

Beyond the Criminal Arena: The Justice Studies Program at Winston-Salem State University

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Abstract

The justice studies program at Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) is designed to produce a new breed of justice practitioners whose understanding of justice and its administration is broadened to include the political, social, economic, and cultural conditions within which issues of crime and punishment are pursued and addressed. While it covers the bases found in criminal justice programs, justice studies at WSSU goes beyond those basics to prepare students to recognize, analyze, and address issues of justice both within and outside the practice of law enforcement. By connecting Department of Social Sciences faculty and students to the university's research, outreach, and training center, the program also emphasizes the many opportunities and positive outcomes inherent in the university's engagement with the broader community.

Introduction

Criminal justice systems are designed to administer justice. In the past, justice was understood primarily to consist of retribution, with offenders often being punished severely in an effort to redress violations of the law (*Allen et al. 2007*). This meant that offenders were punished harshly or imprisoned temporarily while the state thought of the best way to make their victims "whole" again. In the process, administrators of justice hoped that severity of punishment would serve as a deterrent to crime (*Bohm and Haley 2007*). However, in spite of the best efforts of governments to control and obliterate criminal behavior, prisons have been constantly filled and the crime rate has remained a major concern (*Allen et al. 2007*).

In recent years, new insights provided by the humanities and social sciences, especially by Marxists and the postmodernist school of social thought, have led to widespread recognition that political, social, and economic conditions contribute to the escalation of crime and criminal behavior. Furthermore, even the most ruthless and relentless incarceration of those guilty of breaking the law has been insufficient to win the "war on crime." This is

because “justice” is often an ideological concept that reflects the interest of a particular social class, especially one in power (*Harr and Hess 2005*). The result of the dominant class’s ideology of justice is often the state’s habitual violation of the human rights of the poor, women, and racial and ethnic minorities. Then, when these oppressed groups or classes seek to redress the situation, their actions may be construed by law as “criminal.”

In light of these insights, the justice studies program at Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) is designed to produce a new breed of justice practitioners who take a more critical and comprehensive approach to the administration of justice. Students receive more than a technical education in the administration of justice; they are grounded in the social sciences and the liberal arts. In other words, their understanding of justice and its administration is broadened to include the political, social, economic, and cultural conditions within which these issues of crime and punishment are pursued and addressed. The program seeks to expose students to a variety of attempts to define and deconstruct justice, encouraging them to seek new ways of grappling with the enduring issues of justice in society.

Long ago, President Lyndon Johnson’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (*1967*) recognized the importance of this kind of preparation:

It is nonsense to state or assume that the enforcement of law is so simple that it can be done by those unencumbered by the study of liberal arts. Officers of any department should certainly be conversant with the structure of government and its philosophies. They must be well grounded in sociology, criminology, and human relations in order to understand the ramifications of the problems which confront them daily.

Designed to meet standards established for bachelor’s degree programs in criminal justice (*Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences 2005*), justice studies at WSSU goes beyond those standards to prepare students to recognize, analyze, and address issues of justice both within and outside the practice of law enforcement. By connecting Department of Social Sciences faculty and students to the university’s Center for Community Safety, the program also emphasizes the positive outcomes inherent in the university’s engagement with the broader community.

Background and Program Development

Established in 1892 to provide opportunities of higher education to African Americans, WSSU embodies unique components noted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: “Institutions of higher education (IHEs) that serve minority populations are unique both in their missions and in their day-to-day operations” (2003, 10). Referring more specifically to historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), HUD reports, “In addition to offering a host of degree and nondegree programs that help their students improve themselves, HBCUs also have taken aggressive steps to improve their neighborhoods and help local residents improve their lives” (11). Confirming these claims, the University

“[T]he program also emphasizes the positive outcomes inherent in the university’s engagement with the broader community.”

Mission Statement in WSSU’s undergraduate catalog includes this sentence: “While the primary focus is on teaching and learning, the university encourages scholarship and creative activities by faculty and students, and *engages in mutually beneficial relationships with the community in ways that complement its educational mission*” (Winston-Salem State University 2005,

emphasis added). Although similar to other HBCUs in this way, WSSU, as far as we have been able to determine, is the only one of over a hundred HBCUs in the nation that employs a program in justice studies to directly address this part of its mission. Tying the program in the Department of Social Sciences to the Center for Community Safety, which is located in downtown Winston-Salem about two miles from the university campus, furthers that goal.

The WSSU Center for Community Safety, a research, outreach, and training center, was established in 2001 to continue and expand on work begun under the Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative (SACSI). Winston-Salem was one of five original SACSI sites in the nation, supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of North Carolina from 1998 to 2000. The overall strategy promoted a data-driven, community-based partnership approach to solving local problems, and two WSSU faculty members served on the initiative’s local evaluation team. The university established the center in January 2001, with the help of a five-year, \$1.8 million grant from a local foundation, the Kate B.

Reynolds Charitable Trust. The two faculty researchers from the Department of Social Sciences continued their work on SACSI and other projects, holding half-time appointments at the new center. The Winston-Salem Foundation has since granted the university another \$500,000 to help continue the center's operations.

The center's mission is to engage communities in using research strategically to shape action and response to community safety issues. It produces action-oriented research, provides community-mapping workshops using geographic information systems (GIS) software, and facilitates community problem-solving partnerships among criminal justice, social service, civic, community development, faith-based, and neighborhood organizations, as well as individual community residents. It also serves as an internship site for many students, who do research, help organize and publicize community events, and provide direct services under programs that are coordinated or assisted by the center, such as the federally funded Weed and Seed, Project Safe Neighborhoods, and Community Outreach Partnership Centers. Among those students interning at the center will be an increasing number of justice studies majors as the program grows.

Led by the department chair, the justice studies program emerged in WSSU's Department of Social Sciences, which was already home to several other majors. Consistent with this diverse academic context, the program from the beginning was envisioned as an interdisciplinary effort. Several other institutions in the University of North Carolina system, of which WSSU is a part, already had criminal justice programs, but none of them took (or currently takes) a liberal arts approach centered on a broader concept of justice. With the vision in mind and permission from the UNC system, a Social Sciences faculty committee reviewed programs at other colleges and universities and began to design a unique program of study that would be well-suited for Winston-Salem and WSSU. Approved by the department, the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and the university's Academic Standards and Curriculum Committee, the justice studies major gained approval of the UNC Board of Governors and Office of the President during the spring semester of 2005.

The Justice Studies Program

Justice studies majors at WSSU complete several courses whose titles are comparable to those that criminal justice majors take at other universities (see exhibit 1). Among those are three

Exhibit 1. Courses for the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Justice Studies

General Education Core Requirements in bold type

Freshman

Fall Semester			Spring Semester		
ENG 1301	Freshman Comp. 1	3	ENG 1302	Freshman Comp. II	3
MAT 1311	College Math I	3	POS 2311	American Government	3
HIS 1302	World Civilization II	3	ART 1301	Intro to Art or	
HED 1201	Concepts/Fitness & Health	2	MUS 1301	Intro to Music	3
CSC 1306	Computer & Its Use I	3	PED xxxx	Physical Education	1
	Or proficiency	SOC	SOC 2301	General Sociology	3
FYC 1103	Freshman Seminar	1	BIO 1301	General Biology I	3
		15			16

Sophomore

Fall Semester			Spring Semester		
PSY 2301	General Psychology	3	JUS 2302	Writing & Research in Justice Studies I	3
HUM 2310	African-American Culture	3	ENG 2301	World Literature I	3
PHI 2301	Introduction to Philosophy	3	POS 2316	State & Local Government	3
MAT 2326	Elementary Statistics	3	SPH 2341	Fundamentals of Speech	3
JUS 2301	Intro to Justice Studies	3	PHS 2336	Physical Science	4
		15			16

Junior

Fall Semester			Spring Semester		
JUS 3335	Justice Administration	3	JUS 3344	Polit. Economy of Justice or	
JUS 3337	Court Procedure & Evidence	3	JUS 3382	Class, Race, Gender & Just.	3
SOC 3353	Criminology	3	JUS 3310	Police & Community	3
PHI 2302	Contemp. Moral Problems	3	JUS 3345	Strat. Apps. to Comm. Just.	3
	Foreign Language I	3		Foreign Language II	3
		15		Elective	3
					15

Senior

Fall Semester			Spring Semester		
JUS 4342	Technological Analysis	3	JUS 4322	Contemp. Issues in JUS or	
JUS 3361	Juvenile Justice	3	JUS 3342	Comparative Just. Systems	3
JUS 4302	Writing & Research. in Justice Studies II	3	JUS 4391	Internship in Justice Studies	3
JUS 4344	Corrections	3	JUS 3355	Criminal Law	3
	Elective	3		Electives	6
		15			15

TOTAL HOURS: At least 122 semester hours, with a minimum of 42 hours of upper-division courses

that examine the major components of the criminal justice system: Police and Community, Court Procedure and Evidence, and Corrections. They also take Criminal Law and Juvenile Justice. But the first course in the sequence for majors is Introduction to Justice Studies, *not* Introduction to Criminal Justice. Justice Administration addresses issues not confined to criminal justice agencies. Two philosophy courses, Introduction to Philosophy and Contemporary Moral Problems, broaden the students' thinking and push them to think critically. Criminology, which requires the student to have completed an introductory course in sociology, challenges them to consider competing explanations for criminal behavior and patterns of reported crimes and arrests. Writing and Research in Justice Studies I, a sophomore-level course, involves them in seeking deeper understanding of, and writing about, issues of social justice. Foreign language courses provide knowledge and skills that can help them secure and maintain future employment in a variety of justice-related organizations.

Justice studies majors choose between The Political Economy of Justice—examining the history of justice systems and their connections with systems of political and economic power—and Class, Race, Gender and Justice. Depending on personal interests, they take either Comparative Justice Systems—exploring different systems of justice in societies at various stages of development—or Contemporary Issues in Justice Studies. As seniors, justice studies majors take a second research and writing course. They also encounter, as upper-division students, Strategic Approaches to Community Justice, a course not likely to be found in criminal justice programs. This course examines the theory and practice of research-driven, comprehensive, community-based efforts to address local justice-related issues. Students in the course explore methods of community organizing and partnership development, develop their problem-solving skills, and employ insights from research and practice in discussions of how to sustain community-based initiatives.

“The [Center for Community Safety] facilitates such partnerships among all the types of agencies where interns work, and university faculty members conduct research that guides and evaluates partnership efforts.”

After taking an introductory statistics course, justice studies majors have another opportunity that is unusual for undergraduates, especially for those in criminal justice programs: they learn to use geographic information systems (GIS) software in a course called Technological Analysis. This technology allows students to analyze spatial aspects of justice-related issues and literally to see the geographic distribution of relevant variables in maps of their own creation. Currently this course is taught in the Transforming Communities Research Laboratory (TCRL) at the Center for Community Safety, giving the students an on-site opportunity to witness some of the university's research and outreach efforts.

Although a senior-level undergraduate internship is not unusual, justice studies majors at WSSU have a not-so-common chance to be involved in university-community partnerships. Possible internship placements include law enforcement agencies, courts, probation and parole offices, juvenile justice departments, and a wide variety of social service and community-based organizations, as well as the Center for Community Safety itself. Regardless of the placement, partnerships are endemic to the internship. The center facilitates such partnerships among all the types of agencies where interns work, and university faculty members conduct research that guides and evaluates partnership efforts.

The Program in Context

The Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Community Safety Partnership works to make the area safer through the concerted actions of the many different types of organizations listed above (see exhibit 2). While much of the work focuses on reducing crime, law enforcement is only one component of the overall strategy, even in crime-reduction efforts. The process of making the community safer involves neighborhood revitalization, community development work, and assisting ex-offenders who are reentering the community. Such concerns clearly coincide with those of the justice studies program, and the university-community partnership is central to all these efforts on a local level.

For example, the Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) initiative of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development directly connects WSSU with its neighbors. This program, coordinated in Winston-Salem by the Center for Community Safety, focuses activities on three neighborhoods near the university campus. Reflecting the broad-based areas of COPC concern and the center's data-driven approach, the initiative has involved

Exhibit 2. The Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Community Safety Partnership

MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Safety Partnership (CSP) is to make Winston-Salem and Forsyth County a safer place for citizens and visitors.

PRINCIPLES:

- The reduction of violence and the causes and effects on our community facilitates a full-time partnership and commitment by all facets of the community.
- Those partnerships include, but are not limited to, residents, governmental agencies, citizens groups, residents, the faith community, and private businesses.
- The activities of this group will impact the systemic social problems and conflicts that occur in our community and embody short-term and long-term strategies to improve the lives of our citizens and visitors.
- The strategies and programs developed out of these partnerships will better coordinate, deliver, manage and support the core values of this partnership.

GOALS:

1. To coordinate and sustain partnerships between the criminal justice, educational, business, faith, and community service organizations which serve the residents, citizens, and guests in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County.
2. To coordinate the expenditure of both public and private monies and resources to support the programs and initiatives that are endorsed by the partnership, and to develop a unified approach that best leverages the partnership to achieve financial backing for the components and programs.
3. To initiate and shape community response to community safety issues as prioritized by the partnership and supported by research and data.

CORE VALUES:

Integrity—The actions and deeds of the partners are honest and we are accountable in both our actions and deeds.

Community—The community's well-being and the safety of our citizens and visitors is the priority of our decision-making processes.

Partnerships—The CSP commits to building and maintaining partnerships to enhance our safety and achieve positive success in our programs.

Community Diversity—The CSP acknowledges and respects the diversity of the members of our community and are committed to openness and information sharing.

Accountability—The CSP is accountable to the citizens for the actions, deeds, and programs of the partnership. The operational components and programs will have measurable outcomes and will be reported to the community.

Data-Driven—The analysis of data regarding the occurrence of crime, perpetrators, victims, times, and impact to the community and businesses drives all programs and assists the partnership in validation of problems and the setting of priorities for the development projects and goals.

Problem Solving—The development and implementation of problem-solving strategies are utilized by the partnership to best leverage the expertise of the partners. Those strategies will be outcome-oriented and measurable and reportable to the partners and the community.

The Center for Community Safety coordinates the activities of the partners and is responsible to facilitate the implementation of the strategic initiatives and programs of the CSP.

business, education, nursing, occupational therapy, and social sciences students in a variety of community research and service activities.

The research-driven, community-based problem-solving strategy behind WSSU's engagement is illustrated by an ongoing COPC project in the Waughtown/Belview Historic District, in partnership with a local community development corporation (CDC) that focuses on historic preservation and restoration. As a class project, twelve criminology students had developed a survey instrument and completed telephone interviews regarding COPC community residents' perceptions of neighborhood safety and crime, as well as their relationships with police assigned to the neighborhood. Based on that survey, a more focused face-to-face interview protocol was developed for residents and business owners in the historic district, and a social science intern conducted sixty-five interviews. Findings of that survey were used to develop an action plan for involving neighborhood residents in planning and implementing neighborhood revitalization activities. At six community meetings, each attended by twelve to twenty-five neighborhood residents, survey results were presented and additional input was sought from community members. WSSU students assisted with a community day, which brought out eighty-three neighborhood residents, with a community clean-up day, and with workshops focusing on crime prevention, leadership development, and home repairs.

The major change to date is that neighborhood residents have begun to talk and work together to create a community vision, define issues, implement solutions, and find other ways to develop a sense of community. A Neighborhood Watch organization has been reestablished, a memory tree garden is scheduled for dedication in May 2007, and the establishment of a community vegetable garden is under discussion. In response to community concerns, police patrols are more visible. An architectural student from another university interning with the CDC has created drawings of proposed renovations, an AmeriCorps volunteer is researching the history of the community and sources of rehabilitation grants and loans, the neighborhood business association is working with the city on a program designed to revitalize commercial areas, and discussions have begun with a neighborhood church regarding the donation of a lot for the building of a Habitat for Humanity house.

Weed and Seed, an initiative of the U.S. Department of Justice coordinated locally by the Center for Community Safety, is a comprehensive program that provides both research and service opportunities to WSSU students and faculty, particularly those

in justice studies. For five years, this initiative has involved the Community Safety Partnership in activities aimed at “weeding out” crime and “seeding” economic/community development in five Winston-Salem neighborhoods that had been shown by research to have high concentrations of both poverty and crime. The “seeding” component specifically addresses issues of social justice, a major concern in justice studies, through the provision of human services: prevention, intervention, treatment, and neighborhood revitalization.

Many students have served as Weed and Seed interns, providing different types of services that fit within the overall strategy of the center and the justice studies program as they attempt to positively impact the surrounding community. For example, interns assisted with the development of an after-school drug-use-prevention club; served as advisors to an urban 4-H Club, developing a club newsletter and working with youth on a prize-winning booth at the Dixie Classic Fair; and helped plan and implement the first Youth Crime Watch of America (YCWA) Conference in Winston-Salem while helping organize local YCWA chapters in different Weed and Seed neighborhoods.

These Youth Crime Watch activities serve as another illustration of the university’s community impact strategy. Youth Crime Watch of America is a national program that brings youth together to identify and correct problems unique to their communities. YCWA assists these students in developing youth-led programs that encourage “watch out” activities, such as crime reporting, and “help out” activities, such as mentoring and mediation. Once youth and youth advisors are trained in YCWA methods, the youth develop and implement their own programs for their school, neighborhood, public housing site, recreational center, or park. Currently six active YCWA chapters in Winston-Salem meet weekly.

In the three years since the inception of Youth Crime Watch in these public housing communities, over two hundred young people have been members. During this time, no member has been arrested or become pregnant. Members so far have achieved a 100 percent graduation rate, with most going on to college or trade schools. By providing young adult models and reinforcing values of education, leadership, problem solving, helping others, and pride in oneself and one’s community among these youth, WSSU interns contribute to a strengthened Winston-Salem community.

Faculty researchers continue to track specific types of crime in the Weed and Seed neighborhoods and conduct evaluation

activities, providing frequent feedback to the Community Safety Partnership's Executive Committee and Working Group. Those groups, in turn, design and implement actions based on the researchers' findings. Crime trends suggest that the approach is working. From 2000 to 2005, the Weed and Seed neighborhoods experienced a 32.46 percent decline in the twelve types of serious and violent crime on which the initiative focused, while the rest of Winston-Salem saw a drop of 20.68 percent.

Two other faculty members in the Department of Social Sciences are evaluating local efforts being undertaken by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Hope VI program. In Winston-Salem this initiative has involved the removal of deteriorated public housing units in two of the Weed and Seed neighborhoods and the construction of a variety of types of housing, built for residents with a wide range in incomes.

These and numerous other initiatives provide countless opportunities of which justice studies faculty and students will increasingly take advantage as the program grows and graduates enter the job market or pursue graduate education. For those interested primarily in work within the criminal justice arena, research, internship, and future employment opportunities abound. The same is true, perhaps to an even greater extent, for those who want to address issues of justice—and, of course, injustice—within social, economic, and political realms. Regardless of the arena of interest, justice studies majors are preparing to take a set of problem-solving skills and critically thought-out strategies into the world of work and lifelong learning.

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