

Department of Criminal Justice
Weber State University

Program Review Evaluation Team Report
Graduate Program

Program Review Evaluation Team Members:

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INTRODUCTION

The graduate program in the Department of Criminal Justice at Weber State University (WSU) consists of a 36-hour curriculum with a thesis/project or extra coursework option to obtain the Masters of Science degree. At the time of the evaluation team's visit, the department was beginning discussions to re-vamp many facets of the graduate program.

The department operates its master's program with 8 tenured/tenure-track faculty members, three full-time, non-tenure-track faculty, and numerous adjunct faculty members. The department offers graduate level courses at the main Ogden campus and some at WSU's Davis County campus.

The Masters of Science program is currently operating under the direction of Dr. Bruce Bayley. The faculty views Dr. Bayley as someone who is committed to re-envisioning the graduate program and has a strong connection to the professional community in criminal justice. Faculty members and graduate students are quite complimentary of Dr. Bayley's leadership. Faculty members appear quite collegial with one another which will hopefully pave the way for necessary program changes.

As with the undergraduate report, the Program Review Evaluation Team for the Department of Criminal Justice's M.S. program at WSU consisted of Andrew Giacomazzi and Lisa Growette Bostaph (Boise State University), and Sara Dant (Department of History) and Don Davies (Department of Chemistry) from Weber State University.

The views expressed in this report are primarily concerned with the Department of Criminal Justice's graduate program, however many of the issues discussed in this section of the report are intricately tied to the functioning of the undergraduate program and the challenges set forth in the report on that part of the department. Comments included in this portion are the result of a thorough review of the self-study materials and interviews and observations during a site visit on February 15, 2012.

Following the same format as the undergraduate report, this report contains the Program Review Evaluation Team's assessment of (1) program strengths, (2) program challenges, (3) WSU standards, and (4) recommendations for change for the graduate program.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

High Quality and Collegial Faculty. As previously stated, collegiality was a common theme throughout our discussions with department faculty and graduate students. Faculty appear to hold a positive outlook on the upcoming changes to the graduate program and are involved in deciding what actual revisions will be made to the program.

Student Support. The graduate students we met with expressed solid support for the curriculum and faculty who teach within the program. They indicated that faculty members are supportive of their attendance at academic and professional conferences. Graduate students found the program's current structure to be very accessible and were aware of the discussions surrounding upcoming changes. While they expressed some concerns over particular changes being proposed, students were overall supportive of a re-structuring of the program.

Substantial Budget. It appears that the Department of Criminal Justice was kept somewhat in the dark about their budgetary allocation for the M.S. program by past college administrators. Because of this prior practice, the Department of Criminal Justice has been working under the impression that the M.S. program was a self-support model. Since Dean Francis Harrold's hiring and the increase in transparency commented on by faculty, the budget process has become clearer and the department now understand that they have an appropriated annual budget of \$130,000 for the graduate program. This sum is significantly higher than what the Department has been spending in the program (on average \$87,500 annually per the self study) and places the department in an excellent position to make necessary changes to the program. Dean Harrold indicated a willingness to return day-to-day control of the budget back to the Department, once an agreed upon spending plan is submitted.

Supportive College Administration. As previously mentioned, Dean Francis Harrold is supportive of the master's program. He recognizes that as the only criminal justice master's program in the state (and the only graduate program in the college, it is well-positioned to serve a wide base of traditional students and working professionals in this field.

Plan to Improve Admission Standards. One area of targeted change is admission standards for the graduate program. In prior years, the Department has admitted large numbers of graduate students on a semester by semester basis, apparently driven by the mistaken notion that it was a self support program. This practice resulted in the admission of students with low academic standards who were unprepared for graduate work. The GRE requirement appears to have been somewhat of a formality as multiple faculty recited the instance of an admitted student having scored in the bottom one percentile. In addition, the influx of large numbers of graduate students has led to class sizes ranging from 9-27 students. Most graduate programs find the rigorous level of coursework difficult to maintain when class sizes exceed 15 students. Currently, new admissions to the M.S. program have been suspended pending revision of the standards. An admissions committee within the Department has been formed and is

currently reviewing criteria with an eye towards enhancing admission standards and only admitting students once per year in a cohort format (top 15-18 applicants).

Plan to Increase Academic Standards. Planned changes to the program also include the proposed implementation of a qualifying examination after completion of the required courses (12 credits). This examination would serve as a gatekeeper for students continuing on with 21 elective credits and a thesis or 24 credits of elective courses. Those students who fail the qualifying examination would not continue in the graduate program. The qualifying examination would also serve as an outcome assessment for the required core courses (see below).

Plan to Improve Outcome Assessment. As stated in the self study, the Department is aware of the deficiencies in outcome assessment and Dr. Bayley is currently working with WSU's Institutional Assessment Office on a plan to improve outcome assessments within the M.S. program. Per the previous strength, the proposed qualifying examination would serve as one new measure of outcomes for the graduate program.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

What is the Primary Focus of the Department of Criminal Justice and the Masters of Science Program? As discussed in the undergraduate section of this report, the Department of Criminal Justice at WSU offers a wide breadth of degree options with a less than full capacity of faculty, which has resulted in those faculty members being thinly spread. It appears from discussions with tenured faculty that the decision to offer a graduate degree may not have been one that was either fully discussed or supported by the faculty as a whole at the time of implementation. In fact, how the program was originally configured has led to fundamental problems in its current functioning. As previously stated, the undergraduate program is the primary focus of the Department's workload, leaving the graduate program's needs as secondary. In fact, as recently as August 2011, faculty members considered disbanding the M.S. program due to inattentiveness of the department, workload issues, and a wish to pursue more research.

As the Department has worked diligently during the past year to propose changes to the undergraduate curriculum, they, too, are now working on proposed changes at the graduate level. However, there appears to be some disagreement concerning the path for the graduate program. Are they a program catering to working professionals and offering a practical orientation or are they a theoretical program catering to traditional students moving forward with their graduate education? Across graduate programs in criminal justice, some fall in the middle but favor one approach over the other; other programs choose one to the exclusion of the other; and some programs offer multiple tracks to cater to both audiences. WSU does not have the capacity to undertake the final option as it barely has the capacity to offer the program that currently exists. In reviewing the self study, the graduate program seems to be following option one, but new faculty hires have indicated a shift in orientation towards option two and a focus on the theoretical, without the resources to accompany such a shift (reduced course load to account for increased writing). The new graduate director has a more practical vision

which is at odds with a good portion of his new faculty (and current graduate students). Dr. Bayley will be proposing a hybrid M.S. in addition to the existing one. The new program would focus on reaching current law enforcement professionals and POST has agreed to provide credit towards certification for coursework in the proposed program. This program would be 2/3rds online with 2-3 days of intensive coursework on campus. Support for this additional program appears to be lacking among both the faculty and current graduate students who spoke with the evaluation team. Graduate students, in particular, were concerned about the lack of discussion or interaction which has been significantly beneficial to their learning environment and faculty appear to be concerned about the “cop shop” mentality returning to the department. See recommendations below.

High Teaching Loads. Faculty members in the Department of Criminal Justice teach a 4/4 load, and at times, teach 4/5 or 5/4 loads. These higher loads occurred because faculty members were paid to teach one course on overload in the master’s program. More recently, Dr. Lynch (new Department Chair) has allowed faculty members to teach master’s level courses in-load, which are counted at the equivalent of 4 units instead of three. While a 4/4 load is the norm at WSU, it is not conducive to a department with a master’s program where it is recognized that graduate level coursework, student mentoring, and oversight of these is time-intensive. The problems that high teaching loads present were evident in graduate students’ comments during our meeting. While graduate students reported positive aspects about the program and faculty, they spoke of a lack of mentoring (to the extent that they have had to seek it outside of WSU) for students interested in pursuing advanced degrees, difficulty in finding faculty willing to serve on or chair theses, inadequate feedback on writing assignments, and unexplained thesis requirements. In addition, graduate students often anticipate opportunities to assist on research studies, and given the high research interest among recent hires, department faculty hold similar expectations consistent with faculty at comparable master’s programs at other institutions. Unfortunately, the higher teaching load may make that goal difficult to achieve, particularly since there appears to be no college or university push for graduate program growth and hence little support for making appropriate workload adjustments. While the Department is beginning to address changes in the graduate program, they are not necessarily changes to the faculty workload, which is the over-riding issue for the graduate program. The problem of high teaching loads within this department has been consistently deemed a significant issue in previous evaluations (per the self study). See recommendations below.

Scheduling Issues. The former Dean of the College made it a practice to pay faculty to teach in the graduate program as overload. This practice continues and the payment amounts have recently increased to \$4,500/class. Many have opted for the overload, resulting in a 5/4 or 4/5 teaching load, thus exacerbating the effects of a high teaching load (see previous challenge). Faculty members have also offered core courses during the summer enabling them to teach graduate courses off load and for additional money. Unfortunately, according to the graduate students who met with the evaluation team, this had led to the cancellation of core courses during the academic year (when most students enroll in courses), making it difficult for them to complete their degree

according to their original time line. More recently, with Dr. Lynch assuming the duties of department chair, faculty members have been allowed to make graduate courses a part of their 4/4 load (see previous challenge). All in all, these various practices make for a somewhat chaotic system of scheduling courses and do not facilitate degree planning for graduate students. See recommendations below.

Outcomes Assessment. As mentioned in the self study, the current outcome assessment used in the graduate program is inadequate. For example, students are expected to master at least one of the program learning outcomes in each of the required core courses (there are four). However, for MCJ 6150 Diversity Issues in Criminal Justice, according to the curriculum map (provided in the self study), the program learning outcomes will only be *introduced* or *emphasized* for students in this course. Students will not *master* any of the three learning outcomes after course completion which begs the question of why the course is required (as opposed to an elective). Graduate students lamented the lack of a statistics course within the graduate curriculum and, considering the inclusion of analytical skill-building in both the program's mission statement and outcome measures, this does seem to be a glaring omission. In addition, for each core course, there are outcome measures that are only *introduced*. Graduate level courses should be building upon the knowledge gained at the undergraduate level as opposed to merely introducing knowledge. Department faculty, as noted in the strengths' section above, have a plan to improve the assessment process and are using the assistance of WSU's Institutional Assessment Office. See recommendations section below.

STANDARDS

Mission Statement. The department has a well-articulated mission statement for its graduate program.

Curriculum. See comments regarding the department's graduate curriculum throughout this report.

Student Learning Outcomes/Assessment. The department faculty acknowledges that improvements are needed in its outcome assessment. See comments concerning this standard throughout the report.

Academic Advising. The Graduate Director schedules required group advising once per year and individual advising occurs on an "as requested" basis throughout the year. High teaching loads appear to be impacting students' ability to receive mentoring from individual faculty members, according to the graduate students with whom we met. See comments concerning mentoring throughout this report.

Faculty. The full-time tenure/tenure-track faculty with whom we met seem engaged in teaching, research, and service. However, high teaching loads understandably present challenges for faculty to achieve appropriate balances in these core areas. See comments concerning teaching loads throughout this report.

Program Support. The Department of Criminal Justice is well positioned in the College, and enjoys support from Dean Harrold, who is willing to turn over day-to-day control of the graduate program budget to the Department. However, there appears to be a lack of institutional support for adjusting teaching loads that is commiserate with a masters-granting department. See comments regarding this throughout the report.

Relationships with External Communities. Several faculty members continue to forge important community partnerships throughout the greater Ogden area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Scheduling and Staffing. Currently, the graduate program appears to be viewed as an “add-on” to the department. We recommend scheduling courses in an organized, pre-planned fashion. As an example, MCJ 6100 and MCJ 6110 (required courses) may be taught only in fall semesters, along with one or two electives with MCJ 6120 and 6150 always scheduled for spring semesters with additional electives. Consistently following a schedule such as this allows faculty to have advance knowledge of their course load for the next academic year and incorporates the graduate classes into their in-load courses (see budgetary recommendations below). It also facilitates students planning out their entire degree path and eliminates the scheduling of required courses during summer school which is an optional semester for students (and above annual tuition costs). Also, the scheduling of graduate courses with tenured/tenure track faculty prior to adding in undergraduate courses will reduce the use of adjuncts at the graduate level. Finally, we recommend that the department’s administrative assistant, Faye Medd, be compensated for the additional workload she has received since the reduction of staff due to budgetary issues (see budgetary recommendations below).

Outcomes Assessment. As noted in earlier sections of this report, the department’s current assessment process is inadequate. However, one of the department’s strengths is its recognition of this inadequacy. We also noted the current department plan to improve its outcomes assessment process.

Towards this end, the Evaluation Team recommends a review of current program learning outcomes to better capture the Department’s mission and current course work. We agree with Dr. Bayley concerning the use of the qualifying exam as a measure of core course competency/outcomes and would further recommend revisiting the option of one extra course as a culminating activity that is deemed equivalent to the thesis/project option as it does not appear to be an adequate measure of degree competency (see curriculum recommendation).

Major Changes to Graduate Curriculum. As noted earlier, department faculty members are just beginning to discuss potential changes to the graduate program. We recommend that the changes emphasize quality over quantity and cite the proposed hybrid addition to the current graduate program as an example of the opposite. While the concept certainly has merit and there appears to be a desire for it among professionals in the community, support among existing faculty and current graduate students is mixed. With limited faculty time due to higher teaching loads than other

master's granting departments in criminal justice, the pressure to meet the needs of a vast undergraduate program, and faculty who have little time to pursue research interests, yet one more degree program seems ill-advised.

As addressed in the recommendations for outcomes assessment, the Evaluation Team recommends considering the addition of a graduate statistics course. Graduate students indicated a lack of preparedness in this area and a statistics course would support the analytical skills mentioned in both the program's mission statement and learning outcomes. Finally, we recommend a re-visiting of culminating activity options to ensure equivalent demonstration of degree competency. Graduate students expressed dissatisfaction that the current option of taking one extra course (24 elective credits as opposed to 21 elective credits for the thesis option) is deemed comparable to the thesis/project option and the Evaluation Team agrees.

High Teaching Loads. The current teaching load is of significant concern to the current Evaluation Team, as it has been to previous ones (see the self study). The recommendations for the undergraduate program outline a solid justification for a more flexible workload within the Department of Criminal Justice. The Evaluation Team concludes that the M.S. program has suffered the brunt of this problem. The existence of a graduate program within a department creates additional workload issues by virtue of increased writing required from students in master's degree courses and the time-intensive, necessary activities, such as individual mentoring and oversight of theses. In addition, it is well-known that pedagogy benefits from faculty research and this is even of greater importance in a graduate program where students anticipate opportunities to conduct (or assist in conducting) original research. However, the current teaching load is hampering these efforts (including the ability to obtain external funding which could be used to "buyout" courses). In the undergraduate recommendations, we highlighted the need for the department chair and graduate director to continue working with the Dean to provide relief for the faculty and see the significant annual budget for the M.S. program as possibly facilitating this effort (see budgetary recommendations).

Department Focus and M.S. Program Audience. Following on the heels of recommendations in this area for the undergraduate program, we recommend that the department discuss how it sees the graduate program fitting into its overall mission. If the primary focus is the undergraduate programs, then the M.S. program may be too time and resource consuming to be beneficial to the overall future of the department. If the graduate program presents an opportunity for the department to re-envision itself, then who is the primary audience for the M.S. program? Once this is determined, the future structure of the graduate program will become much clearer.

Budgetary Priorities. The Evaluation Team sees the relatively unused annual budget for the M.S. program as an opportunity to rectify current problems and enhance the department as a whole (including graduate students' experiences). We have several recommendations for budgetary priorities. First, if the scheduling recommendations outlined above are undertaken, monies from the graduate program budget could be used to fund adjuncts to cover undergraduate courses for faculty members teaching in

the M.S. program each semester. This would result in a teaching load reduction for tenured/tenure track faculty and but not a reduction in undergraduate course offerings. In addition, adjunct pay is generally less than what tenured/tenure track faculty are paid to teach a course and certainly less than the current \$4,500/class being offered, thus it results in a budgetary savings in the long run. Second, an increase in compensation for Ms. Medd's additional job duties could be included in the graduate program budget, since most of those new duties concern the functioning of that program. Third, the funding of graduate (GA) or teaching assistantships (TA) for graduate students further reduces faculty workload (TAs can assist with grading for undergraduate courses) and increases research productivity (reduce grading allows for increased research time and GAs assist with research studies). Assistantships also enhance graduate program competitiveness, affordability for some, and graduate students' experiences. Fourth, graduate students within the department attend academic and professional conference (and are encouraged to do so by faculty). In fact, members of the Evaluation Team have met a number of WSU graduate students at the regional conferences. However, graduate students we met with during our site visit informed us that they must pay for their travel costs. Generally speaking, conference attendance can be cost prohibitive for many graduate students, yet immensely beneficial to their academic and professional experiences. Using the M.S. program budget to assist graduate students in attending conferences at which they are presenting a paper would further these efforts.

CONCLUSION

Based on information we obtained from the department self study as well as observations and interviews during our site visit, we conclude that the Department of Criminal Justice at Weber State University is a well-led department with congenial faculty members and staff, and happy and content students. The department finds itself in a good position to undertake major initiatives, including its current curricula overhaul and enhancements to its outcomes' assessment.

As indicated above, the department has numerous strengths, but also has major challenges. Most of the current faculty members have inherited program initiatives that were in place either prior to their hiring or at an early stage in their tenure at WSU, including the current master's program and distance programs. As such, the department faculty and staff are doing quite a bit to serve a diverse student body at multiple locations, while also experiencing high student to faculty ratios and high teaching loads. This report, in part, attempts to articulate these issues, while also acknowledging that there are no easy solutions to these challenges. Despite this, it is our hope that the recommendations found in this report serve as a starting point for discussions that might enhance an already well functioning department.