

The School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University

Arthur F. Brandstatter's commitment to and passion for the role universities could assume in preparing well-trained and highly educated police personnel is well documented. In this essay, Brandstatter reflects on the evolution of the School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University and argues for the valuable contribution the School has made to the mission of the University.

In the Beginning

The Morrill Act of 1862 sought to “promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life”. More than a century after its founding under provisions of the Morrill Act, Michigan State University, the Police Administration curriculum was founded in 1935 in cooperation with the Michigan Crime Commission and the Michigan State Police. The School of Police Administration and Public Safety emerged in 1935 as one of the three pioneering schools in the United States. Today’s School of Criminal Justice, which evolved from the Police Administration and Public Safety program, remains the single justice focused educational program that can trace its professional and intellectual history back to the 1930s.

In 1970, anticipating and leading the changes which were to occur in crime related education throughout the United States, the name and curriculum of the School were changed to reflect what had become clearly known: namely, that crime

and society’s response were more complex issues than providing liberal education to the police. Hence, the School of Criminal Justice broadened its leadership role in justice education.

Since 1935, the School of Criminal Justice has sought to blend liberal and professional education in a fashion consistent with the basic founding goals of the University. As a result, the program of study that evolved is generally recognized as one of the best in the country and a leader in the field of criminal justice education.

Accounting for Success

Although there are certainly more contributing factors to the success of the School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University, three are paramount. First, the School has maintained its strong academic emphasis within the context of professional education. A professional school will, by its very nature and mission, maintain close liaison with its constituency, will sponsor the kinds of research necessary to cope with current and long term problems, and will offer a curriculum that reflects the changing needs of the student, practitioner, and academic communities. However, we are not a professional school in the sense of providing a narrow, technical education. While a number of schools of criminal justice throughout the country have followed such a narrow model, the School of Criminal Justice at MSU continues to stress the importance of a broadly based liberal arts education. This commitment has, and will

continue to be reflected in the School's curriculum, research, and public services.

A second factor that has significantly contributed to the success of the School of Criminal Justice has been its holistic approach to the study of criminal justice. Through two comprehensive revisions of the School's curricula over the past six years, we have developed an integrated curriculum at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. All degree candidates (graduate and undergraduate) are required to complete coursework which can be termed "system wide" in emphasis rather than specializing solely in a narrow occupational area within the field of criminal justice. Such coursework broadens the conceptual base for students majoring in criminal justice as well as those who complete coursework in criminal justice on an elective basis.

Further, while faculty members in the School have particular areas of interest in the justice field, each is involved in the teaching of courses that have broader system level implications and conducting research that transcends traditional agency boundaries found in criminal justice. This diversity in faculty in terms of teaching, research and public service is largely related to definitions of the field of criminal justice and to its interdisciplinary nature.

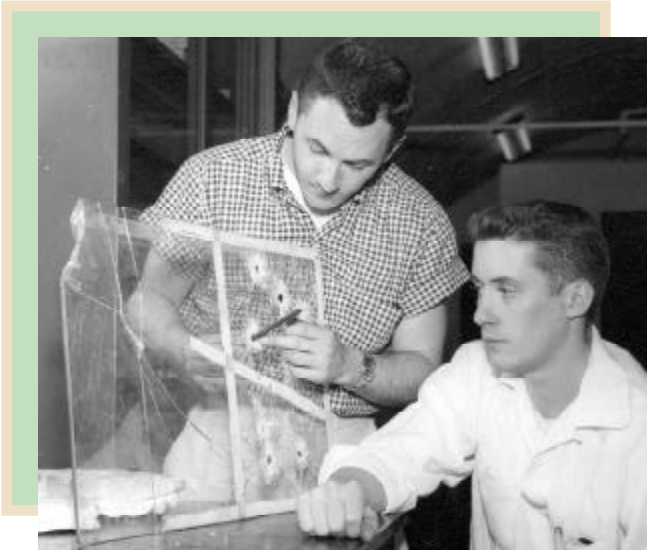
A recognized definition of criminal justice includes a concern for the study of the etiology of crime and its control, the decision network devoted to crime control, and the administration of the many public and private agencies involved in the processing of criminal offenders. The study of crime and its control suggest multifaceted knowledge and skills that constitute a recognized and highly important function of professional higher education at a university. An under-

standing of the criminal justice system (and thus of criminal justice) requires an appreciation of the conflicts of interests and goals among the various parts of the system, as well as a working knowledge of its collaborative and complementary aspects. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to separate out a component of this system and examine it in isolation for to do so would be analogous to a medical school arbitrarily eliminating part of the body from medical study.

Criminal justice knowledge and practice is based on theoretical frameworks adapted from a number of disciplines including, but not limited to, sociology, psychology, political science, economics, and the physical sciences. Its uniqueness is in the synthesis and application of principles drawn from various disciplines which independently do not systematically focus on crime or criminal justice issues.

The interdisciplinary and holistic nature of criminal justice are well reflected in the School's undergraduate and graduate curricula which have long served as models for other educational institutions developing programs in crime related studies. Recent criticism of higher education in criminal justice has centered on the quality of educational programs in terms of faculty, curricula and educational philosophy. The School of Criminal Justice has consistently been evaluated highly on these dimensions, as having a diversified faculty, teaching and conducting research in the broader justice context and embracing an educational philosophy which is professional, multidisciplinary and liberal education based.

The third important contribution to the success of the School of Criminal Justice is the link that the School has, and continues to maintain, between academia and those prac-



ticing criminal justice in the agency world. Such a link is reflected in the School's commitment to improving the quality of criminal justice training.

The training of practitioners is an integral part of the School of Criminal Justice. The training component provides the opportunity for academic theories to be shared with the field. By becoming involved with practitioners, the training component opens the door to agencies for field research and student placement opportunities. The feedback that accompanies both the training and the field work greatly assists the collaborative identification of new problems confronting criminal justice agencies and the refinement of thinking.

Another contribution of the School's training component is the providing of a forum for academic staff to test their thoughts in the field. Training is a mechanism for providing technology transfer and program evaluation, thus up-

grading the practice of criminal justice. The ability of training to attract positive attention to the School is yet another contribution of the training programs. By conducting quality training programs, the national profile of the School continues to be enhanced. In this sense, we have added prestige to past graduates and encouraged other funding sources to support the School's efforts.

A final contribution of the training component of the School's reputation is in its support of recruitment efforts of students. Some persons who may never have considered returning to the university for a degree may be influenced by the training they receive to pursue college level work, and training programs provide for the operational grounding for criminal justice education.

The practicum similarly allows for developing and expanding linkages with the criminal justice field. A substantial number of the School's undergraduate majors characteristically undergo "hands on" experience in criminal justice agencies. Quality assurance mechanisms have been developed and refined to ensure that the experience is closely related to coursework. In the best



sense of the Morrill Act this promotes “liberal and practical education.”

The Status of the School

In addition to the contributions made to the national reputation of the School of Criminal Justice, the School has also been evaluated within the Michigan State University community. In 1971, the School of Criminal Justice was rigorously evaluated and analyzed by the Office of the Provost. The results of this analysis were published in a document entitled Resource Analysis of the School of Criminal Justice. The Analysis identified the School of Criminal Justice as a professional unit and outlined a set of goals and objectives. It recommended that the School “develop as a ‘center of excellence’” which should emphasize “high quality degree programs rather than the production of student credit hours.” It added that the “number of students earning degrees from a high quality program in criminal justice is the primary measure of productivity.” The productivity model developed by the Analysis dictated that “the School of Criminal Justice award an average of 150 bachelor’s and 40 master’s degrees each year.”

We believe that the evidence exists to clearly indicate that the School has met the quantitative and qualitative expectations set for it both by the Analysis Report and by the broader university community. We offer the following as partial evidence in support of this.

In 1979, the Journal of Criminal Justice published a series of articles dealing with the quality of criminal justice education in the United States. An analysis of criminal justice college programs concluded that, “Michigan State University has the highest

‘known reputation’” among the almost 1200 criminal justice programs in the country. The same survey added that, no matter how the data were interpreted, Michigan State University, SUNY-Albany, and Florida State University were consistently ranked as the highest quality programs. Furthermore, in a study conducted by the Joint Commission on Criminology and Criminal Justice Education and Standards, the School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University was consistently ranked as one of the top two programs in the country.

In 1973, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration designated the School of Criminal Justice as a National Center of Excellence in criminal justice. Only 7 schools in the United States received such honors. The School of Criminal Justice was the recipient of over one million dollars from this program. Further, the School is internationally recognized, and has been for 25 years, as the leading center for the study of police and community relations. It is incontestable that a high proportion of graduates of MSU’s School of Criminal Justice today occupy high level, policymaking positions throughout criminal justice.

Student enrollments in the School have proven and continue to be stable. Currently, about 17% of the College’s total number of majors and graduates are from the School of Criminal Justice. These indications of student interest are but one manifestation of the importance of the crime problem to this society and of the School’s educational excellence.

In a recent report from the Office of the Vice-President for Research and Development, the School of Criminal Justice was ranked 15th out of all university departments in the generation of outside research per

FTE. It was reported in that document that in the last three years, the School generated an average of \$37,000 per FTE.

The School has generally met or exceeded all expectations generated out of the Analysis Report concerning the 150 bachelor's and 40 master's graduates per year. The commitment to public service and assistance, conducive with the general missions of a professional school, have led to significant linkages between the School and state and local agencies. Last year alone, public service linkages were established with more than 60 state and local agencies.

The Future of the School

The School of Criminal Justice has a long standing commitment to improving the quality of justice through education, research and public service. Due to the holistic nature of

the School's approach to criminal justice education, it becomes difficult to prioritize its programming or to define distinct programs within the School. To prioritize aspects of criminal justice is to make fragmentary that which must be viewed as unified, and, therefore, the School is in the awkward position of being asked to make decisions which will, no doubt, seriously affect the overall quality of our current system.

Also, and perhaps more to the point, the School of Criminal Justice, having been evaluated throughout the University and the criminal justice academic and operational communities, has consistently demonstrated a level of quality reached by few institutions in the educational enterprise. Such quality considerations serve to identify the strength of the School of Criminal Justice in justice education and the contributions which the School makes directly to the MSU academic community.