpful for them in their career, that they would be able to apply the knowledge that they learned as part of the program, and that the MACJ program prepared them to engage in evaluation oriented activities.

The most glaring problem noted by the students related to the guidance and assistance that they received for their policy paper. Six of the eight students indicated that they did not receive proper assistance for their policy project. Some of the students stated that they did not receive

enough attention, and that the guidance that they did receive was vague. On the other hand, some students believed that too much advice was given and that the student was not permitted enough ownership in their project. Faculty in the department have held ongoing discussions about the policy project with a focus on trying to ensure quality projects that students can complete in a timely manner and still feel a sense of ownership in the finished product.

IV. Decisions and Outcomes

Student Outcomes Assessment Plan 2004 – 2005

Information from this report will be distributed to faculty within the department. Faculty will continue to encourage students to take part in internships as well as present students with current employment opportunities. As part of its ongoing assessment process, student intern evaluations will continue to be closely reviewed and noteworthy differences highlighted in next year's assessment report. The implementation of the zero credit hour course CRJ 485: Student Assessment will eventually enable *all* students to take part in the assessment process. In order to ensure that the goal of CRJ 485 is met, future assessment reports will report levels of student participation. Assessment data from graduate students will continue to be collected and reported in future assessment reports. Lastly, the department will continue to work with the library liaison to measure students' information literacy skills. In particular, focus will be given to ensuring that students are able to perform the following:

- 1) Students know the most efficient means of identifying and locating empirical research articles and effectively use research-based information to make judgments about an issue or program.
- 2) Students can distinguish between local ordinances, state and federal statutory, regulatory and case law and effectively locate each type of legal information through the free web or library databases.
- 3) Students can locate local, state or federal statistics on a given issue and read and use the data effectively.
- 4) Students can look at a citation and determine whether the source is a book, an article, statutory or case law, a government publication. Also, that students take a reference to information a) found in reports, books, popular or scholarly articles, the news or b) given to them by a colleague or expert and track down the original source.
- 5) Students know how to gain access to information that is not immediately accessible through the library electronic sources.
- 6) Students can look at the results of a web search or an article search in a database and distinguish between the weakest and strongest information related to the topic.

Overall, faculty will address how to ensure that the student assessment process (at the undergraduate and graduate level) is reliable, precise, and is utilizing the best tools to measure student learning.

Evidence of Current Practices - Undergraduate and Graduate Program

The faculty within the Criminal Justice & Criminology Department are enhancing the learning environment by using various practices to enhance student professional development. For example, using undergraduate students in the research process should enhance student learning and professional development. Over the past five academic years, faculty have used

more than 50 students to work on research efforts. Students' tasks ranged from data entry to conducting field interviews with specific populations.

While the technical advising process for students in the program is handled at the college level, students may obtain information from faculty regarding the nature and scope of courses, the academic and professional skills needed for specific occupations, and employment opportunities. Faculty also serve as advisors for members of Alpha Phi Sigma, the Criminal Justice Honor Society and the Justice Club.

The implementation of the Faculty Mentoring Program in Fall 2001 allows department faculty to advise and mentor students on course curriculum and career opportunities. This program serves students' needs based on their curriculum and major field of study but also provides them with information on research opportunities, internships, and future employment options.

Future assessments of the graduate program will provide information on curriculum matters and on the utility of the Applied Policy Analysis Project. Current mechanisms in place to track program inquiries along with future student assessment outcomes will enable the department to measure the program's learning objectives.

V. Ancillary Issues

Alumni Survey - Undergraduate Program

In order to obtain information from former students, all graduates of the undergraduate program from 1993 – 1998 were sent a letter during March 1999 describing an upcoming alumni survey. The committee attempted to contact all 389 graduates from the program, but was able to locate address information for only 359 alumni. One week later, these 359 alumni were sent the survey along with a self-addressed stamped return envelope and a letter encouraging participation. Two weeks later, a postcard reminder was sent to all alumni in order to ensure that the survey was received and to reemphasize the importance of participating.

A total of 113 surveys were returned (32% response rate). Alumni were asked to describe what they gained from their undergraduate experience in the department that was most helpful in their occupation or additional education. Responses include general knowledge of the criminal justice system (21%), law courses (21%), writing/analytical/research skills (17%), faculty (15%), internship opportunities (13%), comments from students not utilizing their degree in the field of criminal justice (13%), and exposure to diversity (9%).

Results from the "Graduating Senior Report Card" (Office of University Evaluation, Fall 2004) indicated that most majors were either satisfied or very satisfied with their overall and academic experiences, the concern expressed by faculty for their performance, the quality of instruction in upper-division courses, but slightly less satisfied with the availability of required courses. The survey responses also indicated that most majors were unlikely to discuss non-course related issues with faculty outside of the classroom.

Alumni Survey - Graduate Program

Since the MACJ program was first implemented, fifteen students have graduated, of which eight students have completed an exit survey. In general, most of the graduates work for a criminal justice agency, one has gone to law school, and another enrolled in a Criminal Justice Ph.D. program at another university.