

## **Outside Evaluation Team Narrative Report**

### **Department of Criminal Justice**

#### **Weber State University**

**Prepared by: Dr. Lish Harris and Dr. Branden Little**

On Friday, February 17, 2017, Dr. Lish Harris and Dr. Branden Little visited with select students and faculty of the Weber State University Department of Criminal Justice. During this visit we identified strengths, challenges, and weaknesses of the CJ program. In this report, we will detail said strengths, challenges, and weaknesses and provide a few brief recommendations for change. However, before we begin, we would like to note that our overall evaluation experience led us both to view the program as one of strength within the College and the University.

### **Strengths**

- **The Faculty**

In our opinion, the strongest aspect of the CJ program is the faculty. The program's nine tenured or tenure-track faculty members have diverse educational and professional backgrounds which allow them to offer a wide range of courses to the students. The faculty members are engaged in the development and wellbeing of the students and the program itself. In our meetings with students, they all quickly identified the individual attention and care they received from various faculty members are the most important and noteworthy part of their experience in the CJ program. The hard work and dedication of this group of faculty should be celebrated.

- **Community Integration**

The CJ program has deep, accessible ties to the city of Ogden, Weber County, and other surrounding counties. These connections provide meaningful opportunities for the faculty and students. Faculty members foster these relationships through participating in administrative capacities, helping with evaluations, and performing research with a multitude of CJ agencies. The student body greatly benefits from these ties through internships, field experience, and field trips. The CJ program provides its students with a well-established pathway to employment in the CJ field in the greater Ogden area.

- **Practitioner/Theoretician Balance**

CJ programs can often be derided by being labeled a “cop shop”. This term insinuates that a program does not adequately distinguish itself from police academy training and simply churns out police officers. Many of the faculty we talked to expressed their pleasure with the balance that has been struck between CJ practitioners and theoreticians, which gives their students a well-rounded education in criminal justice and the causes of criminal behavior.

- **Experiential Learning**

Many opportunities exist for students in the CJ program to participate in experiential learning. Internship opportunities abound due to the aforementioned community integration. Study abroad is also available to students. This year, for example, some students will travel to London with faculty members. The availability of these opportunities is invaluable to students’ academic training and professional development.

## **Challenges**

- **Advising**

Faculty members and students both identified advising as one of the largest challenges for the CJ program. The CJ program is home to over 700 majors, the largest major in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and the substantial task of advising these students falls to the faculty members. Faculty members feel overwhelmed and, at times, unqualified in their advising duties. At times, students have trouble locating their advisors and do not experience consistent care and guidance as some faculty members put more time and effort into their advising role than others.

- **Adjunct Supervision**

The CJ program operates at a variety of locations (i.e. Weber State’s main campus, SLCC campus, etc.) and utilizes over 20 adjunct professors. The geographic distribution of the program and the size of the adjunct pool makes evaluation and assessment of adjunct professors difficult. Various faculty members identified this as a concerning challenge.

- **Potential Online Degree**

Most faculty members agreed that a fully online CJ program for A.S. and B.S. degrees was an inevitability. Presently the department has all but one course online which could confer the A.S. degree.

Nonetheless, there were diverging opinions about the implementation, efficacy, and feasibility of an online Bachelor's degree. The department feels pressured to develop the program by Continuing Education and by the establishment of an online CJ program at UVU that may compete with WSU enrollment. One of the faculty's foremost concerns, however, is the possibility of an online degree destroying the satellite campus programs at SLCC and Davis. If an online degree is developed, it will provide a myriad of challenges for the administration, faculty, and students of the CJ program that warrants detailed prior study and a plan for evaluation to ensure the integrity of in-person instruction, the quality of course offerings at all satellite campuses, and the preservation of satellite campus programs.

### **Weaknesses**

- **Communication Component**

Faculty and students identified a lack of writing and oral communication assignments in the CJ program as a weakness. Students could only identify one or two classes in the major that required a paper of more than five pages in length. Faculty members mentioned they did not often require written work in their courses. Moreover, oral communication assignments were sparse.

- **Forensic Science Degree**

The CJ program offers degrees in forensic science and crime scene investigation. Very few students graduate from the forensic science program owing to its rigorous coursework and the pervasive unavailability of jobs in this specialized field. In fact, Dr. Brent Horn, the head of these programs, advises students interested in forensic science to pursue a degree in the traditional sciences (e.g., chemistry).

- **CJ Senior Capstone Course**

While we had some general concerns with the CJ program's assessment methods, our largest apprehension centered on how the CJ Senior Capstone course is utilized. This course is exclusively used as a delivery system for a standardized test that analyzes what a student learned in the CJ program. The students we spoke with did not have a positive view of this course, and did not think it painted a fair or nuanced picture of what they learned as students in the program. Also, this course does not seem to approach the breadth or rigor of other capstone courses that require culminating projects or papers.

## Recommendations for Change

Although we will provide some brief recommendations for change, we will not suggest ways forward for each challenge or weakness we identified in our visit. More importantly, the courses for change the CJ program adopts should be congruent with their own interests and strengths.

- Rotate and Incentivize Advising Duties

We suggest implementing an advising rotation. This will allow faculty members to have a scheduled break from advising (i.e. one year on, one year off; or a longer duration, etc.), which hopefully allows them to acquire adequate training and to invest more time and effort into advising when it is their turn. When a faculty member is performing their rotation, we suggest compensating their efforts with a course release or a stipend. Rotation will also afford students an opportunity to glean insights from a wider pool of faculty adviser-mentors than they might otherwise be able to obtain with a single adviser.

- Study the Likely Implications of an Online Bachelor's Program

The department could survey its alumni about the value of face-to-face versus online instruction in CJ courses. It could easily inquire about its current students' experiences in exit interviews and in workshops with currently enrolled majors. The department should also observe the implementation and perceived effects of the newly emerging UVU online CJ program. Should the department decide against an online Bachelor's program it should feel empowered to withstand institutional pressures that favor such a move. If an affirmative decision to develop an online program is reached, the department should solicit institutional and possibly external support to develop a dynamic online program.

- Create a Schedule of Adjunct Evaluation

Evaluating adjunct professors can be burdensome and tedious. Constructing a schedule of evaluation that incorporates all of the faculty members eligible and able to help may help diffuse this significant, yet important, responsibility.

- Writing Intensive and Oral Communication Designation

Graduates of a CJ program should be able to communicate effectively in written and oral mediums, as both are central to most jobs in the CJ field. To help ensure this, we recommend that two core courses are selected as writing intensive courses (i.e. Theories of Crime and Delinquency, Victimology, Ethical

Issues, etc.) and one core course (Criminal Law and Courts, Constitutional Rights, Ethical Issues, etc.) is selected as an oral communication course in which succinct briefs or reports be delivered by students. These courses should demand more intense writing and oral communication assignments. The responsibility of teaching these courses should be shared by creating a teaching assignment rotation.

- Disassemble Forensic Science Degree

We recommend the forensic science degree be changed to a minor, emphasis, or certificate. In its current state, it should not exist as a major. Dr. Horn concurs with this recommendation.

- Recalibrate CJ 4995 Senior Capstone Course

The capstone course should not primarily be used to deliver an exam. If the course is to continue as a “capstone” course, it should incorporate a substantial, concluding project (it could serve as a writing intensive course) or experience (i.e. internship, job shadowing). Such a substantive project would assist students applying for law and graduate programs and provide a writing sample for application packages. Supervising these projects, however, would likely prove difficult owing to the numbers of graduates annually. A possible alternative for aspiring law and graduate students would encourage them to complete a CJ4830 Special Projects course where they could develop a substantive project. If the CJ faculty decide against this change and preserve the curriculum as-is (i.e., 4995 is not going to include anything other than an exam), the course name should reflect that by dropping the capstone designation. The manner by which the department assesses its students’ performance on this exam, moreover, could benefit from recasting its metrics to focus on the success rate achieved by semester’s end (reportedly 95% of students pass), rather than on the failure of a majority of students to pass the exam at the beginning of the term.