

Department of Criminal Justice
Weber State University

Graduate Program Review Response
Spring, 2016

Dr. Bruce Bayley
Graduate Director

On March 14, 2016 a Program Review Evaluation Team, consisting of Dr. Yvette Farmer from California State University-Sacramento, Drs. Greg Lewis and Don Davies from Weber State University, and Lt. Lane Findlay from the Weber County Sheriff's Office conducted a five-year accreditation review of the Masters in Criminal Justice program at Weber State University. As noted in the Program Review Evaluation Team Report, the graduate program recently transitioned to a fully online format. This restructuring was necessitated by the department's desire to improve the quality and content of the program, as well as reflect the strengths and diversity of its current faculty. To this end, we appreciate the thoughtful and detailed report provided by the review team and wish to address the items listed in the "Recommendations" portion of their report.

1-Explore the idea that an online graduate student may differ from a graduate student that attends a traditional program so faculty expectations may need to be adjusted. Students seeking an online degree may not be looking for an opportunity to develop collaborative relationships with faculty and other students or the academic rigor of a traditional program

We agree with the assessment team's observation that online graduate students may not have a traditional interest in developing collaborative relationships with graduate faculty and fellow graduate students. To this end, department faculty voted two years ago to drop the thesis option from our curriculum. Faculty are still encouraged, however, to integrate collaborative assignments, such as discussion forums, within their curriculum to help foster a sense of community within the online environment from which students may share ideas and foster diversity of thought. These interactive assignments also allow graduate faculty to share their knowledge and expertise on a variety of criminal justice related issues.

Academic rigor has also been a point of contention among faculty for a number of years and was one of the first things to be enhanced once the program was moved to a fully online format. While we appreciate the thoughtful comments of the assessment team and their desire to ensure our program is meeting the needs of our target audience (working professionals in the field), we respectfully disagree with the need to reduce the level of academic rigor to less than traditional expectations. In doing so, faculty strongly believe the graduate experience will be degraded, the degree of graduate education will be minimized, and in the end, the quality and reputation of the program will be damaged.

Plan of Action: The program will continue to review the needs of our students to ensure the curriculum is both academically rigorous and professionally practical.

2-Explore the appropriate curriculum for the target audience; a traditional curriculum may not attract target students (e.g., law enforcement) that may be looking to learn more cutting-edge policing techniques

Curriculum within the graduate program has been the center of debate for a number of years and I'm sure will continue to be so. After numerous discussions, faculty have reached a consensus that the program should retain a traditional graduate level academic curriculum. While we agree cutting-edge techniques are an important aspect of such coursework and professors are encourage to integrate new and developing ideas within their classes, graduate

faculty do not want to move away from a more traditional graduate program format. The general feeling among faculty is that cutting-edge policing techniques are part of the profession's in-service training and should not be a guiding philosophical paradigm for the program itself.

Plan of Action: Graduate faculty will explore ways to integrate cutting-edge criminal justice policies and techniques into their individual classes, while at the same time maintaining traditional graduate level rigor and expectations.

3-Explore ways to make the curriculum more interactive (e.g., use video conferencing tools to approximate a more traditional classroom environment) since both students and faculty indicated that they enjoy such interaction

We agree with the assessment team's recommendation that both the program and faculty should explore new ways to make our curriculum more interactive. Four years ago, the graduate program purchased new laptops for all graduate faculty that included a built-in camera and necessary software to allow professors to actively engage their students through video-conferencing and other forms of personalized online interaction. Graduate faculty have also been incentivized through increased pay to participate in on-going online training that not only makes them aware of new and developing technologies and techniques, but also ensures they are proficient in their use (both practically and pedagogically). We also maintain a strong partnership with WSU Online to optimize the technical competency of our faculty in the developmental structure and presentation of online coursework.

Plan of Action: The program and faculty will continue to work with WSU Online to find new and innovated methods of developing more interactive curriculum and program functionalities. As funding permits, the program will also provide faculty with any needed hardware or software updates to help accomplish these goals.

4-Explore the possibility of compensating the department secretary for the additional graduate program duties – if she is working beyond her current classification, her classification and corresponding salary should be adjusted

This is the second graduate program assessment review in a row to identified the need to better compensate our department secretary, Faye Medd, for her increased workload directly related to taking over all secretarial duties within the graduate program. Prior to Ms. Medd taking on these responsibilities, the graduate program had a part-time secretary making approximately \$10,000 a year (before taxes). After that position was terminated due to funding, Ms. Medd absorbed all secretarial duties related to the graduate program as part of her day-to-day undergraduate duties. Ultimately, after a few years of no additional compensation for this increased workload, Ms. Medd did receive a one percent raise in acknowledgement of her growing responsibilities (all college secretaries at the time received a two percent raise, while Ms. Medd received three percent). This raise equated to approximately an extra \$50 per month after taxes. Unfortunately, the additional compensation was well short of the money the program's part-time secretary was making for the same type of work (approximately an \$8000.00 deficit). It should also be noted that since Ms. Medd received the one percent raise,

she has taken on the additional duties of reconciling the entire graduate budget, as well as all payments and reconciliation for the program's growing marketing plan. To the best of my knowledge, Ms. Medd is the only graduate secretary currently classified as an Administrative Specialist I (all other graduate secretaries are classified as level II or level III). As such, we strongly request that Ms. Medd have her position re-classified in recognition of the increased workload and responsibilities directly related to her work within the graduate program. She is an invaluable resource upon which the program is reliant.

Plan of Action: The Graduate Director will meet with the College Dean to discuss the need to have Ms. Medd's position reclassified to a higher pay scale.

5-Address faculty feelings about the graduate program – some faculty members do not feel enriched by participating in the graduate program

We acknowledge that some faculty members miss the traditional interactions often found in a face-to-face classroom environment. This, combined with the lack of collaborative faculty/student relationships that often take place in traditional graduate programs, may be the source of these sentiments. Due to the continual enrollment decline faced by the program five years ago, however, going back to a traditional brick and mortar format is no longer a viable option. As such, an element of faculty enrichment mentioned in Recommendation 3 might be addressed by integrating more interactive components into a professor's online classroom. In addition, it will be necessary to query the faculty to find out exactly what is meant when they say professors don't feel enriched by participating in the graduate program.

Plan of Action: Faculty will be surveyed to find out why some don't feel enriched by participating in the graduate program. Based upon those results, necessary adjustments will be explored as format and funding allow.

6-Since the University administration has a stake in the MCJ program's survival, they should consider offering incentives (such as a course reduction) for teaching in the graduate program in an effort to maintain morale and job satisfaction

To-date, graduate faculty receive the following for teaching in the graduate program: 1) extra pay when teaching a graduate course overload, 2) the ability to teach a graduate course in-load (at the discretion of the Department Chair), 3) extra pay per course taught for completing the Masters of Online Teaching Certification, 4) \$750 per academic year for teaching in the graduate program during that academic year, 5) upgraded technology, such as laptops, at no cost to the faculty member - as funding allows, and 6) technology grants to be used at the professor's discretion for additional technology related to teaching in the graduate program – as funding allows. Currently, the graduate budget cannot absorb the costs of offering a course reduction per professor during a given academic year (such costs could be in the range of \$45,000 - \$50,000 per year if all graduate faculty members were given a course release). In addition, the current graduate budget cannot absorb the costs of paying graduate faculty when a graduate course is taught in-load (professors now have the option of teaching overload for extra pay or teaching in-load with no additional pay – they do not have the option of teaching in-load with pay).

Teaching a graduate course in-load with pay would place an undue burden on the graduate budget as the graduate program often has to cover the cost of hiring an adjunct professor to teach the undergraduate course displaced by the graduate professor teaching his/her graduate course in-load (teaching a graduate course in-load means an undergraduate course is not being taught by the professor and is often replaced by an adjunct professor at graduate program cost).

Plan of Action: The Graduate Director will meet with the College Dean to discuss what additional incentives might be available for teaching in the graduate program in an effort to maintain morale and job satisfaction.

7-Faculty should assess the MCJ program again in 24 months and decide whether they want to continue offering the program and the University administration should abide by their decision

We agree with the assessment team's recommendation and will re-evaluate the graduate program's status in 24 months. If the decision is to terminate the program, we acknowledge the Department of Criminal Justice is legally obligated to offer graduate coursework for an additional three years or until the last active graduate student has graduated.

Plan of Action: Graduate faculty will following the assessment team's recommendation and re-evaluate the program's status in 24 months.

Program Request

If, after 24 months, the graduate faculty has decided to continue the graduate program in criminal justice, we request that the next graduate program assessment take place in six, not five years so we may bring the assessment of our undergraduate and graduate programs back in sync. We were required to assess our graduate program a year early during this cycle (placing us out of sync with our undergraduate assessment which takes place next year) and keeping both assessments out-of-phase places an economic burden on the college and department, as well as additional duties to graduate faculty who must now be engrossed in assessment related functions for two years in a row, instead of one single year.

In closing, I would like to thank the review team members for their time and thoughtful contributions to the development and improvement of our graduate program.

Sincerely,

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