Criminal Justice Program Review  
Department of Social Sciences  
Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi  

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by  

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The site visit occurred on September 14 and September 15 at TAMU-CC. There were opportunities to meet with program faculty, students, the department chair and the dean of the college and the provost. Additional information was received via email.  

A. Overview  

The following evaluation of the criminal justice program at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi is based, in part, on standards set by the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) and my knowledge of the admissions, curriculum and faculty standards at comparable colleges and universities that offer degrees in criminal justice.  

The criminal justice curriculum at TAMU-CC is designed to meet the needs of students aspiring for careers in criminal justice and/or preparing students for graduate study or law school.  

Admissions criteria for the undergraduate program are comparable to many other criminal justice programs.  

The program has over 300 majors and only four full time faculty members, pointing toward very high faculty - student ratios.  

There is much concern about neglect with respect to the criminal justice program. On the matter of morale, one individual mentioned that “morale was better than it has been…” Others indicated that growth opportunities (or new initiatives) for the criminal justice program would require new resources. Most profound and instructive were statements from criminal justice faculty expressing optimism about the new administration.  

The program faculty seem highly dedicated to the criminal justice program.
B. Brief History

1. The criminal justice program started in the early 1970’s. Felix Fabian was the program’s first professor. After which, Philip Rhoades was hired in the early 1980’s. It was essentially a two person program (with Dorothy McClellan), until the hiring of Eric Moore. The criminal justice program has recently hired Melissa Jarrell, bringing the number of full time faculty to four. With exception to a one or two year period in the early 1980’s, the criminal justice program has grown over the years. In fall semester 2006, undergraduate enrollment is at least 300 majors.

C. Mission Statement

1. The review prepared by program faculty indicates that the primary mission of the program is to “offer preparation for entry into graduate school or law school.” Both the review and catalog make references to the importance of advancing academic knowledge and providing opportunities for areas of specialization.

D. Program Structure and Curriculum

1. The goals and objectives of the program are articulated in the catalog. A review of curriculum reveals that only 30 hours of actual criminal justice courses are required for the major. Of the 30 credit hours required, 24 hours must be at the advanced level.

2. Criminal Justice majors are required to select 15 hours from different categories to satisfy the major core, plus 6 hours for a specialization, and 9 hours of criminal justice electives. The catalog indicates that students are required to take supporting courses in English and Statistics for the Social Sciences, which brings the total number of hours required for the major to 36. The curriculum needs a revision and recommendations are made in Section I of this report.

3. Students are required to enroll in courses that provide an overview of the criminal justice system. In addition, students are required to select a track to develop competency in a particular area of interest: law enforcement, courts, or corrections.
4. Conversations with program faculty reveal that many courses are designed to foster analytical and critical thinking skills.

5. A review of course syllabi indicates that students are reading textbooks by well known and highly regarded authors in the discipline.

6. Most, but not all syllabi included statements about accommodations for students with disabilities. There were some syllabi without course objectives, but for the most part, a review of syllabi was impressive. The program faculty might give some consideration to a model template for part time instructors.

E. Faculty

1. There are four full time faculty within the criminal justice program. Of these four: three hold the Ph.D. in criminology/criminal justice and one holds a JD. It should be noted that all full time faculty are from highly regarded programs. The State University of New York at Albany, also known as The University of Albany is ranked among the top two criminology programs in the nation. Harvard is very prestigious. The University of South Florida has a relatively new PhD. program, but some of the top scholars in the discipline are leading that program to prominence. TAMU-CC is fortunate to have faculty from high caliber schools.

2. In another observation about the full time faculty, each has unique talents and academic backgrounds that bode well for the students in the criminal justice program.

3. There are approximately four part time faculty teaching courses in the program. Some of these part-time faculty members teach core and elective courses.

4. Some of the part time faculty do not hold degrees in criminal justice. When programs do not hire faculty with degrees in the discipline, it is critically important that there be a justification for hire in their personnel files. During my visit, I did not have the opportunity to check for SACS compliance, but these justifications are of critical importance.

5. With respect to faculty vitae, some copies received for my perusal were not current. Every effort should be made to maintain annually updated cv that reflects current scholarship, service and teaching accomplishments, etc.
6. The FTE ratio is extremely high, with more than 300 majors in the program. There is a need to address this imbalance through additional hires. If this is not done, there is the risk of losing discipline credibility.

7. The hiring of new faculty will help the criminal justice program reach critical mass.

8. I was unable to determine if newly hired or untenured faculty have full knowledge of requirements for tenure and promotion. The department should make certain that this information is readily available.

9. With respect to tenure and promotion, the department or college should sponsor annual workshops designed to inform untenured faculty about the tenure process.

10. In the years ahead, each unit within the department should consider a tenure and promotion statement that reflects the national norms for their respective disciplines.

11. All faculty should be encouraged to continue/renew scholarship and/or conference participation at regional or national meetings. This may require a reassessment of teaching and service loads, etc.

12. In addition, the allocations for travel support to present research papers should be increased to correspond with the high cost of air travel, hotel accommodations and conference registration.

13. Based upon a meeting with criminal justice students, the criminal justice faculty are well regarded. The students also had very favorable remarks about part time faculty. Their reactions will be discussed more fully in section H of this report.

14. Many program faculty have been recipients of teaching awards.

15. During the site visit, I found the criminal justice faculty, their program coordinator and the department chairperson to be very professional and knowledgeable.
G. Admissions and Articulation

1. The criminal justice program provides information about requirements for admission and graduation through the University catalog. There is also some information posted on the bulletin board near the departmental office.

2. There is no evidence that the criminal justice program uses remedial courses toward completion of degree requirements.

3. I was able to confirm that the department has original copies of academic transcripts for all criminal justice faculty.

4. The admissions requirement for criminal justice majors is identical to the admissions criteria for other disciplines within the department. Nevertheless, I would recommend that program faculty meet to consider the wisdom of requiring a 2.25 or 2.50, before a student can declare criminal justice as a major.

5. A review of the University catalog reveals that students are allowed to take up to 4 hours of activity courses and to use them toward the 124 hours required for graduation. I think this practice should be reassessed. On the other hand, economics, a fundamentally important course is required. I am surprised that so many colleges do not require this class, so I was pleased to see it in the University core.

H. Students

I had the opportunity to meet with approximately ten students. I did ask a wide range of questions about faculty, curriculum, advisement, departmental matters, etc. I have recorded (below) some of the themes or concerns from the students.

1. The students expressed concerns about the need for more full time faculty within the criminal justice program. If this need is not met, students will wonder if the criminal justice program is supported and may encourage potential students (e.g., friends, relatives, etc.) to pursue academic degrees elsewhere.

2. Many students voiced concerns about the need for identifiable space in which to gather for meetings, study, etc.
3. Most students expressed concerns about the need for greater variety of courses. Similarly, many students voiced concerns about overlap of course content in the current curriculum.

4. A few students verbalized concerns about the importance of an option for a 6 credit hour internship, over the existing 3 credit hour internship.

5. Most students were genuinely pleased with the part time instructors. I suspect that this is a function of courses taught by practitioners – who bring into the classroom “real world” experiences. I understood this concern, but reminded the students that theory (criminology) and practice (criminal justice) is fundamentally related. In other words, you cannot have good practice -- without sound theory -- and many seemed to agree. The challenge, I believe, for the criminal justice program is to identify a fine balance between both perspectives.

6. The students were very pleased with the library facilities. They also had high praise for library support staff.

7. The students had praise for the undergraduate program. The students spoke about the dedication of the faculty, while a small percentage reported difficulties arranging meetings with some faculty. The criminal justice students are also genuinely excited about the program’s latest hire.

8. Some of the students noted that they did not have opportunities for sufficient advisement from faculty. Many indicated that they relied heavily upon the person responsible for consummating official degree plans.

9. I did ask students if they were concerned that the criminal justice program was not a department. Some were concerned, but seem to understand that program status might be directly related to the unit’s small faculty count.

10. Many students indicated that if there were a graduate program in criminal justice at TAMU-CC, they would apply for admission. Many were aware of other schools marketing their graduate programs in the Corpus Christi area. It is my opinion, that the unit should put development of an MS or MA program in criminal justice on a three or five year plan. Doing so will enable the criminal justice program to grow, meet market needs and remain competitive in the criminal justice academic market.
11. Students indicated that they would like to see better usage of the bulletin board. In addition, many indicated that use of a listserv would be a better way to communicate departmental activities, employment opportunities, etc.

12. With respect to student advisement and registration: Is it possible to provide students with a computer generated degree plan that would show courses taken (plus hours) and courses remaining? Do students need to be advised about course offerings every semester? If a student has an official degree plan does s/he need to be advised or cleared for registration in subsequent semesters? At UTA, we waive this requirement, if the student is in good standing and has an official degree plan delineating courses taken and courses needed.

I. Resources

1. I had an opportunity to tour the library and the bookstore and was very favorably impressed.

2. It appears that most classrooms are equipped for power point presentations, etc. Students and faculty are fortunate to have classrooms that accommodate new learning technologies.

3. I was surprised to learn that there is only one secretary for a department that includes multiple academic units. I would recommend that consideration be given to the hiring of another full time or half time office assistant.

4. Regarding the library, I did not have an opportunity to explore how library acquisitions are made on behalf of the department or program. If this is not being done already, program faculty should have opportunities to request books or videos for purchase by the library.

J. Social Science Research Center

The Social Science Research Center was created around 1975. The Center’s mission is to provide quality research for both the University and the community. The Center is characterized as “interdisciplinary, engaging faculty, staff, students and community partners in research that serves the intellectual, cultural, social, environmental and economic needs of the region.” Dr. Phil Rhoades is director of the Center. There are other faculty and students associated with the Center. The Center has had an
active grant agenda and has successfully completed several projects ranging from research, workshops and professional training to community intervention and outreach. At this time, the Center (Rhoades and Jorgensen) is participating in funded research in the area of public transportation.

1. The Center is well regarded. The Center has several ongoing research agendas that serve the community and reflects very favorably upon the University.

2. The Center provides meaningful opportunities for students to learn about the benefits of applied research. In addition, some students have been able to use data for research papers or thesis projects.

3. The interdisciplinary nature of the Center is viewed very favorably by this writer.

4. The director should be lauded for encouraging other faculty to write grants through the Center.

5. Despite much success, there are some identifiable challenges for the Center that will hopefully be addressed in the years ahead, if not sooner. These needs may include a half time administrative assistant and eventually more space as grants are eventually funded.

6. The accomplishments of the Social Science Research Center easily surpass the activities of a similar Center on the UTA campus. Last year, I had the opportunity to conduct a review for a school in North Carolina with several Centers, but very short on deliverables. TAMU-CC should be proud of the accomplishments of the Social Science Research Center.

7. It is recommended that the dialogue for imaginative ways in which to support and grow the Center continue.

K. Opportunities for programmatic growth and improvement

1. There is an immediate need to continue the momentum already established, by funding additional faculty positions. Doing so will permit the criminal justice program to retain discipline credibility and to respond to continued interest in criminal justice as an academic discipline. The criminal justice program should plan to hire at least, one or two additional faculty members over the next two years. The University of Texas at Arlington, for example, have more faculty members (n=8), with nearly as many criminal justice majors (n=338).
Fayetteville State University (an HBCU in North Carolina) with approximately 400 majors has 11 full time faculty members.

2 The University should work with the department and criminal justice program to identify and agree upon short and long term goals. One short or long range goal may include departmental status for the criminal justice program. During my visit, there was some discussion about departmental status for criminal justice and sociology. I think this represents an auspicious beginning, but the idea will require “buy in” and meaningful faculty input from both programs.

3 Another short or long term goal would be development of an MS or MA program, assuming that staffing needs are adequately met.

4 With other programs, such as Texas State University, Sam Houston State University, Texas Southern, University of Houston-Downtown, the University of Texas at Dallas, and the University of North Texas building their criminal justice programs, it is important that TAMU-CC not lose momentum and explore ways to fund new hires.

5 The salary for criminal justice faculty at TAMU-CC has not kept pace with salary increases for criminal justice faculty nationwide. There should be continued dialogue and concerted efforts to address this problem.

6 The criminal justice program curriculum requires a minimum of 30 semester hours of criminal justice courses, 24 of which must be at the advanced level. Criminal Justice majors are also required to declare a concentration in corrections, courts, or law enforcement. I firmly believe that there is a need to streamline or modernize the curriculum. Instead of requiring a wide range of options to select from, the criminal justice faculty should consider a core curriculum that includes the following:

   a. Introduction to Criminal Justice (required)
   b. Theoretical Criminology
   c. Research Methods
   d. Institutional Corrections or Community Corrections
   e. Policing: Management and Supervision
   f. Juvenile Justice Systems
   g. Judicial Systems/Courts
   h. Criminal justice elective
   i. Criminal justice elective
   j. Criminal justice elective

This would result in a 21 hour core, plus 9 electives and the 6 hours (statistics and writing). I think that the concentration in a particular component should be discontinued, but this decision must be made by criminal justice faculty. If concentrations are purged, it would still be possible for students to self declare
a concentration, if they elected to do so. Any proposed changes should be oriented toward streamlining the curriculum, minimizing redundancy and creating opportunities for students to take specialty courses in such areas as forensics or social science forensics.

7 The program review reveals that criminal justice faculty are attempting to develop measurements of learning outcomes and that Dr. Rhoades and Professor Moore are actively involved in the process. I see this as something that merits pursuit and would strongly encourage continuation of this effort.

8 Once critical mass has been achieved, the criminal justice program should give some thought to increasing the number of actual criminal justice courses to 36 hours.

9 The University should begin a dialogue on ways to compensate faculty who hold administrative posts, as chairs and program coordinators. Is there a rate structure? When was it implemented? When was the rate structure last changed/modified? How does it compare to other institutions?

10 I did not have an opportunity to meet with the departmental secretary, nor the degree planner, but as things evolve at TAMU-CC, I would recommend that these individuals be encouraged to voice concerns and offer insights.

11 If it does not already do so, the department should post in or near the main office a sign for all faculty and staff as it relates to the University policy on sexual harassment.

12 The criminal justice program may consider a full day retreat to explore several issues, such as a reception for criminal justice alumni and graduating seniors, better use or development of a listserv for all criminal justice majors (as a way to disseminate information about courses, etc.), employment opportunities, etc. During this retreat, the criminal justice faculty may also explore the benefits of teaching graduate level courses for students in the MPA program, relative to more course instruction at the undergraduate level.

13 Other ideas include the creation of a forensics concentration or a certificate program in forensics, plus consideration of online courses to meet the changing needs of today’s student population. Doing so, however, will require more support faculty and a collaboration with the department of biology.
Concluding remarks: The basic needs surrounding the criminal justice program pertain to funding for new faculty lines. Next, there is a need to modernize the curriculum and to consider some of the proposed changes in this document. There is need for the department and college to become active in a strategic plan for criminal justice, predicated upon increased resources. In fact, now is a great time for criminal justice faculty and its stakeholders to plan for the future. If funding for high demand programs is available within the TAMU system, I recommend that criminal justice program receive consideration for additional funding. Why? If only to compete with other schools that have elected to grow criminal justice at their respective institutions.