Letter from the Chair, Brian K. Payne, PhD

It is an exciting time to be a part of the Department of Criminal Justice at Georgia State University. Whether as a professor, staff member, or student, together we are witnessing the wonders of change as we watch the department continue to grow and develop as one of the premiere criminal justice programs in the nation. Consider that a recent study ranked our department eighth in the nation in terms of the number of scholarly publications in top journals per faculty member. With more than 1,000 criminal justice programs across the United States, this is no small feat! In fact, among non-PhD granting programs, the department ranks second in the nation on this measure of research productivity. Beyond publishing their research, faculty members continue to receive federal, state, and private funds to conduct groundbreaking research that is of value to the discipline, policy makers, the community, and students. Without a doubt, faculty members represent some of the top scholars in their areas of expertise.

What sets the department apart from many other research-oriented departments is the commitment of the faculty to teaching. Although I have only recently begun my role as chair, I have already witnessed the great lengths that faculty will go to make sure their students are appropriately challenged and educated. Certainly, the Department includes some of the best teachers any criminal justice student could hope for. While courses are demanding by design, the pay off for students cannot be understated.

As you read this newsletter, you will notice all that is going on in your department. This is a department of which you can be quite proud, and I hope you will take to heart this commitment to teaching. With a professor, staff member, or student, together we are working to increase international cooperation in the area of homeland security and promote shared experiences of best practices.

Faculty Accomplishments

Dr. Brenda Blackwell was appointed to the American Society of Criminology’s Ad Hoc Teaching Committee. As part of this committee, Dr. Blackwell is helping to lead an international effort to compile syllabi for introductory criminal justice courses offered at colleges and universities across the world.

Dr. Dean Dabney was named editor of the Criminal Justice Review and International Criminal Justice Review. He also is working on his singing career.

Dr. Mary Finn was recently appointed Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness. Dr. Finn will be responsible for overseeing Academic Program Review and Assessment, Administrative and Support Unit Review and Assessment, Institutional Research, Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, Decision Support Services, and reporting as is necessary for SACS accreditation.

Dr. Robert Friedmann was named the Distinguished Chair of Public Safety Partnerships. In this role, Dr. Friedmann will promote efforts to better understand crime and terrorism. As Distinguished Chair, he will also continue to develop international cooperation in the area of homeland security and promote shared experiences of best practices.

Dr. Richard Terrill has announced he will retire at the end of the fall semester. Dr. Terrill plans to develop products similar to the 3M post-it notes and create an amusement park.

Dr. Volkan Topalli continues to work on his research funded by the National Science Foundation. This research includes interviews with offenders living in disadvantaged areas of Atlanta. As with his past research using this methodology, Dr. Topalli’s research promises to make a valuable contribution.

Dr. Barbara Warner completed an intensive training program that resulted in her being registered as a dispute resolution mediator for the Georgia Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution. In addition to being able to provide her mediation skills to local agencies, Dr. Warner will also use the skills acquired from this training to guide her nationally-recognized research on informal control, social disorganization, and the urban community.

Something for CJ Majors to Think About

To many criminal justice majors, criminal justice careers are particularly exciting because of the personal rewards and challenges that go along with the daily activities of criminal justice professionals. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, many individuals prefer these jobs because “criminal justice professionals in many agencies may retire with a pension after 25 or 30 years of service, allowing them to pursue a second career while still in their 40s or 50s.” Jobs are available in the private sector and at all levels of government. Competition is higher for state and federal positions. The BLS notes that applicants with college degrees “should have the best opportunities.” Some undergraduates use their Bachelor’s degree as a foundation for graduate school or law school. As criminologist Todd Clear notes, “Criminal justice is an area where knowledge directly pays off in quality of life.” To some, using the knowledge you gain to make the community a better place is not a privilege, it is a duty.
From CJSA President, Ryan Fausett...

The Criminal Justice Student Association ended a very successful 2006-2007 year with the spring career fair. Approximately 160 students had the opportunity to meet and network with representatives from 24 local, state, and federal agencies. Numerous fields were represented including courts, corrections, law enforcement, and even academic units from the GSU and John Marshall law school.

As we enter the 2007-2008 academic year, we plan to outdo ourselves. Planning for this year's career fair has already begun. Our goal is to increase the number of students who participate as well as the number of agencies. In addition to the career fair, the CJSA is inviting many criminal justice professionals to our campus this semester. These talented individuals will give students insight into their careers that may not be conveyed in a classroom.

Speakers will include representatives from local police agencies, the United States Secret Service, and the District Attorney's Office. If you have anyone you would like to see at these events, please feel free to contact the CJSA and we will do our best to make it happen.

While the primary objective of the CJSA is to provide career opportunities to CJ students, we hold other events as well. We are hosting the Welcome Back reception with the CJ department this fall. Faculty members will give students an overview of how the class schedule is created to aid students in planning for upcoming semesters. We may also sponsor a CJSA team paintball event and a visit to the Army Criminal Investigation Division at Fort McPherson, among many other things.

All of this cannot be done without the membership of CJ students. Membership requirements in our organization are simple. We require a 2.0 GPA and a $15 membership fee. These fees are used to defray the costs of the career fair and other events we host during the academic year. If you are interested in joining, simply send us an email at cjsa@gsu.edu. We will provide you with general information, answer any questions you might have, and advise you of our next meeting date. We look forward to hearing from you.

Mark your calendars...

A welcome back reception for CJ students will be held September 10th from 12:30-2:00 in the West Exhibit Area of the Second Floor in Urban Life. Light refreshments will be provided.

A graduate reception for December Criminal Justice graduates will be held December 13th from 1:00-3:30 in the Lucerne Suite in the Student Center. Graduating seniors and guests are invited. The event will be sponsored by CJSA, the Department, and CJ alumni.

The Career Scene Investigations: Careers in Criminal Justice panel discussion will be held November 8th from 12:30 to 2:00 in University Center Room 245. Professionals and professors will discuss careers in criminal justice. This event is co-sponsored by University Career Services and CJSA.

The last day to apply for Spring 2008 internships is September 15. The general group meeting for students who plan to enroll in CRJU 4930/4940 for Spring 2008 will be October 12th from 1:00 to 3:30. Students must apply for Summer 2008 internships by January 15. The general group meeting for students who plan to enroll in CRJU 4930/4940 for Summer 2008 will be March 14th from 1:00-3:30.

Name the Newsletter...

This newsletter needs a name. Any ideas? Please submit them to Jessica Ekhomu (crijle@langate.gsu.edu). A committee will select the best entry and name the newsletter. This isn’t like naming a baby. The winner will receive a free lunch with the newsletter committee. Who ever got a free lunch for naming a baby?

Congratulations to the undergraduate students receiving awards on Honor’s Day last Spring:

Dean’s Scholarship Key--Steven D. Anthony, John F. Auers, Mark Edelson, Jessica L. Ekhomu, Bradley D. Etterle, Heath J. Hayes, Azra Mufic, William E. Reynolds

Faculty Scholarship Award--Jessica L. Ekhomu, Bradley D. Etterle, James Won Kim

Undergraduate Academic Honor Award--Heath Hayes

Dr. James L. Maddex Scholarship--Jessica L. Ekhomu

Greater Atlanta Chapter of the ASIS Scholarship-- Robert B. Wilbanks

Larry E. Quinn Memorial Award--William E. Reynolds

Phil Peters Memorial Scholarship--Stacy S. Ekmark

From the Research Arena...

Dr. Timothy Brezina is working on research challenging stereotypes of Hurricane Katrina evacuees. To explain the large number of residents who did not evacuate in time, some commentators allege that many of these residents were dependent on welfare, suffered from a dependency-induced “mentality of helplessness,” and waited on others to act responsibly. Such views have contributed to the stereotype of storm evacuees as lazy, irresponsible, and prone to criminal behavior. To gauge the plausibility of the welfare dependency account, Dr. Brezina used data from the Survey of Hurricane Katrina Evacuees to examine the characteristics of New Orleanians who were trapped in the flooded city. The findings indicate that, contrary to the expectations of welfare dependency theorists, most of the New Orleans evacuees in question were employed full-time before the storm and most displayed initiative after the disaster. It appears that the incomplete evacuation was, in part, a story about the working poor in New Orleans. Many of the residents in question lacked private vehicles and were unable to flee the storm, while others underestimated the severity of the storm.

From the Classroom...

Students in Dr. Wendy Pogorzelski’s Crime and Media class became film artists this past spring. Students worked in small groups to create a 20-minute multi-media presentation about a crime and media topic of their choice. Students used GSU’s Digital Aquarium, the only multimedia computer lab open to all students regardless of their field of study. Students were proud of their projects and the feedback received was overwhelmingly positive. One student commented, “This was a great experience and my skill level has increased especially in communication and technology.” Echoing this sentiment, another student said, “The Digital Aquarium is awesome! This project helped us learn more about how crime is portrayed in the media.” The final products were creative, professional, incorporated research and course materials, and covered pertinent issues such as human trafficking, violence and video games, violence and the objectification of women in music, and methamphetamine.

Dr. Sue Carter Collins is leading the departmental effort to assess learning outcomes in criminal justice courses. Part of this effort includes changes in the way courses are delivered. To enhance student development, the Department is exposing students to a range of diverse but rigorous critical thinking and writing activities in various courses. The ultimate aim is to provide an opportunity for graduating seniors to integrate and apply their critical thinking and writing skills in a professional setting.
Students Speak Out, Jessica L. Ekmoun, Senior  
(editor’s note—Jessica is a student employee in the department)

When you first walk into the Criminal Justice department, more often than not you will encounter Mary Mason, who serves as the messenger of the department’s policies. Mary has been extremely helpful in making new adjustments, including ones when she got covered in ink while teaching me a crash course on Changing Copy Machine Toner for Dummies, among several other occasions where she’s helped me. I have also seen how Anita Stewart runs the show from behind closed doors. Because I work in close proximity with the faculty members, and have even traveled with many of them, I hold a different perspective than many students. However, it comes through twice as much schooling as some, and has had twice as much practice as others; basically, she knows her stuff, and expects students to grasp it too. While she has high expectations, as expressed through her tough demeanor, I agree with one student who said that “her bark is worse than her bite.” She is one of the most helpful and caring professors in the department, and simply desires to see her students succeed. Dr. Dean Danby is known to have a fun class, and is respected as an interesting professor. As a student of his, I enjoy his cynical sarcasm, and as my new boss, I appreciate how knowledgeable he is about the CJ field, and the scholars in it. Some students commented that Dr. Mark Reed is “very good” and “very knowledgeable.” I can say that he is very thorough and informative, and he has high credentials—which is enough to earn my respect. Dr. Tim Brezina is most certainly viewed as an intelligent and firm professor. Dr. Brenda Blackwell may have a reputation of being hard, but the students commented on how she’s actually very nice, helpful, and caring. The classes that she teaches are difficult in and of themselves (esp. statistics), which causes students to view her as a poor teacher. However, she is a sweetheart—she is the most sincerely concerned professors in the department. She has always made every effort to help me and other students succeed. Dr. Volkan Topalli is known for his cell phone policy: if a student’s phone rings in class, it is confiscated; if his phone rings, he buys pizza for the class. Dr. Topalli is arguably one of the busiest and most active professors in the department, and everyday he is gaining more notoriety in the field. His obligations are seemingly never-ending. On several occasions, though, I’ve asked him to review papers for my own classes and he has been helpful with all of these requests. Dr. Brian Payne’s reputation as a student advocate certainly precedes him. He doesn’t think the degree of the day is the be-all and end-all of the college experience, and he expresses his interest in student opinions (hence, this column) and student success. Dr. Barbara Warner’s reputation certainly precedes her, also. The students agree that she is a very knowledgeable and an overall good professor, and they also agree that she offers help when needed. Perhaps because of my sampling strategy, the students in this survey didn’t have much experience with Dr. Mary Finn, but I know her as a very kind and respectable professional. She’s extremely refined in her manerisms, but commands all ears and respect in the classroom. Similarly, because she is new to the university, Dr. Sue-Ming Yang was fairly unknown to the students. I have, however, heard from other professors at other universities that coming from the University of Maryland, Dr. Yang surely knows her material. Dr. Robert Friedmann also was not commented on by this group of students, though I was initially intimidated by him, more than anyone else, upon arriving to the department. I don’t know if it was the red carpet, or his tough reputation from other students, but I steered clear of him for a long time. However, I’ve actually had very positive interactions with Dr. Friedmann, and I respect him as a very dignified, intelligent individual. Many students know Dr. Richard Terrill as the “Terrible Terrill,” because he is known to be strict and extremely knowledgeable about everything (so, you can’t “bull-crap” any information on papers or tests). Despite this intimidating nickname, students think he is a wonderful professor. As one of my personal favorites, I can’t even begin to explain his impact and importance on my education and on the education of other students in the department. I have always known Dr. Terrill to wear many hats. Not only has he been my academic advisor, but he’s also been my boss and a personal advisor on countless occasions. He has played a huge role in helping students to succeed, and has always injected a sense of reality and responsibility into us. Also, Dr. Terrill knows everybody! He has built such a great reputation around the University, the state, the country, and even the world, and this breadth of experience has added so much to the department over the years. As students, we’re truly lucky to have him as a part of the CJ faculty, and he will certainly be missed when he retires.

I cannot encourage you enough to get to know your faculty. Doing so will certainly help make your CJ experience a valuable one!

Interested in Graduate School?

Crime and criminal justice are at the forefront of national policy and practice. The increasing emphasis on professional preparation in criminal justice careers places additional academic demands on the in-service professional. To meet this need, Georgia State University’s Department of Criminal Justice offers a Master of Science degree in Criminal Justice. The master’s degree in criminal justice represents a broad range of study designed to meet the academic needs of both pre-professional students and those already employed in the wide range of agencies that make up the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems. The two-year program focuses on the preparation of criminal justice professionals with advanced competencies in their respective specialties and areas of interest and emphasizes excellence in practice, problem-solving, critical thinking, inquiry, and leadership.

Graduate student funding, scholarships, and financial aid are available in the department. For more information about the master’s degree program, admission requirements, and graduate funding, go to the department’s web site at: www.cjgsu.net. The deadline for Spring 2008 admission is September 15, 2007 and the deadline for Fall 2008 admission is May 15, 2008. Please feel free to contact Dr. Mark D. Reed, the graduate coordinator, by telephone (404-413-1034) or e-mail (mreed@gsu.edu) with any questions about the program or application process.

Free Library Help from Lyn Thaxton

Sometimes being a Criminal Justice major can be a real challenge. It’s possible that you may have assignments that require you to locate statistics on domestic violence in Atlanta, find federal and state court cases related to the use of deadly force by police, and compile a literature review of scholarly articles on restorative justice. Furthermore, your professor tells you not to rely on Google! Instead, you’re instructed to use government documents, newspaper articles, and peer-reviewed journals. Before you tear your hair out and/or change your major to Ceramics, I suggest a consultation with me, the library subject specialist for the Criminal Justice Department.

A major part of my job as Behavioral Sciences Liaison is to assist students in their academic research. I maintain office hours in the department on Thursday from 2:00 to 4:00 in 1206 Urban Life. You can drop by during this time. If you need an appointment at a different time, please e-mail me at lthaxton@gsu.edu (preferred communication method). I can call you at 404-413-3000. I will be happy to help you find out what your topic is and when you are available. In addition, I’ve compiled a Research Guide of basic resources to get you started with your research. This guide is available at: http://www.library.gsu.edu/research/liason.asp?ID=13.

I hope to see you soon!
Faculty Spotlight, Sue-Ming Yang, PhD

There are two fundamental principles that can describe my career trajectory up to this point. First, it is my belief that you can always change. I have always been interested in human behavior, especially deviant behavior that involves abnormal personalities, outlawed behaviors and violence since I was young. Yet I was encouraged to choose the science track in high school due to my good performance in math and physics. When I got into college, I picked Psychology to be my major and was particularly interested in bio–psychology. I even took courses like Animal Classification, Ecology of Whales and Physiology to help me understand the beauty of natural science. Upon graduation from college, I then was awarded a fellowship for a graduate degree in Criminology. I had no idea what criminology was about back then but the attraction of the fellowship motivated me to give it a try. That was the first turning point of my career. During the 3 years of graduate school, I struggled to get a balance between psychology and criminology. I also turned into a qualitative researcher and started to explore the subjective nature of social reality. That was the second turning point.

The second fundamental principle describing my career trajectory is that no matter what, a hidden trait always predisposes you to move in a pre-determined direction. Upon graduation, I was not sure whether I wanted to stay in criminology or go back to psychology. At that time, the Government of Taiwan awarded me a full fellowship for three years to encourage me to pursue further education in Criminology. I decided to take the opportunity and move on to work on my doctoral degree at the University of Maryland in College Park. By this time, my career trajectory was far away from where I was in high school. I never thought of being a criminologist... rather I dreamt of being a space scientist or a biologist!

My time in graduate school in Maryland was the third biggest change in my career--another major turning point. I started to work with my mentors David Weisburd and Cynthia Lum. Their passion for research and their insistence on conducting rigorous research inspired me and motivated me. I found my love of criminology. I re-discovered the attractiveness of studying deviant behavior. I also went back to my numbers and equations and become a very quantitative-oriented researcher.

Looking back to my past years I thought that I’ve redirected my pathway away from where I wanted to be. It seems like any decision you make can be a turning point for your career. While I felt that I was walking farther and farther away from my dream, the fate (or my subconscious) has brought me back to my starting point. Now I am a quantitative criminologist studying deviant behavior with scientific methods. These two principles, changes and continuity, have characterized two different aspects of my life course. After graduating from the University of Maryland, I accepted a position at Georgia State University. I am very excited to see where my career path will lead me from this point forward!

Recent Faculty Publications (Selected)


Ongoing Externally Funded Research Projects

Several faculty members are beginning or continuing work on funded research projects. Drs. Finn and Blackwell are working on a project, funded by the National Institute of Justice, focusing on child exploitation. Dr. Friedmann is working on a project, also funded by the National Institute of Justice, that is designed to improve the quality of crime data. Dr. Topalli is working on projects funded by the Centers for Disease Control and the National Science Foundation. Dr. Pogorzelski received funding to study the Dekalb County Drug Court. Collectively, these funded projects provided several opportunities for graduate students and are promoting understanding about the specific issues addressed by each scholar.