INTRODUCTION

During the 2008-2009 Academic Year the Division of Criminal Justice continued to refine our assessment process in pursuit of program improvement. As a result of last year’s comprehensive review, we significantly revised our process and initiated new evaluation tools during the 2008-2009 year.

Between AY (academic years) 2004/5 and 2007/8 the Division tested criminal justice content knowledge with a multiple choice test and writing skills with an essay test. These tests were administered in a pre-post test format. Each new major (both native and transfer) and the majority of graduating seniors took the multiple choice and essay exams. This initial effort of evaluating content and writing skills, revealed several problems inherent in testing such a large number of majors. There was considerable variation in test administration. Student and faculty feedback indicated that the validity of both tests was questionable. In response to this feedback, we decided to thoroughly review and revise our process during AY 2008-2009.

As a result of this review, the Division developed a new writing exam with an emphasis on critical thinking. Additionally, we initiated a review of all upper division, core courses as well as a means of building a new multiple choice content test that would more closely follow the learning objectives of each upper division core course.

ASSESSMENT FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2008-2009

Review of Core Courses

With between 1600 and 1700 majors, the Division of Criminal Justice offers between 11 and 17 sections of each core, upper division course yearly. To ensure quality and consistency among the sections, the Division asks that course cohorts (all those who teach a particular course) meet to discuss course related issues. This has been an informal process with some cohorts meeting more regularly than others. The initial goal of the 08-09 Assessment Committee was to improve this cohort review process.

The Division has identified writing and critical thinking as an important focus in each core course. With these goals in mind, the Committee developed an Annual Course Review Form that asks each core course cohort to report on their review of syllabi for the following criteria: 1) appropriateness of learning objectives; 2) appropriateness of writing assignments tied to the learning objectives; and 3) assignments or content that encourage the development of critical thinking (see Appendix A).
Each core cohort met in AY 2008-2009 and submitted their new annual review form to the Division Curriculum Committee and Assessment Committee. The aim of providing cohorts with a form to submit was to provide structure and consistency in course review. It appears that this has occurred and the Division plans to continue use of the form. After review of the submitted forms, the Assessment Committee will determine how to improve the form for future use.

Development of New Multiple Choice Test

The multiple choice content exam previously used to test specific criminal justice knowledge both at entrance to the program and at graduation was largely developed by one faculty member. While this was a strong exam, the Criminal Justice faculty are diverse and any evaluation of the student’s experience needs to be from an equally diverse perspective.

As part of the cohort review process, each cohort was asked to submit two multiple choice questions (with four answer choices) per learning objective. This process ensured that test questions were written across the curriculum and are directly tied to each core learning objective. The process of collecting test questions, which took the academic year, is complete. We have also requested and received the test currently used by the Department of Criminology at Fresno State. Test construction will begin in AY 2009-2010.

Development and Administration of New Essay Test

In previous review cycles the Criminal Justice Division administered an essay exam to test student writing. This was administered as a pre-test initially in new student orientations and later in CrJ 110, a class usually taken early in the major course sequence. It was also administered as a post-test in CrJ 194, a class usually taken at the end of the major sequence. Due to the difference in faculty styles and course structures, there was considerable variance in how the test was administered. All students were informed that the test had no bearing on their grade or graduation. Faculty and students reported that, in particular, post-test students (seniors) were not taking the test seriously.

The 2008-2009 Assessment Committee focused efforts to improve both the substance of the test and the process of test administration. Because the Division of Criminal Justice has as its core goals the development of writing and critical thinking skills, we focused on developing an exam that assesses both writing and critical thinking. The Assessment Committee incorporated elements from Bloom’s cognitive model and the work of Richard Paul and Linda Elder on critical thinking into the attached rubric which measures both writing and elements of critical thinking (analysis, synthesis and evaluation). Finally, the Committee engaged in an intensive collaborative process to write an essay test that asks students to demonstrate each of these skills (see Appendix C).
Since the Division cannot say with certainty that demonstrated student improvement in writing and critical thinking skills is the direct result of Division coursework, the pre-post test model was discontinued. The process of the test administration was standardized so that every senior was given the same test instructions, at roughly the same time in the academic year. Each senior took the test on a computer with the same time to finish (75 minutes). To help seniors take the exam more seriously, the CrJ 194 Course Cohort agreed to make the essay test worth 10 percent of the CrJ 194 grade. Each CrJ 194 faculty provided feedback on the test and rubric and agreed to use the new rubric for grading the exam as part of the CrJ 194 course. Integrating the essay test as part of the core coursework increased student buy-in and participation with the exam and ensured more uniform administration.

Test Administration and Analysis

Students in each CrJ 194 class were given material to take home and review one class prior to the essay exam. While students were able to take notes or research the test material prior to class, they were asked to come to class with no notes or books. On the day of the exam, students were supplied with scratch paper and given the test material again along with two related question prompts. Students either emailed their completed exams to their professor or uploaded the exam onto the WebCT platform.

There were approximately 171 seniors in Fall 08. The Committee wanted to evaluate a sample of at least thirty percent of the current senior cohort. Therefore, a random sample of 50 essays was selected. There were six sections of CrJ 194 in Fall 08 with class sizes ranging from 24 to 37 students. The sample was stratified so that each course section had a proportionate number of essays represented in the sample. The Assessment Committee requested the randomly selected essays from each CrJ 194 faculty after the tests were completed.

Prior to scoring the sample, a group of non-sample essays was selected for evaluation by the Committee to determine inter-rater reliability. The sample essays were divided relatively evenly across the Committee for evaluation, and scores were entered into Excel for analysis. While the results of the Spring test administration will not be analyzed until Fall 09, the results of the Fall 08 test are positive.

Results

The evaluations were measured using a rubric with a five point scale that roughly mirrors the typical five point grading scale with five being the highest score. The mean scores for each criterion are all in the 3 range with modal scores ranging from average to above average (see Table 1). Each student’s total score was calculated by summing their score for each of the criteria evaluated. The range
of possible total scores was from 5 to 25. The actual range of total scores for the Fall 08 sample was 7 to 25 with a mean of 16.

Table 1: Score Means and Modes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Mean</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Synthesis</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Score Mode</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>16.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Assessment Committee will proceed with analysis of the Spring 09 essay test scores and compare these scores with the Fall 08 scores. Early student feedback as well as anecdotal faculty feedback indicates that the essay test prompts might be too long for the time allotted. Test editing, if necessary, will take place after more discussion of the AY08-09 test results. Additionally, the Committee will need to consider developing multiple versions of the test as the number of administrations increase.

Additionally, the Committee will review the multiple choice questions submitted by the core course cohorts and develop the new multiple choice content exam. The new content exam will likely be administered late in the Fall 09 semester.

Lastly, the Division will discuss the results of the writing and critical thinking essay exam and the content exam to determine if new writing methodologies or teaching strategies need to be entertained to meet the Division goals. Until that process has been completed, we do not contemplate any changes to our course content or curriculum.

Preliminary examination of the results indicates that the majority of our students are writing at least at the expected level of proficiency. The nature of this evaluation does not support reaching conclusions regarding student subject matter knowledge.
Appendix A

ANNUAL COURSE REVIEW

Date______
CrJ ______

1. Has the committee confirmed that syllabi for all sections contain the current learning objectives?

Yes___
No____   If no, please confirm that all faculty have the current learning objectives.

2. Are learning objectives appropriate?
   • Measurable
   • Contains ethical component
   • Includes each content area cited on matrix
   • GE course contain required GE objectives

Yes____
No_____ If no, please attach proposed revisions for Curriculum Committee.

3. Did the committee review how learning objectives are addressed?

Yes___
No____

4. Do course assignments seem to help students meet the current learning objectives?

Yes ___
No____

5. Is a writing assignment included in all sections?

Yes___
No_____ If no, please confirm that all faculty are now aware of this requirement.
6. Did the committee review strategies and activities designed to encourage the development of critical thinking*?

Yes ___
No ____

7. Does the committee recommend adoption of a common text or common assignment?

Yes _____ If yes, please attach recommendations
No_______

8. List all participants:

_________________________________________________________________________ _____________

Course Coordinator       Date

*The level(s) of cognitive thinking that we are targeting for development may vary depending on the nature of the course (e.g., lower division vs. upper division). Recognizing that professional definitions of “critical thinking” may also vary, in this context the Assessment Committee is using the term “critical thinking” to refer to a set of skills designed to advance students' abilities to apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate course content (as identified and defined in Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive domains). Other definitions are welcomed for consideration.
Appendix B

RUBRIC FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE 194 ASSESSMENT ESSAY ASSIGNMENT
SACRAMENTO STATE UNIVERSITY

Author:__________________________________________________________  
Reviewer:_______________________________Date:____________________  

This rubric is designed to make clear the grading process for the CRJ 194 Assessment Essay assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Points</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organization is purposeful, effective, and excellent; writing reflects effective use of transitions to present ideas with no digressions; essay begins with introductory sentence, each paragraph has a topic sentence, and the essay ends with a sentence of conclusion.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organization is effective, and writing reflects sufficient use of transitions to present ideas logically; topic sentences may be present, conclusion may be present, but are not consistent.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organization is coherent but simplistic sequencing of events and may have minor digressions; topic sentences and conclusions not present.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organization is a simple listing of information and details; paragraphs are undeveloped, relies on narrative for structure.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Writing presents no organizational framework for presentation of content.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Grammar** |       |
| • Sentence form and word choice are varied and appropriate; punctuation, grammar and spelling are superior with consistent conventions of Standard English. | 5 |
| • Writing reflects consistent control of syntax, sentence variety, word choice and conventions of Standard English. | 4 |
| • Writing reflects adequate control of syntax, sentence variety, word choice, and conventions of Standard English. Errors do not slow the reader or impede understanding for the reader in a serious way. | 3 |
| • Writing reflects deficient control of syntax, word choice, and conventions of Standard English. Errors impede or seriously undermine the comprehension of the reader. | 2 |
| • Writing reflects inadequate and inappropriate use of syntax, word choice, and conventions of Standard English. | 1 |

| **Analysis (The ability to break material down into component parts.)** |       |
| • Writing reflects in-depth analysis that consists of seeing patterns and parts, organizing parts, recognizing hidden meanings, and identifying components of information presented. Analysis draws on information learned in previous courses and disciplines. | 5 |
| • Writing reflects in-depth analysis that consists of seeing patterns and parts, organizing parts, and recognizing hidden meanings, but only in the context of this assignment and information presented. | 4 |
| • Writing reflects logical analysis and ability to see obvious linkages and parts but is limited and narrow in context. | 3 |
| • Writing reflects limited/ weak analysis, errors in perceiving associations; analysis is outside the context of the assignment. | 2 |
| • Writing reflects no analysis of related linkages and parts. | 1 |
**Synthesis (The ability to put parts together to form a new whole.)**

- Writing reflects utilization of ideas presented in assignment to create new, logical ideas and an ability to predict, draw conclusions; generalization of information from facts presented in a correct and logical manner, information drawn from other coursework and studies to form logical and innovative conclusions.  
  
  | 5 |

- Writing reflects utilization of ideas presented in assignment to create new logical ideas and an ability to predict, draw conclusions; generalization of facts, but only from those included in the assignment, to come to logical conclusions.  
  
  | 4 |

- Writing reflects few new ideas generated from information presented in assignment, or new ideas that are not logical or innovative. Few, if any, generalizations.  
  
  | 3 |

- Writing reflects no new ideas generated from the information given in the assignment, poor or incorrect generalizations given.  
  
  | 2 |

- Writing includes no new ideas, no generalizations or conclusions based on the material in the assignment.  
  
  | 1 |

**Evaluation (The ability to judge the value of material for a given purpose.)**

- Writing demonstrates an outstanding ability to compare and discriminate between ideas presented in the assignment, recognize subjectivity, assess and verify the value of theories and facts presented come to a choice of whether the information is important, making reasonable arguments based on the information provided along with other information learned in other classes.  
  
  | 5 |

- Writing demonstrates a strong ability to compare and discriminate between ideas presented in the assignment, recognize subjectivity, weigh and verify the value of theories and facts and choose in a logical manner the value of evidence. Writer is able to make reasonable arguments based on the information provided in the assignment.  
  
  | 4 |

- Writer shows some ability to be able to compare and discriminate between some facts and theories presented in the assignment and recognize subjectivity. Writer demonstrates some difficulty in reasoning when making arguments based on the information provided in the assignment.  
  
  | 3 |

- Writer has difficulty in comparing and discriminating between the facts given in the assignment, does not recognize subjectivity, and cannot give logical rationales when choosing a certain point over another.  
  
  | 2 |

- No evidence of comparing or discriminating between ideas or making choices based on any arguments, or assessing the value of evidence is present in the writing.  
  
  | 1 |

**Total Score on Assessment Essay Assignment:**

---

**Comments**
Appendix C

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO
Division of Criminal Justice

CrJ 194: Contemporary Issues in Criminal Justice
Writing and Critical Thinking Assessment Essay

Below is information that you will use to write your in-class essay exam. You will be given the essay questions when the exam begins and will have the full class time to answer the questions. In the mean time, you should just review and think about this information. You can look up more information on this subject before the exam, but no additional information will be necessary to answer the questions, or permitted at the exam. (Do not bring any materials to the exam.) At the exam you will be given two essay questions and will be expected to write approximately one page per question. You will be evaluated according to the criteria listed on the attached essay rubric. Remember to manage your time accordingly. Please log on to a computer as soon as you arrive to class.

Facts:
- California has the largest prison population in the country, and it has grown almost twice as much as other systems nationwide from 1980 to 2007.
- Most prison systems in California are severely overcrowded.
- California’s correctional costs have grown by about 50% in the past decade.
- Correctional costs account for approximately 10% of the California’s overall state spending (almost as much as educational expenditures).
- California spends approximately $43,000 a year to house one inmate (compared with approx. $26,000 nationally).
- Recidivism rates have remained relatively constant over time, with approximately 66% of inmates released in California returned to prison within three years (compared to approximately 40% nation-wide).
California Index Crime Rates per 100,000 Inhabitants*  
And Inmate Population and Parolees in California**  
(2002-2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Violent</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Murder</th>
<th>CDCR Inmate Population</th>
<th>CDCR % of Inmates on Parole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>35,001,986</td>
<td>595.4</td>
<td>3,361.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>159,695</td>
<td>16.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>35,462,712</td>
<td>579.6</td>
<td>3,426.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>161,785</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>35,842,038</td>
<td>527.8</td>
<td>3,423.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>163,929</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>36,154,147</td>
<td>526.0</td>
<td>3,320.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>168,035</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>36,457,549</td>
<td>532.5</td>
<td>3,170.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>172,528</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>36,553,213</td>
<td>522.6</td>
<td>3,033.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>171,444</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* FBI, Uniform Crime Reports  
** California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR)

Scenario:
Independent California State Assembly Member Riggs is being lobbied by a coalition called “Two Strikes – You’re Out” (TSYO) to support legislation designed to increase penalties for repeat criminal offenders in effort to reduce recidivism. Given that California’s recidivism rate is significantly higher than the national average, members of the coalition have concluded that we are too soft on crime and that we need to hold offenders more accountable for their actions. Specifically, the group wants Assembly Member Riggs to support legislation to amend California’s well-known “three-strikes” law, and make it into “two-strikes.”

The TSYO coalition has argued that there should be an additional mandatory 15 year prison term whenever someone is convicted of committing a second serious violent felony offense. Members of the coalition are convinced that this law will reduce rates of recidivism by deterring first time offenders from reoffending (specific deterrence), and by keeping others from ever getting involved in criminal activity (general deterrence).

In addition to the TSYO coalition, many state and local politicians, as well as a wide range of other public interest groups such as state and national victims’ rights groups, Mothers’ Against Drunk Drivers, and some law enforcement officials around the state have shown strong support for this legislation, citing the need to prevent future victims from getting harmed from known criminals.

Other groups, however, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, Citizen’s for a Balanced Budget, restorative justice proponents, treatment specialists, drug specialists, public teachers’ associations and other law enforcement organizations are strongly opposed to the legislation. Those
opposed to the legislation cite the questionable effectiveness of the three-strikes legislation, and the need for more re-entry programs, which have been proven to reduce recidivism, to be drafted as legislation instead of the current proposal which would lead to enhanced prison time in overcrowded facilities with minimal rehabilitation programming.

**Assignment:**
Assume that you have been hired by Assembly Member Riggs as a staff analyst with a special expertise in criminal justice. She too is quite concerned about crime in our state but is not sure if she should support this particular piece of legislation. Therefore, she has asked you to help her determine the extent to which this legislation is an effective way to accomplish its intended goal, to deter offending and reduce recidivism. Using the material provided above as well as information you have learned in your Criminal Justice curriculum, please write approximately one, single-spaced page on each of the following:

1. Analyze the proposed legislation, and;
2. Formulate a reasonable policy alternative designed to reduce crime and promote public safety within in the State of California.

Be sure to explain the logic and rationale for both the analysis of the proposed legislation, as well as your proposed policy alternative.