Letter from the Chair, Brian K. Payne, PhD

A few months ago my daughter left a note to the tooth fairy under her pillow. The note read verbatim, “Dear Toth Fairy. Here is my toth. You can have it if you give me a laptop. If you don’t give me a laptop, you can’t have it. Love, Chloe.” The tooth fairy never gave her the laptop, instead choosing to give my daughter five dollars. (Incidentally, my wife was hoping the tooth fairy would write back, “Dear Chloe, No deal. Tooth Fairy.”). Chloe’s note reminds me of the importance of writing. Just in the second grade, she already is recognizing the value of writing as a communication tool.

Our newsletter is intended to represent the value of using writing to communicate. It is our hope that you will find what is written on these pages to be of interest. We are proud of our Department and we hope you are too.

Applying Knowledge in the Field

Super maximum (or “supermax”) facilities exist within prisons or as independent units to house those inmates who are particularly aggressive and/or violent. These facilities have been established in at least 46 states and go by many names. In Georgia, they are called “special management units.” Current research suggests that inmates placed in supermax facilities usually remain there until someone more aggressive and violent comes along and space is needed to accommodate him/her. The less violent inmate is returned to the general prison population and the more violent inmate takes his or her place.

This semester, in a partnership with the Georgia Department of Corrections, Dr. Sue Collins and her Organization and Management Theory students (Shari Gadson, Meredith Knowles, Caroline Daniel, Beverly Reece, and Tanesha Sims) and one much appreciated volunteer and GSU alum (Joshua Bryd) will conduct a national study of supermax prisons to identify criteria used to determine when and how prisoners successfully exit these high security environments.

The five highly motivated students will assess existing literature and design and conduct a study to identify the “best practices” in this area. The students will administer surveys to wardens, counselors, and other prison and corrections officials. The resulting data will be used to assist the GDOC in establishing an effective and safe exit strategy for inmates leaving supermax facilities and rejoining the general prison population and/or society.

This study is the first of its kind and has the potential to make the State of Georgia’s exit strategy for special management units a model for the nation. The students will present their research to GDOC officials on Wednesday, December 3, 2008. Information about the time and location will be forthcoming. Interested faculty and students are invited to attend.

Faculty News

The Department is pleased to welcome three new assistant professors (Drs. Leah Daigle, Lisa Muftic, and Brent Teasdale) and two visiting assistant professors (Professor Sandra Blount and Dr. Ranee McEntire) to the department. For more information, check out their bios on the Department website (www.cjgsu.net).

Dr. Wendy Guastaferro was selected as a Center for Teaching and Learning Research Fellow at Georgia State. In this capacity, she will be meeting with others at CTL to discuss research on teaching and develop different research projects. This is the first year of the fellowship program. Guastaferro also co-authored a grant proposal to fund a second track in the DeKalb County Drug Court. SAMHSA funded the proposal and Guastaferro will serve as the evaluator for the program for the next three years.

Dr. Sue-Ming Yang was awarded a subcontract to support her terrorism research. The subcontract was awarded by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START).

Dr. Leah Daigle was recently named, in a Journal of Criminal Justice Education article, one of the top female scholars graduating from criminal justice/criminology programs.

Dr. Volkkan Topalli moderated a panel of crime experts at a middle Georgia forum sponsored by the 100 Black Men of Macon-Middle Georgia. Participants on the panel included U.S. Senator Saxby Chambliss, Department of Juvenile Justice Commissioner Albert Murray, and Department of Corrections Commissioner James Donald.

Dr. Dean Dabney co-authored a reader titled Prisons and Jails: A Reader (published by McGraw Hill). Dr. Dabney has also made progress on his singing career.

Dr. Barbara Warner was named the new graduate program coordinator for the Master’s program.

Drs. Brenda Blackwell and Mark Reed were elected to Georgia State University’s Faculty Senate. Dr. Reed was also named the College’s representative on the University’s Institutional Review Board.

Dr. Robbie Friedmann, director of the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange, worked with the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia to convene a special briefing, titled "Terrorism: Understand, Predict and Counter," to 140 police and homeland security command staff. As well, Dr. Friedmann hosted a delegation of London officials to increase awareness about the security of the Atlanta 1996 Olympic Games and the 2004 G-8 Summit. Dr. Friedmann was also the recipient of the University’s Exceptional Service Award, given at the Spring 2008 commencement exercises.

Dr. Brian Payne received the Southern Criminal Justice Association’s Educator of the Year Award.
**CJ and the Community, Dean Dabney, PhD**

The Freshmen Learning Community (FLC) program has been in existence at Georgia State University since 1999. This cohort-based model for the first year experience places 25 incoming freshmen in the same five classes in an effort to acclimate them to college and introduce them to a prospective area of study. The Department of Criminal Justice began offering the "Crime; Society's Response" FLC in the Fall 2001. Our version of the program uses a combination of field trips to local justice agencies and follow-up assignments to help introduce students to university life and the local criminal justice system. Faculty members assigned classes in the FLC work together to coordinate assignments and develop a collective vision for how students will grow academically in their first term at GSU. For example, after being schooled on how to systematically observe social environments, students are taken on field trips to local courts, correctional facilities, police academies, and/or civil rights museums and asked to ply their new found observational skills. They are then challenged to relate what they saw in the real world to what they are reading about in their various criminal justice and political science classes and produce short papers or oral presentations to articulate these connections. An ongoing evaluation of this program shows that students benefit greatly from the experience, outperforming other students in the major and incoming class in terms of GPA, retention rates, and overall satisfaction. We are so pleased with the results that this year we decided to become the first department on campus to replicate the model beyond the first year experience. In particular, we created a Sophomore Learning Community (SLC) designed to acclimate new majors, especially transfer students, to our department and the academic study of crime and justice.

The SLC ensures that new majors learn the ropes of the department and also get a sizable chunk of their required courses out of the way on the front end of their tenure at GSU. Faced with mounting evidence thatmajors foolishly put off until the last possible term those courses that they perceive to be the most difficult, we developed a program that heads off this unwise course of action and does so with a tried-and-true cohort-based format to enhance orientation and learning outcomes. During the fall semester, the SLC cohort gets enrolled in a couple of the "tougher" courses such as our theory and research methods courses. Students also enroll in a prosemear class, where faculty members stop by to introduce their research interests and explain to the students the policies, procedures, and expectations that guide the department. In the spring of the same academic year, the same cohort of students are enrolled in another sampling of required courses, including statistics—which will include supplemental instruction to help students overcome their fears and complications with the subject matter. We are watching the progress of this new program closely and are optimistic that it will generate the same sort of positive scholastic outcomes that we have seen with the FLC.

**“Dead by 25, So Who Cares?”: CJ Faculty Explore the Roots of Youth Violence**

Professors Timothy Brezina and Volkan Topalli recently completed a multi-methods study that explores the link between extreme fatalism and violent behavior among young people. Working with GSU economist Erdal Tekin, the team analyzed national survey data and conducted in-depth interviews with active offenders from the streets of Atlanta. Their findings highlight a troubling fact about some of our nation’s youth: many feel their future is uncertain and some do not believe they will live to see age 25. This sense of "futurelessness," in turn, is associated with an increased likelihood of criminal behavior, including theft, assault, and robbery. Due to the pervasive threat of violence that exists in their neighborhoods, including frequent shootings and stabbings, the young men they interviewed accepted the prospect of an early death. They believed they could die at any time. As a result, they thought it was "a waste" to think about the future and that it was important to "get mine now."

The prospect of an early death also fostered the attitude that "there was little else to lose," making these young men fearless and unflinching in the face of danger and the potential consequences of a criminal lifestyle. In the future, Brezina and Topalli plan to study the origins of extreme fatalism in the hopes that such research will suggest ways to combat bleak perceptions among young people and, ultimately, reduce youth violence.

**2008 Scholarships and Awards**

**Dean's Scholarship Key**
Carmela Agnone, Matteo Amato, Erin Anderson, John Auers, Daniel Biber, Danielle Early, Mark Edelson, Jessica Ekhomu, Stacy Ekmark, Chad Gwin, Elizabeth Haren, Meredith Knowles, Michael Kresse, Bradley Latham, Erohwon Ogbemudia, Benjamin Perry, Pamela Peynado, Danny Tedesco, Robert Wilbanks

**Faculty Scholarship Award**
Jessica Ekhomu, Stacy Ekmark, Robert Wilbanks

**Chris Perrin Memorial Scholarship**
Jamie Moon

**Larry E. Quinn Memorial Award**
Tina Miller

**Graduate Academic Award**
W. Jordan Cannon, Keri Fox, Patrice Hill, William Trivelpiece

**James L. Maddex, Jr. Scholarship**
Tyler Gayan

**Phil Peters Scholarship**
Yolanda Faulk, Ryan Fausett, Erinn Perry, Laura Ryan, Alyssa Stewart

**Southern Criminal Justice Association, Outstanding Undergraduate Student Award**
Jessica Ekhomu

**Andrew A. Mickle Outstanding Instructor Award**
Dr. John Rickicki
One event that stands out was an aggravated assault trial I witnessed in early June. The defendant attempted to plead insanity, which was rejected by the jury. The following morning, the criminal trial began. The prosecutor brought the victim on the stand and began questioning her. She alleged the defendant (her ex-boyfriend) had gotten high on narcotics and abducted her at gunpoint after she had broken up with him.

The defendant then proceeded to a parking lot at 3:00 a.m., where he dragged her out of the car, shot her in the head, and then quickly departed the area. However, the defendant made two critical errors. First, the angle at which he shot her caused the bullet to enter the side of her cheek, and exit directly out of her open mouth. This made the shot non-fatal and left her with, miraculously, no permanent injuries. She used the opportunity to play dead, which was enough to fool the defendant. The second error he made was not being aware of his surroundings. The entire act was captured on a Wal-Mart parking lot surveillance camera, which was shown to a horrified jury.

The jury found him guilty in under an hour, and the case moved towards sentencing. In a final effort to avoid facing responsibility, the defendant claimed he was having a heart attack, and needed immediate medical attention. He was hauled off on a stretcher, and his sentencing was delayed.

While the aforementioned case was simplistic in determining innocence or guilt, many cases fell into a serious gray area, or failed the people it was meant to protect. I saw case after case where the criminal justice system did not do its job, or was unfair to a defendant. Thankfully, the judges involved were wise enough to exercise mercy through their discretion to compensate for the lapses within the law. There were also a select few instances when the court applied just the opposite. One crime was so abhorrent that the judge rejected a plea agreement from the prosecutor and gave the defendant the maximum length of incarceration.

It was great to break away from a desk, and see many of the topics discussed by my professors actually play out in an actual courtroom. There are numerous other stories I could share, but the constraints of this newsletter won’t allow that. It is also important to note that while the rumors of the seminar having a near absurd amount of workload are true, the majority of the class is done online. This gives you extra time to compensate for the additional tasks. Of course, that is assuming you actually make use of the time given to you, and do not spend it with your Xbox, or at the bar. For those of you who plan to graduate soon, I would encourage you to begin thinking about which agency you want to intern with. The choices are numerous (well over 200), and provide you with many opportunities, including the possibility of a JOB. Take the internship seriously and make the most of it, as it could very well be the most important "class" you take in the program. After all, it can provide a gateway to getting your career off the ground. Isn’t that why you went to college? To learn more about your future internship, you should attend the Department’s Internship Fair on December 2nd at 4:30 on the second floor of Urban Life. You won’t regret it!

CJSA Wants You, Laura Ryan
As we settle into the fall semester, I would first like to welcome everyone back. I hope you all had a fantastic summer and it is now time to hit the ground running! I am pleased to inform you about the upcoming events that will be hosted by the Criminal Justice Student Association. We are aiming at a variety of events, each of which will cover a different branch of the Criminal Justice system, in addition to a Career Fair that will be held in February. In addition to events focusing on criminal justice careers, we will also be hosting an event dedicated solely to non-traditional Criminal Justice occupations because contrary to popular belief, there is more to Criminal Justice than being a cop!

Our Judicial Forum was a real hit last spring both with the guest judges as well as the attendees. The CJSA anticipates that this year’s Judicial Forum will take place in March. Our biggest and most important event for most of you will be the Career Fair. The projected date for this event is Thursday, February 26, 2009. The room is not yet set in stone so I will keep everyone posted as to when it is finalized. The Career Fair will have representatives present from all three branches of the Criminal Justice field for your convenience. The agencies will cover local, state, and federal levels of government positions. If there is any agency that you have a particular interest in, please send an email to the address below and let me know. I would strongly recommend that you mark the calendar for this event. Agencies have been known to recruit students from our Career Fair and offer them a job upon graduation. We must keep in mind that the agencies are present for us.

I’m sure many of you are wondering how to obtain information regarding these activities and the Career Fair. The easiest way for both of us is for you to go to the Student Life and Leadership website: www.gsu.edu/studentlifeandleadership. Choose the Student Organizations tab on the left side of the page and scroll down to the CJSA link. Click on the Request Info link and simply provide your panther I.D. number, name, a phone number, and your email address. This will allow me to add you to the email list where you will receive an email with any and all updates pertaining to CJSA events, news, etc. If you have a question or comment, feel free to send an email to cjsa@gsu.edu.

I hope to see you throughout the year at these events and at the Career Fair in the spring. As George Santayana once said, “Even the wisest mind has something yet to learn.” Best of luck to all of you in your academic endeavors!
Faculty Spotlight, Brent Teasdale, PhD

Transition points always provide opportunities for reflection. In writing this column, I have reflected on the sequence of events that brought me here to Georgia State. In criminology and criminal justice, we often talk about concepts like deterrence, which rely on a rational choice framework. The idea of rationality (even bounded rationality) suggests that we are agentic; we make decisions based on the information provided to us. Thus, consequences of our actions are ultimately our responsibility, as we made the decisions to act. Reflecting on my own trajectory yields some negative support for the notion of rational choice.

My career trajectory goes back to childhood. My mom has been a first and second grade school teacher for forty years. I remember being a child and thinking about how hard she worked, how little she was appreciated, and (from what she told me) how little she got paid. I decided then that I would never be a teacher. So much for rationality-- I evidently behaved contrary to that decision.

Next, I enrolled at California State University, Sacramento. I started college intending to be a lawyer. My first semester of college, I took Introduction to Criminal Justice. I found the course uninteresting and I earned a B, one of my lowest grades in college. Consequently, I changed majors from Criminal Justice to Psychology. Eventually, I completed degrees in Sociology and Psychology. At that point, I intended to be a social psychologist- definitely not a scholar of criminal justice. I think there is a saying about good intentions and a road that leads down.

After completing my undergraduate degrees, I attended the Pennsylvania State University. It was there that I met Eric Silver. Dr. Silver studied criminology. In particular he was interested in the relationship between mental illness and violence. I worked for Dr. Silver for four years. During that time, I became fascinated with criminological theory, the community contexts of crime, and the relationship between mental illness and violence.

While enduring the harsh winters of central Pennsylvania, it occurred to me that I very much wanted to go home to sunny California, upon graduation. So after completing my doctoral studies at Penn State, I, of course, took a job as an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Akron, in Ohio. Ohio, having sunny weather just like my native California was obviously the right choice, so I spent the past four years researching and teaching there.

Which brings me to Atlanta. I moved to Georgia around the first of August – in the middle of the humidity, which was clearly another good decision in a long line of intentional, rational decision making. Hopefully this column has provided you with some information about me, how I got here, and maybe my perspective on rational choice theory. All joking aside, I am excited to be a part of the Department of Criminal Justice and Georgia State University.

Looking back, I can see the wonderful experiences and opportunities that serendipity has afforded me. In many ways the events of my life have been better than what I could have planned. Thank goodness plans go awry! I believe this is another one of those moments where I have had the unexpected good fortune of being in the right place at the right time. I think it is an exciting time to be in this department, this university, and this city. I look forward to the next things serendipity will bring: meeting you in classes and around the department.

The Alumni Have Spoken--Results of the Alumni Survey, Andrew Manaois

Recently, a survey was sent to a random sample of Georgia State University Criminal Justice alumni. The purpose of the survey was to measure the level of satisfaction past students have of various departmental areas. After brief education and employment sections respondents were asked various questions related to preparation, development, and overall satisfaction of the CJ department. Alumni rated various aspects of their education on a scale reflective of a grading scale (from zero to four or F to A).

Alumni rated the department strongly in the area of overall satisfaction. The department was rated highly for the development of an understanding of the justice system and the law within that system. Average satisfaction in these areas was 3.54 and 3.44. Alumni felt their CJ education prepared them to think critically and analytically. The average satisfaction for this measure was 3.42. A final area of departmental strength was the quality of instruction within the major. The average level of satisfaction with the faculty is 3.45. Results will allow the Department of Criminal Justice to institute change based on the strengths and weaknesses identified by past students.

The alumni survey was also administered to graduating seniors between Fall 2007 and Fall 2008. Comparisons between recent graduates and those who graduated a longer time ago showed no differences between the two groups of alumni. Also, a focus was given to whether quality of education, as defined by the way respondents rated the department, was related to career satisfaction. Preliminary results show a relationship between educational quality and career satisfaction.

The survey was conducted by last year’s undergraduate committee—Drs. Brenda Blackwell, Sue Collins, Dean Dabney, and Wendy Guastaferro. The faculty discussed the alumni research process as part of a panel at the recent meetings of the Southern Criminal Justice Association.

Of course, the Department is interested in course quality and satisfaction of all students, not just the alumni. If you have thoughts or concerns you would like to share, please feel free to share them with your professors or Dr. Payne, the Department Chair. Or, better yet, see Mary Mason. She’ll take care of you.