

**California State University, Fullerton**  
**Program Performance Review External Report**

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**Program:** Criminal Justice

**Date of Review Visit:** February 22, 2022

**Report Submitted:** March 15, 2022

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This report concerns the external review of the Criminal Justice Program at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF). The goal of the review is to examine strengths and weaknesses of the program, to look for opportunities for continued improvement, and to suggest strategies to help the program meet its goals. To that end, the Committee reviewed the Program's self-study document and conducted a site visit where we met with administrators, faculty, students, and staff. During the site visit, we met with Dean Sheryl Fontaine and Associate Dean Jessica Stern of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dr. Matt Jarvis, Chair of the Division of Politics, Administration, and Justice, and the PPR Committee. We also met with part-time faculty, full-time faculty, Division support staff members, and students.

**Summary Statement:** In general, the program appears to be respected in the College and continues to be popular among students, with over 1300 majors. As expected with other criminal justice programs across the U.S., it will likely continue to attract students into the foreseeable future, and should be considered a strategic location for investing resources that will benefit students with diverse backgrounds. Although there was not a lot of discussion of student success in the reports nor during the campus visit, the four-year graduation rate for first-time freshman increased from 22.2% in 2013 to 39.9% in 2017. Further, the program was commended during our visit for its use of initiatives that have helped increase graduation rates, such as special advising and peer mentoring. However, there remain opportunities for growth, discussed in detail below. Given this context, there are areas that need immediate attention.

First, the program lacks a clear mission and vision for the future. As a result, there is internal struggle and continued curricular stagnation. Second, it is unclear if the current governance structure benefits the program in the long-term. Third, the program is under-resourced when compared to the number of majors, which has led to significant burnout among faculty. Finally, there are unaddressed tensions in the program, particularly around issues of racial and gender equity. These tensions seem strong enough that they are inhibiting the program's ability to move forward with long-term planning.

## I. Program Mission, Vision, Goals & Curriculum

As the self-study notes, the program does not currently have a mission statement, in large part because faculty in the program are divided on what the main focus of the program should be. Although most, but not all, full-time faculty members want to move in the direction of a more social justice oriented criminal justice program, not all agree about what this means in practice. In addition, the faculty recognizes that the program does not have clearly articulated program learning outcomes, and the existing outcomes are too broad.<sup>1</sup> The committee applauds the program for re-writing the learning outcomes for core courses. However, it is unclear whether these new course outcomes are designed to meet existing program learning outcomes, and, because the program does not have a mission statement, whether they align with the goals of the program.

Although we recommend holding off on major curricular changes until after the program has collectively agreed on a mission, vision, and goals for the program, we do wish to address the current debates within the program over the curriculum.

1. Program faculty are divided on which courses should be in the core curriculum. Currently the program requires seven core courses, which generally are not sequenced, with five electives, and a writing course. The committee noticed that the program does not require a general courts course, which is a standard in most criminal justice degree programs. Instead, the degree requires a substantive criminal law course, which is unusual. While many criminal justice programs require a law course (typically either substantive criminal law or criminal procedure), such a course would usually be sequenced later in the program, after completion of a general courts course.
2. We learned that an *ad hoc* committee is reviewing the entire curriculum, including the size of the major itself. As such, the program is considering several options, including the following: whether to move Substantive Criminal Law out of the core curriculum, whether to make Race, Inequality, and the Criminal Justice System a required course, whether to add a courts course, and generally whether to increase the total units required for the major, and/or sequence courses. We would also suggest consideration of the necessity of requiring two general survey-type courses – Myths & Realities of Crime and Justice, and Foundations of Criminal Justice. Decisions about these options should be contingent on a broader discussion regarding the mission and vision of the program, as well as the availability of resources such as staff and advising. We note that the program has not hired a Tenure Track faculty member since 2017 and currently, faculty without doctoral degrees are unable to teach 400 level electives. These issues place significant challenges on curriculum redesign efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> The program currently has three BA Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Students are able to articulate key concepts and trends in crime, law and justice;
2. Students are able to write clearly, effectively and persuasively; and
3. Students are able to apply various curricular constructs to criminal justice patterns, policies and practices

3. Related to this, the program self-study and committee site visit suggest that continued attention to and discussions around the role and development of assessment within the department are needed. The program's assessment plan previously looked at 1-2 student learning outcomes to generate an assessment report. The methods for this plan are not clear to the committee. During the review period, a pre-/post-test survey was implemented into core courses of the major. The current assessment plan and instruments, however, are constructed more as a reaction to College requirements rather than being viewed as a helpful tool from which the program may consider curricular revisions. For example, some students shared that some sections of courses are taught very differently than other sections of the same courses. Good assessment can ensure that students taking the same courses achieve the same core competencies regardless of who is teaching the course.

Ultimately, we believe that these important conversations are best done as part of a larger strategic planning process. Specifically, and worth stressing several times, it is important to first articulate a program mission and learning outcomes. Decisions about the size of the major, number of core courses, and types of core courses will follow.

## **II. Program Governance and Leadership Workload**

The governance structure of the program needs attention. The College has departments, divisions, and programs. The Criminal Justice program is housed in a Division containing two other programs: Political Science and Public Administration. The Division is administered by a chairperson selected from, and by, faculty in the three programs. A vice-chair,<sup>2</sup> along with three program coordinators. Each coordinator is tasked with drafting the course schedule, helping with curricular changes, doing graduation checks, and engaging with faculty to help solve problems as they arise.

In principle, the structure consolidates resources. However, in practice there are several problems. These include the following:

1. There is unequal compensation across program coordinators, specifically concerning course releases. The disparity results from college level policy differentiating graduate and undergraduate programs. However, the policy does not seem to take into account the number of majors in the degree. For example, Criminal Justice enrolled over 1,300 students in 2021-22, while the other two programs combined have approximately 600 (fewer than half the number of students). This discrepancy can translate into significantly more work given the duties of the position. The College should address this issue as soon as possible.
2. There appears to be unrecognized administrative work on the side of the Program Coordinator. In particular, the Criminal Justice Program Coordinator is doing extensive

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<sup>2</sup> This position is currently vacant.

hidden work. For example, programs that offer large numbers of courses fielded via part-time faculty require significant more work to hire and mentor part-time faculty, and ensure that syllabi and teaching follow appropriate standards. Further, the committee learned that graduation checks required a lot of work in a program with a high number of students. Finally, there is hidden administrative mentoring and support happening for junior faculty, work that is essential for retention. From what we saw, it appears that the CJ Coordinator is doing exceptional work relating to, and engaging with, faculty of color. We encourage the recognition of this work.

### **III. Program Resources**

Like many units in CSU Fullerton, the Criminal Justice program is significantly under-resourced, particularly given its size and potential for growth. As a result, students, faculty, and staff report deep strain, including feelings of burnout. Additionally, the resources currently available in the Division, and in the program specifically, warrant consideration. Below are the areas that need attention.

1. **Hiring Faculty and Lecturers:** Currently, there are 13 tenured or tenure track faculty in the program. This is an exceptionally low number for a program with 1300 majors. The committee witnessed signs of high service demands that leave faculty members burned out and demoralized. Additionally, the low number of tenure track faculty requires heavy reliance on lecturers to teach some of its courses. However, the program struggles to find qualified part-time individuals to teach. This results in increased stress each semester, and some part-time faculty receiving last-minute assignments.
2. **Retention:** We encourage an immediate and critical focus on faculty retention. The program continually struggles to hire when given lines, while also facing the loss of a tenure track faculty this year, which will reduce the faculty to 12 tenure track members. Issues related to faculty retention include: unhealthy workplace environment, lack of intra-program and inter-division collegial support, inequitable division of service, and inequitable distribution of benefits (i.e., course releases and assignment of graduate assistants). There is a lack of transparency relating to service load, which is catalyzing intra-program and inter-division resentment. Taken together, these items negatively impact retention of high-quality faculty members, particularly junior faculty and faculty of color.
3. **Course Notification for Lecturers:** We suggest improving the scheduling and notification timeline of assigned courses. Some lecturers reported not knowing their course assignments until a week, or even days, prior to the start of the semester. This contributes to instability, feelings of being undervalued, and retention issues.
4. **Advising:** The current advising structure includes two graduate assistant and two faculty members who receive service-based course releases (3 WTUs) for student advising. The most recent model of faculty advising include one faculty advisor focusing on students

“on notice” and the other serving as a general advisor for all department majors. During our campus visit, all stakeholders voiced discontent with features of the current system. However, there is disagreement amongst faculty members regarding the role faculty should play in advising. Some faculty view advising as a staff position, while others view advising as a space for supporting students and encouraging connections to resources. The current model of advising is not sufficiently meeting student needs. During our site visit, students recalled not knowing how to locate advisors, feeling intimidated by the advising process, and being unable to make advising appointments because they book up so quickly.

5. Staff: There are currently three staff members to support the entire division. An additional staff hire is essential, particularly if the governance structure of the division remains the same moving forward. Additionally, attention to the division of duties and increased training of staff is warranted. Presently, one staff member serves more as a personal assistant to the Chairperson and two staff are in program supporting roles.
6. Classroom Space: The program does not have adequate first rights classrooms given the number of students, majors and non-majors, that it serves. Presently, CJ must offer courses at times that are not accessible to their students and in classrooms that do not meet student and faculty needs.

#### **IV. Program Culture**

The Criminal Justice Program appears to have several cultural practices that need critical attention. As social scientists, we know that cultural issues are hard to identify, and often difficult to address. The first signals of issues appeared in the self-study, which lacked details about basic faculty and student demographics, program successes, and alluded to difficulties over curriculum changes, faculty disinvestment, and skepticism over assessment tools. As the committee conducted interviews, the tensions became more apparent. Below is a brief description of areas that we believe need to be addressed:

1. Program faculty need to address communication styles, particularly those that can easily be interpreted as bullying. During a meeting with full-time CJ faculty, review committee members asked about possible curriculum changes. Two CJ faculty members quickly voiced strong opinions about ensuring that law courses remain an integral part of the core curriculum. When committee members asked clarifying questions, one individual was abrasive, catching the committee by surprise. Eventually we let the issue go, but it became evident that some faculty felt entitled to harshly dismiss the views of others. This kind of behavior, if prevalent, will leave junior faculty feeling vulnerable, threatened, and unrecognized, regardless of the intentions.
2. There is tension over the future direction of the CJ program. In the past five years, the field of criminal justice has been changing, and there is a growing, more critical, understanding of the roles that race, gender, sexuality, and class play in the operation of

the criminal legal system. It is unclear where the program as a unit stands in relation to this change. As noted above, most faculty support a shift to a more social justice oriented program, but the faculty as a whole will need to collectively agree on what this means and what their goals for the program are.

3. There are clear signs of burnout and exhaustion across the faculty. Unfortunately, this is being reported across the nation, resulting partly from teaching adjustments and increased workload due to COVID-19. However, the committee noticed that these signs were particularly prevalent in this program, particularly among junior scholars, women, and faculty of color. Thus, there appears to be an inequity in the experience of burnout. This could be related to issues of increase in workload, lack of resources, large number of majors, and/or not feeling heard about the future of the program.
4. There are also submerged racial and gendered dynamics that need addressing. The field of criminal justice, the student body, and the training of incoming faculty are changing quickly. As such, the program needs to make appropriate adjustments. This could require gender and racial sensitivity training, as well as restructuring governance practices that make the environment more open to underrepresented populations.

In conclusion, we understand that changing cultural practice is challenging, and cannot be mandated from above. However, behavior and attitudes can change, but it requires identifying problematic behaviors, developing common values, and forming rules of engagement that open conversation and dialogue.

## **V. Closing Statement and Recommendations**

The Criminal Justice Program has a long history of high enrollment and has made strides in improving graduation rates. At the same time, the program seems to lack resources, for both tenure track faculty hiring, and administrative support, equivalent to the value they bring to the Division, the College, and the University. Below are four general recommendations that we hope will help the future of the program.

1. External Facilitator: We encourage the Dean to bring trained, professional individuals to help the program. It would be useful to hire a professional facilitator to conduct an open discussion amongst program members to identify cultural practices that inhibit long-term planning. This process should be linked to a strategic planning process. There appear to be submerged racial and gendered dynamics that need to be addressed for long-term health. With this help, the committee is confident that change is possible, but it will require focused and deliberate attention.
2. Strategic Planning: The program needs to develop a strategic plan for the next seven years. This process should be formal and run with professional facilitators from outside the program. Ideally, this process should include faculty, students, advisors, and staff. As part of this process, we recommend that the program develop a mission statement, revise

and expand their student learning outcomes, and consider what core courses are required to meet those learning outcomes. We recommend that the program focus on the following issues:

- Develop a clear vision, mission, and student learning outcomes.
- Revisit the core curriculum requirements, including the structure of the degree in relation to the new vision, mission, and student learning outcomes.
- Discuss the possibilities of CJ becoming a stand-alone program.
- Develop and/or revise governance documents for distributing service loads.
- Examine ways to expand diversity and equity in curriculum and scholarship.
- Identify the resources needed if the program is expected to grow.
- Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of developing a graduate program, a minor, or any other offerings that would serve the region.

Though noted in the list above, the Committee wishes to emphasize that it would benefit the program to strategize about its future administrative placement within the College. While we cannot make a direct recommendation on what Criminal Justice should do regarding its position within the Division, we do recommend that the faculty think closely about its future as a growing program. Given that the field of criminal justice is predicted to grow in the coming decade, the future of the unit points toward an independent and self-contained department. To that end, we encourage the College to seriously consider how to support Criminal Justice in building a healthy future, providing resources, building an appropriate governance structure, and supporting independence if that is what the faculty desire.

3. Assessment: As the program addresses strategic planning and revises their overall student learning outcomes, we suggest the following:

- Ensure student learning outcomes (SLOs) are more concise and measurable and think about how these SLOs can be more broadly introduced, practiced and demonstrated across many courses throughout the program. By considering assessment at this initial stage, the program can develop a systematic and rigorous assessment plan whose findings will inform curricular changes in the future.
- Consider the ways the work the program has previously undertaken on course-specific SLOs may better be situated as course core competencies that should then draw on the program SLOs.
- Consider shifting from a single assessment faculty member to a committee structure. This would foster greater collaboration in designing instruments for assessment purposes, distribute workload more fairly, and support reliability of findings.
- Once an assessment cycle is complete, it is essential the program use the findings to reflect on what it is doing well and what might be areas for improvement. This might be done during program faculty meetings, retreats, or through recommendations by the assessment member or committee.

4. Resources and Support: There is critical need for additional resources awarded to the program by the College. Additionally, there is need for consideration within the Division as to use of and allocation of granted resources. Specifically, we recommend the following:
- Grant additional tenure track hiring lines to support faculty by avoiding burnout and to meet increasing student need for courses and mentoring.
  - Focus on service load equity. This can be done by building policy documents that outline how each service task is allocated and how much each service is counted toward a faculty allocation.<sup>3</sup> Such a system would encourage a sense of equity and transparency.
  - To address disagreement around the approach to and model of advising, over the long term, include advising within discussions of strategic planning. To address student needs more immediately, we suggest the department reconsider ways of disseminating information (e.g., group advising, development of advising-related videos, and/or sending advising-related newsletters to majors).
  - Hire an additional staff member so that each program has dedicated administrative support.
  - Grant an additional first rights classroom to the program to support the large number of students it serves.

The Committee would like to thank everyone in the College and the program for helping to provide information and context. Clearly there is much potential in the program. We hope the recommendations above are useful and help the CJ faculty and the program as a whole reach their full potential.

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<sup>3</sup> Luis Fernandez is willing to share documents built in his department if that would be useful.