



**CRIMINAL JUSTICE (BS)
(INSTITUTIONAL THEORY AND PRACTICE)**

Program Learning Assessment

**2011-2015 Assessment Planning Cycle
Key Findings and Proposed Actions**

October 1, 2015

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Criminal Justice (BS) (Institutional Theory and Practice)

Mission

The Criminal Justice Bachelor of Science (Institutional Theory and Practice) provides a comprehensive understanding of the components of the American criminal justice system. It is a dynamic major that responds to issues of diversity as well as innovations and changes in the social and technological arenas, which inform criminal justice professionals. The Bachelor of Science degree in criminal justice focuses on the institutions of criminal justice, particularly the police, courts and corrections. Such focus will be achieved while addressing issues of diversity, including race, gender and ethnicity, as appropriate. It will attract current and future professionals in various law enforcement, judicial or correctional agencies at the local, state and federal level. While the major prepares students for careers in the field of criminal justice and encourages internship experience, it also provides an academic foundation for students who plan to attend graduate or professional schools.

Learning Goals

- 1. Describe from a historical and systemic perspective criminal justice institutions and how they relate to each other.*
- 2. Understand the mechanisms, dynamics and situational context of crime and criminal behavior, and methods of prevention and treatment.*
- 3. Apply the theories related to the policy and practice of the criminal justice systems.*
- 4. Analyze the operations and administration of criminal justice institutions in the context of public discourse.*
- 5. Demonstrate critical thinking skills through verbal presentation, by articulating Standard English and by developing a coherent written argument, consistent with and building upon the goals of general education.*
- 6. Demonstrate the ability to access, conduct, interpret and apply criminal justice research.*

Assessment Philosophy

Outcomes assessment is intended to enhance the learning experiences of current and future students. The Law and Police Science (LPS) Department developed learning objectives, described below, representing the essential knowledge base and required skills to prepare students to enter the practice field or attend graduate school. The assessment program is designed to generate qualitative and quantitative information that will be used to identify the students' strengths and weaknesses, and which will allow LPS faculty to identify program areas that need improvement. Once implemented, the baseline can be compared to future outcomes measures to continue to assess the effectiveness of the program.

The learning goals above rely on a variety of objective measures including examinations, research papers and essay assignments. Throughout the program, students are instructed to develop research and writing skills and to acquire enough knowledge of criminal justice in order to base informed opinions. As a requirement of the capstone course, an in-depth knowledge of a particular problem or issue in the field will be required, and a research paper will be the means of assessing that knowledge, as well as measuring their skills in research and writing. Results of assessment of capstone research paper performance will have implications for future capstone curriculum as well as that of the lower-level courses in the program, where students are expected to have developed their research, writing and critical thinking skills.

Assessment Cycle Review

Introduction

This report represents the culmination of the Department's first five year assessment cycle. It summarizes the overall assessment findings in the Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice (CJBS) major, and the specific actions taken towards addressing them to date. This report will also offer suggested methodological suggestions for a new five-year plan for the Department's second assessment cycle, including a revised methodology¹.

Executive Summary

Across the diversity of courses assessed over the first five years of the CJBS program, students have generally demonstrated a solid ability to deliver information on specific researched topics and show an apparent comprehension of key course concepts and terms where relevant.

The CJBS major is designed to develop increasing critical thinking skills as students move from the introductory orientation to the system in CJBS 101 Introduction to the American Criminal Justice System into the required sequence of CJBS 250 Research Methods and Statistics for Criminal Justice to CJBS 300 Criminal Justice: Theory and Practice and CJBS 415 Capstone Seminar for BS in Criminal Justice. Importantly, CJBS 300 Criminal Justice: Theory and Practice synthesizes the link between criminal justice theory and practice, challenging students to apply their new research skills to an appreciation for evidence-based practice. Finally, the senior course CJBS 415 Capstone Seminar for BS in Criminal Justice ties together the knowledge and skills learned throughout the entire major.

With this in mind, assessment of both CJBS 300 Criminal Justice: Theory and Practice and 415 Capstone Seminar for BS in Criminal Justice offer much to be proud of. Most students performed well across all learning objectives in both of these key courses. With 415, this represented a significant improvement from outcomes initially attained with its earlier version (CRJ 425) in prior years.

However, the needed critical thinking skills proved to be an issue in several of the program's classes. Nowhere else was this more true than in the core CJBS 250 course, Research Methods and Statistics in Criminal Justice. There, it was noted that students struggled particularly with

¹ The five year assessment plan for the second cycle is beyond the scope of the current document, but can be accessed at the LPS Department in the Fall 2015 semester.

how to operationalize variables and research design. This challenge is compounded in the 250 course by the fact that professors are covering vastly different material, with many not providing enough time for the necessary quantitative skills building and ethics due to the tremendous time constraints of that particular course.

It was suggested that a greater consistency of core faculty teaching the CJBS 250 (Research Methods) - 300 (Theory and Practice) - 415 (Capstone Seminar) cycle would help to improve outcomes for the future, allowing the critical thinking and research skills to be more sufficiently targeted and developed throughout each course, rather than relying on CJBS 250 to accomplish this alone.

To examine this issue further, the assessment plan for the coming five year cycle will include both quantitative and qualitative research methods, such as focus groups. All participating instructors will also be met with at the beginning of the semester to agree upon a universal final assessment method for the course (such as a common essay question or exam that addresses all of the course goals sufficiently to match clearly to the larger program, Additionally, the true “randomness” of the methods used by each professor cannot be really known. In the second cycle, professors in selected sections will be offered a list of students randomly selected from the rosters to be included in the semester’s study.

As the department has begun to include more “closing the loop” activities and implementation of proposed actions following assessments in the last two years, there is reason to expect improvement in outcomes to result over time. The new five year plan offers room to “re-measure” and document changes following the implementation of proposed actions longitudinally over time.

Summary of Proposed Actions and Their Implementation Status

As noted in the previous year’s annual report, the first real “closing the loops” seminar was held at the very end of the spring semester, with 20 full and part-time faculty in attendance. This event was generally well received, with considerable discussion about the above findings (not including the CJBS 250 methods results as these were not yet fully analyzed). The following proposed actions emerged from this discussion:

- The need to offer faculty (particularly new adjuncts) the optional opportunity of **peer mentoring** where they can sit in on the classes of other seasoned professors teaching the same classes early in the semester;
- Suggesting to professors the use of more frequent and shorter papers with multiple revisions throughout the semester;
- Offering students greater exposure early on to available electronic resources for research.
- Students need to be exposed to varying types of writing assignments that mimic the real world dynamics of professional team writing projects;
- There needs to be a greater connection made between the skill required in class and the need for those skills in the job market.

The findings related to the CJBS 250 assessment were presented to a workshop meeting of all professors currently teaching that course in the fall semester, as proposed in last year’s

annual report. This meeting was attended by the 7 CJBS 250 professors (each of whom concurred with the assessment's key findings), resulting in the following proposed actions:

- Convene a sub-committee to review and make recommendations on how to revise the CJBS 250 methods course to better balance the demands of both research design and quantitative skills within the current course, or across other core courses and electives;

A sub-committee of three FT CJBS 250 faculty met to consider possible recommendations. The sub-committee recommended that one of two courses of action be taken: 1) create a mandatory CJBS 251 course to cover in depth all the needed inferential statistics skills that faculty do not have sufficient time for within the regular CJBS 250 structure; 2) closely determine the degree to which some of these skills could be reinforced later within the current CJBS 300 and CJBS 415 structure.

A second "closing the loop" workshop was held in May 2015, but was sparsely attended with only 6 faculty participating; at this workshop the following proposed actions were suggested:

- Including allotted time at each faculty meeting to discuss possible actions to improve assessment outcomes;
- Making the assessment samples truly random by working from a roster sampling frame and telling professors which students to include in their study samples;
- Disseminating more information and/or workshops on Bloom's Taxonomy and its pedagogical applications

Criminal Justice (BS)

Program Learning Assessment. Key findings and proposed actions
(2011-2015)

Program Learning Goals

1. Describe from a historical and systemic perspective criminal justice institutions and how they relate to each other.
2. Understand the mechanisms, dynamics and situational context of crime and criminal behavior, and methods of prevention and treatment.
3. Apply theories related to the policy and practice of the criminal justice systems.
4. Analyze the operations and administration of criminal justice institutions in the context of public discourse.
5. Demonstrate critical thinking skills through verbal presentation, by articulating Standard English and by developing a coherent written argument.
6. Demonstrate the ability to access, conduct, interpret and apply criminal justice research.

Outcomes Assessment

Program Learning Goal #	% Meet / Exceed ¹	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? ⁴ Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
2011				
Assessment Context² : Capstone CRJ 425 (n=58), Tool³ : Paper				
2	83	Need to practice synthesizing knowledge of theory and data through writing assignments. Uneven outcomes in terms of the ability to employ knowledge in analytical and critical ways.	Develop a larger and more representative sample size. Professors teaching the course may want to begin a dialogue about developing a standard type of writing assignment.	Sp12 80 ↓
6	65			Sp12 60 ↓
5	76			Sp12 80 ↑
5	79			Sp12 70 ↓
Assessment Context² : LAW 203, Tool³ : Syllabi Review				
		Most syllabi conformed with course learning objectives. Landmark cases not listed by some professors (25%). LO#4, requiring writing assignment and an identity component, met both criteria at 75% presence. Professors don't teach legal research (LO#5), but course not designed to access outside cases or legal material beyond textbook.	Divide LO#4 into two objectives for clearer assessment. Remove LO#5, Legal Research, from the course. Recommend that each course and syllabus have multiple graded writing assignments. Specific orientation of course (broad / narrow focus on CRJ) to be discussed.	
2012				
Assessment Context : Capstone CRJ 425 (n=20), Tool : Paper				
2	80	Students seem to be absorbing the criminal justice content well.		
2	75			
6	60	Uneven outcomes in analytical and critical skills. Slight improvement in critical analysis.	Rountable of CJBS instructors to consider a pedagogical response.	
5	80			
5	70			

(1) Percent represents ratio of students who met or exceeded expectations. Where scores represent mean performance, the mean score and highest scale value are indicated (e.g., 3.3 of 4). (2) Assessment context may relate to comprehensive program review, specific academic setting (e.g., course #, capstone, internship), class standing (e.g., seniors, transfers, alumni), post-graduation outcomes (e.g., placement, further education, employers ratings of employee skills), or indicators of learning progress. (3) Examples of tools include exams, portfolios, research projects, lab reports, papers, essays, surveys, licensure tests, performances, presentations. (4) Re-assessment of learning follows the implementation of actions to determine their effectiveness in improving learning outcomes.

Outcomes Assessment

Program Goal #	% Meet / Exceed	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? ⁴ Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
2012 (cont.)				
Assessment Context : CJBS 101 (n=60) Tool : Paper				
1	73	Able to demonstrate above average knowledge of the material and skills; however there is room for improvement in critical analysis.	Need for students to practice their critical and analytical skills through writing assignments.	
2	60			
5	51			
5	63			
2013				
Assessment Context : LAW 203 (n=96) Tool : Paper				
2	85	Able to describe relevant facts and legal questions.	Focus future assessment on LAW 203 as a core course to see trends across semesters and fine-tune the learning objectives and rubric over time.	
2	81	Able to describe the legal principle or procedure.		
4	87	Can analyze a case with intelligent critical commentary.		
4	84	Use appropriate legal terminology.		
Assessment Context : LAW 209 (n=72) Tool : Paper				
1	92	Can describe the relevant facts of a case.	Add a critical and analytical objective. Require writing clarity plus use of legal terminology.	
1	85	Exhibit accurate description of legal principle / procedure.		
6	86	Can describe the judicial context for the case discussed.		
2	84	Use appropriate terminology.		
2014				
Assessment Context : PSC 245 (n=15) Tool : Paper				
1	93.3	Students performed well across objectives. This is particularly true of student ability to demonstrate the origins and meanings of community policing, as well as its overall record or evaluative successes.		
3	93.3			
6	93.3			
Assessment Context : LAW 204 (n=16) Tool : Paper				
1	93.8	Students performed very well across objectives. Even goal 6, apply NYS penal law to actual criminal fact patterns, has close to 70% of scores very good or excellent. Application skills have proven to be weak in the past.		
2	93.8			
6	97.5			

Outcomes Assessment

Program Goal #	% Meet / Exceed	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? ⁴ Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
2014 (cont.)				
Assessment Context : CJBS 250 (n=57) Tool : Paper				
6	71.2	Only on understanding the basic principles of scientific inquiry, sampled students meet expectations.	'Closing the loop' workshop with CJBS 250 faculty on brainstorming efforts related to: Incorporating statistics through the curriculum; Engaging practical activities for teaching variable operationalization; Integrating ethics into key course discussions, rather than 'stand alone' modules. Recommended that CJBS 300 and 415 be revisited to track changes in student readiness related to criminal justice research methods and statistics.	
6	33.1	Ethical considerations in research not emphasized enough.		
6	41.3	Students struggle with identifying and defining variables and differentiating between probability and non-probability sampling techniques.		
6	47.3			
6	43.8			
5	12.8	Identifying appropriate statistical methods needs improvement.		
Assessment Context : CJBS 250 Tool : Faculty Experience on Student Readiness for Capstone Course				
		Need to review some CJBS 250 core material in capstone.		
2015				
Assessment Context : CJBS 300 (n=45) Tool : Paper				
2	57.8	Most students either meet or exceed expectations. It does appear that the outcomes are about equally balanced between the more theory (LO3) and research-focused learning objectives (LOs 2 & 6).	Mandatory meetings of CJBS 250/300 professors to build agreement on what common core concepts to deliver in 250; and what 250 concepts must be handled in greater depth at the 300 level. Greater consistency in teaching of core critical thinking pathways (CJBS 250 to 415).	
3	64.4			
6	57.8			
6	60.0			
6	71.1			
Assessment Context : CJBS 415 (n=46) Tool : Paper				
2	67.4	Students performed very well across all course learning objectives. This is a very promising finding overall for the major given that these course objectives cover the larger CJBS program goals.		
2	86.9			
3	89.2			
4	41.3			
6	91.3			
Assessment Context : COR 201 (n=28) Tool : Paper				
1	79	Students performing considerably well, able to identify the legal concepts and issues pertaining to offender treatment. Important to note that the forms of assessment varied, from written analysis to close-ended exam formats.		
4	87			
6	100			