

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Review Outcome: The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the M.S. in Criminal Justice Sciences to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee recognizes that many of the efforts and activities that led to the development of the self-study report were accomplished during the time-period coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee thanks the program for a comprehensive and critical self-study report that included input from multiple stakeholders.

The committee notes that the program's enrollment during the period covering the program review cycle has fluctuated (from 24 in 2015 to 23 in 2021, with a high of 35 in fall 202 and a low of 18 in 2018). The program indicates that, with current resources, their ideal target is 25 to 30 students. The percentage of graduate students from groups traditionally underrepresented in the discipline has also fluctuated (from 29.2 percent in fall 2015 to 30.4 percent in fall 2020, with a high of 48.1 in fall 2017 and a low of 28.6 in fall 2020). The percentage of students identifying as female has increased from 58.3 percent in fall 2015 to 73.9 percent in fall 2020.

The committee commends the program faculty for their comprehensive efforts to support the success of their graduate students. This includes a graduate assistant orientation program, the use of contracts that communicate clear expectations, individualized training and mentoring, and designated physical spaces for offices and computers. The committee commends the program for the creative and varied co-curricular options it provides its students which provide multiple opportunities to participate in activities that allow them to learn from experts in the field, network with potential employers, and engage in meaningful civic and community engagement. The committee commends the program for revising exit options, which has resulted in all their students completing the degree within the specified timeframe during the period of review. The graduate program is designed as a student-oriented experience by providing opportunities for student participation in research opportunities with faculty that has resulted in outcomes that include co-authored conference presentations and manuscripts. These varied opportunities help the program prepare students for employment and build a strong student community in the program (examples include work with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Law Enforcement Torch Run, McLean County and Champaign County Jails, YWCA Stepping Stones). Alumni survey results demonstrate strong positive career outcomes for program graduates, many of whom are in leadership positions across a diverse set of occupational contexts (e.g., higher education, the federal government, law enforcement, and health and human services).

The committee notes that the faculty have worked to revise the curriculum during the period of review. This work included the creation of a new undergraduate accelerated sequence designed to feed into the graduate program, revisions to the program exit options (elimination of the comprehensive exam, development of the Culminating Research Experience Project), and the development of two new elective topics for the seminar course (Mental Health, Crime, and Justice & Race, Ethnicity, and Criminal Justice).

The committee commends the program faculty on the development, implementation, and revision of their plan for the assessment of student learning outcomes. During the current review cycle, faculty have used the evidence gathered through the student learning outcomes assessment plan to inform program changes, and this includes curriculum maps and the incorporation of rubrics as tools for assessing student coursework regarding the program's learning outcomes. The committee acknowledges the use of such rubrics as one method to provide consistent reviews of student learning that can provide potential areas for improvement. The information gathered through these measures has been used to make program changes, and examples of these changes were specified.

The committee commends the department for centering Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion as core values in their faculty recruiting practices. We commend the faculty members of the program for their teaching, scholarly, and service contributions to the M.S. in Criminal Justice Sciences. Faculty members are active researchers who publish peer-reviewed journals articles and present at national and international interdisciplinary professional conferences. The program faculty regularly engage in professional development opportunities. The committee thanks the program for the analysis of faculty participation in student supervision of thesis projects and independent studies.

The committee appreciates the analysis of comparator and aspirational programs. As part of this analysis, the program faculty identified multiple institutions with similar programs that excel in ways that our program may aspire to. The committee also recognizes that faculty developed specific action plans to implement similar initiatives to improve the program at Illinois State.

Recommendations.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks faculty members of the Department of Criminal Justice Sciences for the opportunity to provide input regarding the M.S in Criminal Justice Sciences program at Illinois State University through consideration of the self-study report submitted by faculty. The following committee recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle are provided in a spirit of collaboration with Criminal Justice Sciences faculty members. In the next program review self-study report, tentatively due October 1, 2030, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

Develop a plan for controlled enrollment management. The committee notes that demand for the program remains strong and enrollments are within target levels. The committee encourages the program to continue refining and implementing their plan for student recruitment and retention, including strategies for maintaining high levels of enrollment and success by students from racial and ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented in the program and discipline. Furthermore, the monitoring should contextualize and differentiate AMD versus the M.S. CJS enrollments and student success.

Continue to focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity. The committee recognizes the efforts that have resulted in the diversity of faculty and students within the program and encourages the program to continue to pursue its goals related to further developing an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment that effectively supports students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds. We encourage the program to continue refining and implementing their plans for recruiting students from groups who are traditionally underrepresented in the program and discipline. Furthermore, we encourage the program faculty to continue to examine ways to infuse diversity, equity, and inclusion into the curriculum.

Continue to focus on student success and retention. The committee recommends that the program faculty develop a plan for student success. The plan should be used to increase transparency and communication around “student success” by defining the program’s goals for, assessment of, and actions towards supporting students enrolled in the program. The plan may provide an overarching structure for other plans (e.g., retention, curriculum, alumni engagement). The committee recognizes substantial work by former and current faculty members to review and update the program and its curriculum. The committee recommends continued periodic review of the program structure and content to remain current with changes in the field and to maintain program retention and graduation rates. The committee recommends that the program continue monitoring student retention, particularly of students from traditionally underrepresented groups.

Continue to review and revise the curriculum. The committee recognizes work by faculty members to review and update the program and its curriculum. The committee recommends continued periodic review of the program structure, including assessing the impact of recent revisions (e.g., why were students struggling with the comprehensive exams, how do outcomes differ for students doing the CREP compared to the thesis, etc.). The committee recommends that the program faculty develop and analyze a curricular map to assess how these issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion are infused across the curriculum. Finally, the committee notes the relatively high proportion of graduates that pursue doctoral degrees and suggests that the program faculty discuss the feasibility and desire for developing its own doctoral program.

Continue implementing and refining the student learning outcomes assessment plan. The committee encourages faculty to continue their implementation of the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program during the next program review cycle, to continue to utilize information gathered through plan implementation to make program revisions as necessary, and to document how that has been done. The committee encourages faculty to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in assessing student learning to identify any modifications to the plan faculty may deem necessary.

Continue the collaborative work with Milner Library. The committee recommends that the program work with the subject liaison librarian to examine and evaluate the library's journals and monograph collection to aid in both the selection and deselection process of these sources. Given recent journal cancellations and expected increases in distance and hybrid courses, we encourage the department and library to further collaborate to increase awareness of alternative access to resources, such as Interlibrary Loan and I-Share lending, among faculty and students.

Develop a plan for alumni tracking and engagement. The committee encourages the faculty to continue to refine their plan for tracking program alumni and use this system to enhance alumni networking and engagement. These activities may become even more important in the years ahead as the program's alumni become more diverse. We recommend that the program reflect upon why the attempts to maintain an advisory council were not successful. The program could benefit from increased involvement of its alumni, employers, and other external stakeholders in providing input regarding the program, in mentoring students, and in providing employment opportunities for program graduates.

Revise the initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle section. The committee recommends that the program faculty expand the scope of this section of the self-study report beyond the findings of the aspirational and comparator analyses. The program should consider their comparative niche relative to other programs and how it can further differentiate itself to enhance recruitment. We ask the program faculty develop initiatives that incorporate other findings from the self-study, including the ongoing changes in the discipline, and strongly suggest that the initiatives are also aligned with the strategic plan.