Program: Graduate

Department: Criminal Justice

Number of students enrolled in the program in fall, 2011: 44

Faculty member completing template: Yvette Farmer, Graduate Coordinator

Date: February 3, 2012

Period of reference in the template: 2006-07 to present

1. Please describe your program’s learning-outcomes trajectory since 2006-07: Has there been a transformation of organizational culture regarding the establishment of learning outcomes and the capacity to assess progress toward their achievement? If so, during which academic year would you say the transformation became noticeable? What lies ahead; what is the next likely step in developing a learning-outcomes organizational culture within the program?

[Please limit your response to 200 words or less]

The Graduate Program committee within the Division of Criminal Justice is composed of many faculty members that currently serve on or have served on the Division’s assessment committee. The organizational culture of this committee (and the Division) values assessment-related activities. In AY 2007-08, the committee engaged in outcomes assessment by reviewing the graduate program objectives and the catalog description of the graduate program; and then comparing those items to the types of classes that were offered and taken by students enrolled in the program. Based upon that review, the committee proposed curricular changes to strengthen the Division’s ability to meet the program objectives and to align coursework with the catalog description of the graduate degree. Those changes were approved for implementation in Fall 2008 and all students are now required to: 1) enroll in 12 units of core courses covering key content areas as identified by the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS); 2) enroll in 6 units of selective courses covering additional key ACJS content areas; 3) enroll in 6 or 9 units of elective courses (depending upon the type of culminating experience chosen); 4) and enroll in 3 units of culminating experience units for the comprehensive examination option or 6 units of culminating experience units for the thesis or project option. The first three culminating experience units for theses/projects are taken in a structured course environment focusing on establishing productive working relationships with committee chairs, developing ideas, and writing preliminary drafts.

The next steps for the graduate program are to continue with its assessment-related activities by: 1) developing an assessment plan to formally measure whether the program objectives are being met; and 2) carefully reviewing program objectives to make sure that they are closely aligned with Title 5.
2. Please list in prioritized order (or indicate no prioritization regarding) up to four desired learning outcomes (“takeaways” concerning such elements of curriculum as perspectives, specific content knowledge, skill sets, confidence levels) for students completing the program. For each stated outcome, please provide the reason that it was designated as desired by the faculty associated with the program.

a) Be able to apply appropriate analysis in research endeavors

Applying the appropriate analysis in research activities enhances what a student and/or others might learn in the process of conducting research and demonstrates critical thinking. Instructors assigned to graduate courses often require research papers allowing for the formative assessment of this objective in their review and evaluation of student work. Formative and summative assessments of this objective take place during the culminating experience process when faculty advisors supervise the research activities of graduate students.

b) Understand and apply behavioral research methodology in criminal justice problem solving and decision making

Understanding and applying behavioral research methodology to a particular research question may lead to information that can result in problem solving and provide guidance in decision making. One course in which the formative assessment of this objective takes place is CrJ 200 (Research Methods) which requires students to complete a research proposal to address a particular research question. Other courses require students to use the scholarly literature (containing behavioral research methodology) to help identify ideas that relate to current criminal justice problems and to learn the value of making evidence-based decisions. The culminating experience process also provides faculty advisors with the opportunity to engage in formative and summative assessments of this objective.

c) Conduct independent and/or group research and evaluations

Students must be able to complete their culminating experiences which often entail conducting research; they should also be familiar with evaluation research which can be important for determining whether Criminal Justice programs continue to be funded. The culminating experience provides an opportunity for both formative and summative assessment of a student’s ability to conduct independent research (which may also be evaluation research). The Division of Criminal Justice offers a program evaluation research course (CrJ 207) which provides an instructor with the opportunity to engage in formative assessment of group evaluation research conducted by the students enrolled in this course.
d) Have competency in the writing of research papers

Graduate students are training to be scholars in the discipline and hence, must be able to engage in the scholarly activity of writing research papers. Writing is required in all graduate courses allowing the instructors to engage in formative assessment of this objective. Formative and summative assessments of this objective also take place during the culminating experience process as students receive feedback from their advisors, revise numerous drafts, and finally complete a product that reflects their ability to write about research.

[Please limit your response per outcome to 300 words or less]

3. For undergraduate programs only, in what ways are the set of desired learning outcomes described above aligned with the University’s Baccalaureate Learning Goals? Please be as specific as possible.

[Please limit your response to 400 words or less]

4. For each desired outcome indicated in item 2 above, please:
   a) Describe the method(s) by which its ongoing pursuit is monitored and measured.

1. Be able to apply appropriate analysis in research endeavors

   Thesis research and writing are monitored by the Chair, Second Reader, and the Graduate Coordinator. Together these faculty members rely on their collective experience and expertise to guide students in making appropriate analytical choices. This practice reflects the formative assessment process inherent in completing the culminating experience. Summative assessment takes place when the entire culminating experience product is reviewed in relation to this objective.

2. Understand and apply behavioral research methodology in criminal justice problem solving and decision making

   Understanding behavioral research methodology as a means of problem solving and decision making is facilitated in classroom discussions of discipline-related literature; the application of behavioral research methodology in criminal justice problem solving and decision making is often evident in the culminating experience (theses, projects, and comprehensive exams). Instructors in graduate classes engage in the formative assessment of this program objective by listening to student discussions of relevant scholarly literature and the application of those ideas to generate criminal justice policy and program development. Summative assessment of this objective takes place in the culminating experience process as advisors review the research-based policy implications discussed by students in the final section of their theses.
3. Conduct independent and/or group research and evaluations

Students must be able to complete their culminating experiences, which often entail conducting research; they should also be familiar with evaluation research which can be important for determining whether criminal justice programs continue to be funded. Thesis advisors engage in formative assessment as students submit sections of their theses and thesis committees engage in summative assessment when students submit the final version of their work. Students may review and discuss evaluation research in various courses or they may enroll in CrJ 207 (Program Evaluation Research) for the opportunity to conduct evaluation research with their fellow classmates. In both of these options, instructors engage in formative assessment to guide students as they learn about conducting research.

4. Have competency in the writing of research papers

Graduate students are training to be scholars in the discipline and hence, must be able to engage in the scholarly activity of writing research papers. Graduate students are required to read and write in every course within the program. They are exposed to professional writing (e.g., research papers) as a model and required to write research papers. Instructors engage in formative assessment as students turn in drafts for feedback and summative assessment as students submit their final research papers.

b) Include a description of the sample of students (e.g., random sample of transfer students declaring the major; graduating seniors) from whom data were/will be collected and the frequency and schedule with which the data in question were/will be collected.

- Writing Research Papers in Graduate Courses

Students are required to write research papers throughout their coursework in the graduate program. They begin their coursework by enrolling in a research methods course that has been designated as meeting the writing proficiency standard for graduate education on this campus. Students continue to write research papers for individual instructors each semester so in essence, faculty members routinely evaluate a student’s ability to write research papers. In this way, instructors in the graduate program continuously engage in formative assessment of graduate student writing.

- Conducting and Writing about Research

A student’s ability to conduct research is reviewed and evaluated throughout the culminating experience process. Formative assessments provide guidance to students
and faculty members learn from the summative assessments of this process. Approximately 15 students submit theses or projects each year providing faculty members with the opportunity to review and evaluate the student’s ability to conduct and write about research.

c) Describe and append a sample (or samples) of the “instrument” (e.g., survey or test), “artifact” (e.g., writing sample and evaluative protocol, performance review sheet), or other device used to assess the status of the learning outcomes desired by the program.

Criminal Justice students submit theses and projects throughout the year which serve as data sources for assessment-related purposes. In our Graduate Handbook (Appendix D), students (and faculty) are provided with guidelines for organizing theses and projects, including a description of a thesis and project as well as specific items and questions that should be addressed in the process of completing this work. This document serves as a foundation for students as they learn how to write a thesis or project and a guide for faculty members as they review student work.

d) Explain how the program faculty analyzed and evaluated (will analyze and evaluate) the data to reach conclusions about each desired student learning outcome.

Within the past 5 years, the Graduate Program committee revised the Graduate Handbook describing the basic components that serve as the foundation of a thesis or project. This effort has led to increased structural consistency across theses and projects allowing thesis/project advisors to focus more on research and writing rather than structure and format. Using the components identified in the Graduate Handbook, faculty members work as a committee to review/evaluate successive drafts of theses and projects. This formative assessment requires that the thesis or project committee members provide feedback to students so they can work to improve their drafts.

[Please limit your response to 200 words or less per learning outcome]

(If the requested data and/or analysis are not yet available for any of the learning outcomes, please explain why and describe the plan by which these will occur. Please limit your response to 500 words or less.)

5. Regarding each outcome and method discussed in items 2 and 4 above, please provide examples of how findings from the learning outcomes process have been utilized to address decisions to revise or maintain elements of the curriculum (including decisions to alter the
program’s desired outcomes). If such decision-making has not yet occurred, please describe the plan by which it will occur.

**[Please limit your response to 200 words or less per item]**

a) Be able to apply appropriate analysis in research endeavors
b) Understand and apply behavioral research methodology in criminal justice problem solving and decision making
c) Conduct independent and/or group research and evaluations
d) Have competency in the writing of research papers

The Graduate Coordinator reviews all theses and projects for content (as well as format) and can identify strengths and limitations in a student’s ability to conduct and write about research. Collectively, this information is fed back into the thesis/project development course to help students achieve the program objectives. The Graduate Coordinator also shares this information with the Graduate Program committee for discussion and action (e.g., revising information in the Graduate Handbook) as needed. The Division of Criminal Justice Graduate Handbook is a living document so any information identified that may improve the quality of the program is incorporated into that document.

6. Has the program systematically sought data from alumni to measure the longer-term effects of accomplishment of the program’s learning outcomes? If so, please describe the approach to this information-gathering and the ways in which the information will be applied to the program’s curriculum. If such activity has not yet occurred, please describe the plan by which it will occur.

**[Please limit your response to 300 words or less]**

Although we have not yet sought data from alumni, faculty members often hear from our graduates and have received positive information indicating the value of their learning experiences within our graduate program. With regard to a plan to obtain more systematic data, the Graduate Program committee can conduct research on the longer-term effects of accomplishing the program’s objectives via members of our alumni chapter.

7. Does the program pursue learning outcomes identified by an accrediting or other professional discipline-related organization as important? Does the set of outcomes pursued by your program exceed those identified as important by your accrediting or other professional discipline-related organization?

**[Please limit your response to 300 words or less]**

The breadth of the curriculum in the Division of Criminal Justice graduate program is consistent with the required content areas published by the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS). Due to ongoing budget issues and the need to reduce the cost of instruction, we have not
developed and offered a statistics course within the Division. Despite this issue, a couple of our students have elected to enroll in a statistics course offered by another department.

The learning outcomes identified by the ACJS for Master’s programs are very general including:

*the mastery of knowledge, methods of inquiry, and intellectual skills pertinent to the study of the causes, consequences, and responses to crime and its interrelatedness to other areas of inquiry.*

These learning outcomes are inherent in the courses taught within the Division’s graduate program. Our program objectives are far more specific as they focus on conducting research, writing, and preparedness to contribute to a more just and efficient criminal justice system.

8. Finally, what additional information would you like to share with the Senate Committee on Instructional Program Priorities regarding the program’s desired learning outcomes and assessment of their accomplishment?

[Please limit your response to 200 words or less]

Most of the Graduate Program committee members currently serve or have served on the Division’s Assessment committee. Committee members believe in the importance of assessment-related activities and we have made several improvements to the graduate program as a result. We are now ready to focus on aligning our program objectives with the information contained in Title 5, which we believe should further increase the quality of our program.