

Department of Criminal Justice
Weber State University

Program Review Evaluation Team Report
Undergraduate Programs

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INTRODUCTION

The undergraduate program in the Department of Criminal Justice at Weber State University (WSU) consists of a criminal justice minor, an associate's degree, and a bachelor's degree with a number of emphasis areas. At the time of this writing, the department is at the beginning stages of re-conceiving the course requirements for each of these undergraduate programs, which will include the elimination of all areas of emphasis except forensic sciences.

The department operates the above undergraduate programs (and 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 a bachelor's of science degree at the main Ogden campus, at WSU's Davis County campus, and a 2+2 program at Salt Lake Community College. In addition, the department offers a bachelor's degree in an "evening" format.

The Department of Criminal Justice at WSU presents as a well-run department under the leadership of Dr. David Lynch. Dr. Lynch is viewed by his faculty colleagues as an open and transparent leader who seeks input from faculty prior to making major departmental decisions. Faculty members and students (both undergraduate and graduate alike) are quite complimentary of the department and the direction the department is headed. Faculty members appear quite collegial with one another, which will facilitate a number of current departmental initiatives currently underway.

This report represents the views of the Program Review Evaluation Team for WSU's Department of Criminal Justice. The Program Review Evaluation Team is comprised of four members: two faculty members from Boise State University's Department of Criminal Justice (Andrew Giacomazzi and Lisa Growette Bostaph), and two faculty members from Weber State University (Sara Dant, Department of History and Don Davies, Department of Chemistry).

The views expressed in this report are primarily concerned with the Department of Criminal Justice's undergraduate programs. A separate report speaks directly to the Department of Criminal Justice's master's program. Finally, our comments below are based on (1) a thorough review of the self-study materials, and (2) interviews and observations during a visit on February 15, 2012.

What follows is the Program Review Evaluation Team's assessment of (1) program strengths, (2) program challenges, (3) WSU standards, and (4) recommendations for change.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

Collegial Faculty and Supportive Students. Throughout our site visit on 2/15/12, a common theme heard among the faculty with whom we met was how collegial the group of full-time faculty members are. Faculty members noted that they work as a team and are more involved in departmental decision-making than they had been in the past with a former department chairperson.

The undergraduate students we met with also had high praise for the Department of Criminal Justice. Students told us that the faculty assist students, are "laid back," and "wonderful." They also told us that faculty members promote student engagement outside of the classroom. Students also appreciate the mix of theory-based, as well as practitioner oriented faculty in the department. Finally, students appeared to be aware of current efforts to overhaul the curriculum, and were supportive of such efforts.

Supportive College Administration. Dean Francis Harrold supports the Department of Criminal Justice. He recognizes that the department is doing quite a bit to support university initiatives, including its distance programs. He is interested in facilitating an evaluation effort to assess challenges with these programs. He is also supportive of the master's program, which will be addressed more fully in the Graduate Assessment Report.

Plan to Improve Outcomes' Assessment. The department has undergone discussions to improve its outcomes' assessment process. These discussions will address the deficiencies they currently have in assessing program outcomes. The current plan includes a capstone assessment course, which is thought to replace senior seminar. The currently conceived course would include a student assessment during the first week, where students passing the course test out, and the remaining students receive additional instruction.

Major Changes to Undergraduate Curriculum. The department is currently undergoing a major overhaul of its undergraduate programs, including the associate, the minor, and the bachelor of science degree programs. The proposed changes significantly update the undergraduate programs, add additional flexibility for students and faculty alike, and eliminate major emphasis areas in the B.S. degree program. In general, the changes emphasize "quality over quantity." In addition, Dr. Brent Horn informed the team that changes also will be proposed for the forensic science emphases, although these changes were not addressed in a briefing paper given to the team.

Forensic Science Emphases. The Department of Criminal Justice offers two forensic science emphases: Forensic Science Laboratory (for students interested in a career in a crime lab) and Forensic Science Investigation (for students interested in a career in crime scene investigation). The emphases are led by a full-time, tenured professor, Dr.

Bent Horn, and a full-time contract lecturer who provides instructional assistance. The emphases are a potential lure for students wishing to bridge social sciences with the hard sciences (although the team was not provided with enrollment data to determine the exact number of students actually enrolled in these emphases). The forensic science emphases are also not like others embedded in other criminal justice programs; rather, the emphases require a variety of courses in criminal justice, a double major in a hard science (for the laboratory emphasis), and numerous other courses in the hard sciences, social sciences, and the arts (for the investigation emphasis). The forensic science emphases are a true bridge between the social sciences and STEM disciplines.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

Bachelor of Science Program in Criminal Justice at Night. Printed materials provided to the review team indicate that the B.S. in Criminal Justice can be attained by taking night classes only. At this time, based on discussion with the department chair, it does not appear that all criminal justice core classes can be scheduled at night. The curriculum overhaul, currently in progress, will add additional flexibility in scheduling, which may allow the full complement of course offerings at night.

Distance Campuses: Davis County and Salt Lake Community College. Despite the fact that distance programs provide important outreach efforts to students, the reality of such programs is that they tend to be underfunded and staffed by non-tenured/tenure-track or adjunct faculty. Such is the case with WSU's 2+2 program in Criminal Justice at Salt Lake Community College, and the B.S. program in Criminal Justice at the Davis County campus. Both programs are currently run by contract employee coordinators, who also teach classes and hire adjuncts for additional classes. Full-time faculty members at the main Ogden campus teach at these locations sporadically, but infrequently. What's more, in our faculty interviews, there is a perception that these programs are inferior in quality to the program at the main campus (and they probably are). Funding that the department receives from the Board of Regents for the Salt Lake 2+2 program was described by three different faculty members as "a bribe," "dirty money," and "blood money." See recommendations below.

Outcomes' Assessment. Department faculty currently recognize that the department's outcomes' assessment process is inadequate. 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.

Forensic Science Emphases. The forensic science emphases do not appear to be fully integrated into the Department of Criminal Justice. Rather than embracing the uniqueness of the forensic science emphases, the department has only tangentially connected this gem to the more "mainstream" social science department. See recommendations section 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 (one course overload in the master's program). While the review team understands that a 4/4 teaching load is a normal load at WSU, it is not conducive to a department that has been hiring faculty members with active research agendas. It is our collective sense that the department is striving to foster a research culture in the department, but the high teaching load in the department is a formidable barrier to realizing this culture. See recommendations below, as well as the Graduate Assessment Report.

What is the Primary Focus of the Department of Criminal Justice? The Department of Criminal Justice at Weber State is running like "the little engine that could." In other words, its programs are numerous and varied and its staff is rather small. The department operates a large undergraduate program, with a minor and associate's degree. What's more, the bachelor's program has numerous required courses that are offered during a traditional daytime format, an evening format, as well as a distance format at two locations. It also offers a master's degree. In a word, the department appears to be "all things" to all types of students, which obviously presents challenges. See recommendations below.

STANDARDS

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

Curriculum. See comments regarding the department's undergraduate 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 this report.

Academic Advising. The department faculty appears to prioritize undergraduate advising. The undergraduate students with whom we met report that they have access to faculty for both academic and career advising.

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 assist the department in assessing its distance programs. See comments regarding this above.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

Distance Campuses: Davis County and Salt Lake Community College. Despite the outreach initiatives that the distance programs provide, there is concern among faculty that the program is being stretched too thin and that the instructional programs at each of the distance sites are inferior to those of the main campus. This is a very common problem at distance sites, which can be fixed, at least to some degree.

Discussions with Dean Harrold lead us to believe that he is understanding of the issues concerning the distance sites and intends to be supportive of a viable resolution, particularly if the resolution concerns enhancing the programs at the distance sites. As such, we recommend assessing these programs by interviewing the coordinators, reviewing course and instructor evaluations, conducting classroom visits/evaluations, as well as reviewing grade distributions at the distance sites. If necessary, a portion of the funding received from the Board of Regents for the Salt Lake site should be used to enhance the quality of the programs. This might come in the form of professional development training for the coordinators and/or adjuncts to improve the quality of instruction, if necessary. While this team understands that running programs by using only contract employees and adjuncts is problematic, we also believe that the programs can be improved through an assessment of each program. In addition, pushing funding back into the distance programs may reduce the tendency for this funding to be labeled in a negative way.

Forensic Science Emphases. The department should take better advantage of the uniqueness of the forensic science emphases and better integrate the emphases and personnel associated with the emphases into the department. Currently, the emphases appear to be viewed as an “add-on” to the department. Integration can be achieved by (1) having the forensic science instructional personnel teach, on occasion, criminal justice core courses, (2) compensating the coordinator of the emphases (as his job duties are similar to that of the graduate coordinator, who *is* compensated), and (3) promoting the benefits of having the emphases in the department.

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.

We recommend that the department use the results of the first week student assessment in the currently conceived 1-unit assessment course as feedback to inform them of future curriculum changes and/or course content modifications. We also suggest utilizing Alpha Phi Sigma students as tutors for students in the capstone assessment course.

Major Changes to Undergraduate Curriculum. As noted earlier, department faculty have a clear vision for the future of their undergraduate programs and are currently proposing changes in all of these programs. These changes emphasize quality over quantity. Changes in the B.S. program emphasize flexibility for both students and

faculty. We further recommend that the department consider reducing the total number of credits in the major from 45 to 42 or 39, eliminating 3-6 units of electives in the major. The reduction of credits in the major at WSU will mirror the trend to reduce credits in the criminal justice major across the country. This will also add additional flexibility for students, which may affect, in a positive way, 6 year graduation rates.

High Teaching Loads. There is no quick fix to the problem of high teaching loads, especially in the College of Social Sciences where a 4/4 load appears to be the norm. We recommend that department leaders work with the Dean to provide some relief to faculty members in the department who would like to pursue active research agendas. It is not uncommon at other institutions to have flexible workload policies that allow faculty members working on research projects and/or grants to have reduced teaching loads. The department, with its proposed curriculum overhaul, will be in an ideal position to experiment with flexible teaching loads beginning in Fall 2013. The result is likely to be a more satisfied group of faculty members who can demonstrate not only their fine teaching skills, but the fruits of their research endeavors.

What is the Primary Focus of the Department of Criminal Justice? We recommend that the department engage in a process that eventually articulates its primary focus—perhaps with a revision of its current mission statements. Is the primary focus undergraduate or graduate instruction? If the primary focus is the undergraduate programs (and we get this sense from the self study that describes the undergraduate programs as the “bread and butter” of the department), then what areas within the undergraduate programs need further enhancing? Once articulated, departmental reserves and future departmental revenues can be earmarked based on this articulation of “primary focus.”

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 undergraduate students. The department finds itself in a good position to undertake major initiatives, including its current curriculum 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.