

Sam Houston State University's Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology
Response to External Review of the Ph.D. in Criminal Justice
Submitted July 1, 2024

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to respond to the May 17, 2024 report prepared by the external reviewers who examined the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology's (CJC) Ph.D. program. Dr. Carter Hay, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies at Florida State University and Dr. Natalie Hipple, Professor and Chair of the Department of Criminal Justice at Indiana University visited SHSU April 3-4, 2024. During their visit, they gathered information through interviews with various stakeholders, including campus administrators, faculty, and graduate students.

The reviewers observed several strengths of the department, including faculty productivity, strong department leadership, positive graduate student culture, resources for student travel, and summer funding opportunities. The review team also observed some challenges the department faces. These include the inability to provide full tuition waivers or zero (or reduced) cost health insurance, faculty turnover, changes in key department leadership positions, inconsistencies in portfolio requirements, and a coursework heavy degree plan. Below are the specific recommendations or suggestions made by Drs. Hay and Hipple for a number of aspects across the Ph.D. program, as well as the department's response to these suggestions.

External Reviewer Recommendations: Recruitment, Admissions, and Enrollment

Recommendation #1: We would recommend that a CJC staff member become the dedicated point of contact for the interested applicant hand-off and that person be available and able to answer program specific questions. This person would need to be immersed in the graduate program to be able to answer potential applicant questions. They could collaborate with a few faculty members who could serve as the information base. It would make sense that the GSAC be part of this effort. It might be beneficial to create an FAQ document that could be available to multiple points of contacts including faculty.

- Response: The Graduate Program Director and Graduate Program Coordinator usually serve as points of contact for interested students and for students who have questions about the program. Generally, when faculty members speak with students who are interested in the program, they refer the student to the Graduate Program Director or Graduate Program Coordinator. The creation of an FAQ document that could address commonly asked student questions would be quite beneficial. This FAQ document could be provided to faculty to better help them when recruiting students to the Ph.D. program. The Graduate Program Director will work with the Graduate Program Coordinator to identify questions that are frequently asked to better tailor the FAQ document.

Recommendation #2: CJC could use the ETS GRE Search Service to engage students based on certain criteria including individuals who are interested in CJC, interested in going to school in Texas or surrounding states, and/or meet a certain GRE score percentile rank.

- Response: This seems like a good resource to consider for recruitment of potential Ph.D. students. As this service is not free, the Graduate Program Director plans on discussing this idea with the CJC Department Chair and college-level administration.

Recommendation #3: We would encourage CJC to examine the role that the GRE takes in their admission process and consider making the GRE optional.

- Response: As the reviewers pointed out in their report, based on an informal survey of Association of Doctoral Programs in Criminology and Criminal Justice (ADPCCJ) programs that occurred in 2023, close to half of responding programs no longer require the GRE for admissions. With this in mind, we plan on further discussing the possibility of not requiring the GRE for Ph.D. admissions. At the beginning of the Fall 2024 semester, the Graduate Program Director, who serves as chair of the Graduate Standards and Admissions Committee (GSAC) will ask GSAC for their feedback on whether we should continue to require the GRE for Ph.D. admissions. If GSAC is in favor of no longer requiring the GRE for Ph.D. admissions, they will also consider whether they want to include an additional admissions requirement in place of the GRE, such as a writing sample.

Recommendation #4: Allowing BA/BS recipients to be directly admitted into the PhD program could entice SHSU students who know they want a PhD to enroll and stay in the SHSU program.

- Response: For students to be admitted into the Ph.D. program they must have completed a master's degree prior to the start of the semester they are applying for. As the reviewers noted in their report, most doctoral programs in criminal justice/criminology do not require that students obtain their master's degree prior to starting the Ph.D. program. In fact, according to the most recent ADPCCJ survey, about 67% of doctoral programs (24 out of 36) do not require a master's degree for admission to the Ph.D. program. It is likely that not allowing students to enter the Ph.D. program with their BA/BS is negatively impacting recruitment and enrollment in several ways. First, students who know they want to pursue a Ph.D. after completing their BA/BS may not even apply to SHSU since they are not eligible for the Ph.D. program without a master's degree and there are 24 Ph.D. programs that would consider them for admission. If these students are directly admitted to a Ph.D. program, they likely will not apply to SHSU after completing their master's since they are already in a Ph.D. program. As such, we are likely losing prospective students early in the process. Second, for students interested in applying to SHSU after finishing their BA/BS, our M.A. program is their only option since they are not yet eligible for the Ph.D. program. However, if and when students who are interested in pursuing a Ph.D. do apply to our M.A. program, they may also be applying to Ph.D. programs. Thus, they would be comparing our M.A. funding package to the funding packages of Ph.D. programs which would likely be substantially higher than our M.A. offer. Thus, we may be losing high achieving students who would potentially be interested in our program because our M.A. funding package cannot compete with Ph.D. funding packages. Third, our M.A. program is largely a feeder for our Ph.D. program, however, when our own M.A. students want to stay for the Ph.D. program, they are required to formally apply to our Ph.D. program and pay the application fee. Additionally, since our M.A. program is so separate from our Ph.D. program, there is no

programmatic incentive for our M.A. students to stay at SHSU. For example, despite the fact that students take two years of classes in the M.A. program, they still need to complete two and a half years of coursework once they enter the Ph.D. program. Many of the classes they are required to take in the Ph.D. program overlap greatly with the classes they took in the M.A. program. Currently, we do not allow overlapping classes to be waived for these students. As such, from a programmatic perspective our M.A. students are essentially starting over in a new program. With this in mind, when our M.A. students receive offers from other Ph.D. programs, they may think that it won't be as "costly" to start over in a new program since they would essentially be starting over in the SHSU Ph.D. program anyway. Allowing direct admits to the Ph.D. would likely increase the number of applications received to the Ph.D. program as both students with BA/BS degrees and MA/MS degrees could apply. As there appear to be several disadvantages to not allowing direct admits and the SHSU Ph.D. program is currently in the minority of programs on this issue, CJC leadership is seriously considering the possibility of allowing BA/BS recipients to be directly admitted into the Ph.D. program. At the beginning of the Fall 2024 semester, the Graduate Program Director will ask GSAC for their feedback on whether we should allow direct admits into the Ph.D. program. If GSAC is in favor of direct admits, then CJC leadership will ask for feedback from the faculty.

External Reviewer Recommendations: Funding Packages

Recommendation #1: An increase in the 9-month stipend should be a strong priority for SHSU.

- Response: As the reviewer's state in their report, the Ph.D. stipends fall slightly below the average of \$20,274. They also mention that given the history and resources of criminal justice at SHSU and ambitions to continue growing the Ph.D. program, that they would expect our stipends to be able to compete with top 10 programs. We believe that increasing the Ph.D. stipend would be beneficial for recruitment and would enable us to better compete with higher ranked Ph.D. programs for highly qualified applicants. Increases to the GA funding packages have been included as the CJC Department's top new initiative priority for the last 2 years. The college has included it as a new initiative request priority to the Provost and President, but it has not been funded by the university. CJC leadership are certainly supportive of increasing our 9-month stipend and will continue to advocate for this.

Recommendation #2: CJC also might consider drawing upon donated funds or other sources of flexible funding (from the COCJ but also perhaps from the University) to create stipend enhancements for a select number of especially strong candidates.

- Response: Creating stipend enhancements for select students, particularly strong candidates, would certainly be beneficial for recruitment and enrollment. The benefit of these types of stipend enhancements is that they are not recurring costs and can be offered to students for just their first year (or first 2 years). As such, they could be provided when extra funds are available or via other sources of flexible funding. CJC leadership is very supportive of this and will work with the college-level administration to see if this is feasible.

Recommendation #3: All efforts to preserve the Hoover Fellowship program and make it as available as possible to PhD students is an important priority.

- Response: The Larry Hoover Summer Fellowships allow students the opportunity to receive full summer funding while working on a publishable manuscript with a faculty advisor. In Summer 2023 we funded 10 Hoover Fellowships and in Summer 2024 we funded 8 Hoover Fellowships. We usually fund around 8-10 Hoover Fellowships per summer; however, we have the capacity to fund more if there are more applications. We will continue to encourage Ph.D. students to apply for the Hoover Fellowship, particularly students who are beginning to prepare for or are currently working on their portfolios. We believe that the Hoover Fellowship is particularly beneficial for students who are planning or working on their portfolios as their Hoover Fellowship application could be based on one of the publishable papers they plan on using for their portfolio. By using the Hoover Fellowship as a way to work on one of the portfolio requirements, students can potentially reduce some of their workload during their 3rd year.

Recommendation #4: An important goal for CJC should be to determine if full waiver of tuition is possible or if the tuition scholarships can be increased to come closer to covering the full costs of tuition.

- Response: It appears that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) has limits on who is eligible for tuition exemptions and waivers (<https://www.highered.texas.gov/our-work/supporting-our-institutions/institutional-funding-resources/exemptions-and-waivers/>). Texas Education Code 54.213 allows for the waiver/adjustment of non-resident tuition to resident tuition for students who receive a competitive scholarship of at least \$1,000. This is the category that applies most generally for graduate students. Any coverage of tuition/fees beyond what is allowable by the THECB would have to be covered by the university/academic unit. As such, the CJC leadership team will have discussions with college-level administration to determine whether it is feasible to provide more coverage of tuition/fees for graduate students.

Recommendation #5: The absence of health insurance may be undermining PhD recruitment. Similar to the tuition remission issue, addressing this issue likely requires University-wide solutions and support.

- Response: Graduate students have the option of purchasing health insurance through the university and have access to free services at the student health center, which aligns with Texas State University System policy. However, providing health insurance as a part of the funding package to graduate assistants would be greatly beneficial for recruitment, as well as student health. As this is clearly something that is very important to the students, the CJC leadership team will work with college-level administration to see if it would be feasible to provide lower cost health insurance to graduate assistants.

Recommendation #6: CJC may wish to consider whether procedures may be developed for sometimes granting a 5th year of funding.

- Response: Prior to AY 2020-2021 students could apply for consideration for 5th year funding. 5th year funding consideration ended in AY 2020-2021 due to COVID-19 related budget uncertainties. Ph.D. students appreciated knowing that there was a possibility for 5th year funding and were concerned when consideration for 5th year funding ended. As this issue was important to the Ph.D. students, CJC leadership will discuss the possibility of considering certain students for 5th year funding with college-level administration. Consideration of this could be dependent on future actions taken on other reviewer recommendations, such as direct admittances into the Ph.D. program.

External Reviewer Recommendations: Curriculum

Recommendation #1: Two separate but related issues involve preferences for both a greater number of electives and the option of occasionally using independent studies to earn some elective credits. The rationale in both instances, emerging from faculty and students alike, is to increase opportunities for students to earn credits in ways that directly align with students' research interests and publication efforts.

- Response: The Ph.D. curriculum requires 18 hours (6 courses) of required courses, 6 hours (2 courses) of required electives, 21 hours (7 courses) of electives, and 12 hours (4 courses) of dissertation hours. Given the size of our Ph.D. cohorts and curriculum requirements, each semester we generally offer 1 advanced statistics elective, 1 required elective (Legal Aspects of the Criminal Justice System, Seminar in American Courts, Seminar in American Corrections, Seminar in American Policing), and 1 additional elective. As such, on any given semester there are not many elective offerings. When Ph.D. students are not interested in one of the electives being offered, they often ask if they are able to take an independent study instead of one of the electives and cater the independent study to their research interests. Although we do have an independent studies course in the curriculum (CRIJ 7070 – Independent Studies in Criminal Justice), historically Ph.D. students have not been permitted to register for CRIJ 7070 for several reasons. First, as our Ph.D. cohorts are generally around 7-10 students and we offer about 3 electives per semester, allowing multiple Ph.D. students to register for CRIJ 7070 may result in some of the offered electives not having sufficient enrollment. Second, allowing Ph.D. students to register for CRIJ 7070 presents workload issues for faculty. In order for students to register for CRIJ 7070 they need to identify a faculty member who is willing to supervise their independent study. As it is a course in the curriculum, instructors must create a syllabus and dedicate considerable time to ensure that Ph.D. students are meeting the agreed upon requirements of the independent study. However, this course would not count towards the faculty's workload and there is currently no mechanism for faculty to receive workload credit for supervising independent studies. However, student preference for more electives or courses that align with their research interests is understandable and one that students have expressed to CJC leadership previously. As such, CJC leadership is certainly interested in finding a way to provide more elective offerings for students. At the beginning of Fall 2024, the Graduate Program Director will ask GSAC to review the Ph.D. curriculum to determine whether all the required courses and required electives should remain required. Additionally, GSAC will also consider whether we should permit students to sign up for CRIJ 7070 when they are not interested in

the elective offerings or creating a way for students to earn course credit towards the portfolio. This will be further discussed below.

Recommendation #2: It should be noted that the overall program is course-intensive and includes some apparent redundancies for students who enter the PhD program after earning a MA degree from SHSU. Such students take two full years of courses for the MA degree and then at least two additional years for the PhD. The courses are seen as redundant in some instances, with students and their supervising faculty sometimes feeling that student time would be better directed to research activities than these courses.

- **Response:** Ph.D. students are required to take courses for 2.5 years. Specifically, they have a full load of courses in their first 2 years and then in the fall of their 3rd year they take between 1 to 3 courses, depending on whether they took courses over the summer or not. If students enrolled for 2 summer courses during their first two years, then they would only be required to take 1 course in the fall of their 3rd year. However, if a student chooses to not take any summer courses, then they would be required to take 3 courses in the fall of their 3rd year. This can be seen as a course heavy curriculum, particularly for Ph.D. students who were our M.A. students. Students who completed our M.A. program prior to beginning the Ph.D. program take 2 years of courses for the M.A. program and then must complete 2.5 additional years of courses for the Ph.D. program. As such, these students often perceive redundancy in the curriculum and have expressed that some of their Ph.D. courses are similar to the courses they took during the M.A. program. Additionally, when students join the Ph.D. program, either from our M.A. program or from a different master's program, they are not permitted to waive Ph.D. courses even if they took similar courses for their master's degree. We believe that this may be hurting our recruitment, particularly of our own M.A. students. At the beginning of Fall 2024, the Graduate Program Director will ask GSAC to review the Ph.D. curriculum and discuss whether they perceive it to be coursework heavy. If GSAC does believe the curriculum is coursework heavy, they will discuss possible options to address this.

Recommendation #3: CJC might consider ways in which PhD students (perhaps especially those in the second year or beyond) could better tailor their credit hours to their chosen research agendas. This tailoring could involve efforts to reduce redundancy and the strategic addition of new electives (with student preferences considered when possible). Also, several students and faculty called for increasing opportunities for faculty-supervised independent studies that could take the place of electives.

- **Response:** We certainly understand Ph.D. student interest in tailoring their credit hours to their chosen research agendas. As mentioned above, students who complete the M.A. program at SHSU before joining the Ph.D. program often feel as though some of their coursework is redundant as several of their Ph.D. courses are similar to classes they took in the M.A. program. To try to address these redundancies, the Graduate Program Director will ask GSAC to evaluate both the M.A. and Ph.D. curriculums for redundancies and work towards reducing these. Additionally, GSAC will also consider options for allowing more space in student schedules for electives, such as potentially reducing the number of required courses (particularly those similar to M.A. courses). Students have also expressed interest in

being able to register for CRIJ 7070 – Independent Studies in Criminal Justice. As discussed above, students have historically not been permitted to register for independent studies as it can create workload issues for faculty and may result in courses not having sufficient enrollment. Importantly, if even 5-6 Ph.D. students per semester registered for independent studies, then we would likely not be able to offer an additional elective that semester. As such, it is important to consider whether students prefer having more elective offerings or registering for independent studies. GSAC will also discuss this issue in Fall 2024.

Recommendation #4: One potential option is to offer elective courses that can be taken by both MA and PhD students.

- Response: Given the size of our Ph.D. cohorts and curriculum requirements, each semester we generally offer 1 advanced statistics elective, 1 required elective (Legal Aspects of the Criminal Justice System, Seminar in American Courts, Seminar in American Corrections, Seminar in American Policing), and 1 additional elective. The additional elective is based on what faculty are interested in teaching and changes every semester. Additionally, for the M.A. program 1 or 2 electives are offered every semester. One possible suggestion to maximize elective offerings is to consider offering electives that both M.A. and Ph.D. students could take. Currently, M.A. courses (5000 or 6000 level) and Ph.D. courses (7000 or 8000 level) are usually taught separately, however, courses are occasionally cross listed so that both M.A. and Ph.D. students can take the same course. Because M.A. courses are at the 5000 or 6000 level, while Ph.D. courses are at the 7000 or 8000 level, in order to cross list a course, two sections of the same course need to be created (one at the M.A. level and one at the Ph.D. level) and the same instructor is assigned to both. While this has been done in the past, it is not done routinely. This may be a good option for maximizing elective offerings.

Recommendation #5: There are many challenges that emerge in the third year as PhD students are still taking courses, often teaching their own course for the first time, and working on their portfolios. The perception from some students is that flexibility on courses may better enable these varying obligations to be more successfully accomplished.

- Response: In the fall of their 3rd year Ph.D. students generally teach their own class for the first time. Additionally, they enroll in classes this semester (anywhere from 1 to 3 courses depending on whether they enrolled in summer classes previously) and work on completing the requirements for their portfolio. Thus, in the fall of their 3rd year, Ph.D. students are teaching, taking classes, and working on their portfolio. As Ph.D. students have various requirements competing for their attention this semester, students sometimes become overwhelmed. Additionally, as the work associated with coursework and teaching a course have set deadlines, students likely prioritize their coursework and course prep at the expense of their portfolio work. As such, it may be beneficial to adjust some of the required coursework in this semester so that students have more time to work on their portfolio requirements. For example, one option could be to create a way for students to earn course credit towards the portfolio. This would adjust the student's workload in the fall of their 3rd year which should allow them to dedicate more time to their portfolio requirements. At the beginning of the Fall 2024 semester, the Graduate Program Director will ask GSAC to

consider whether it would be beneficial for students to receive credit hours towards their portfolio.

Recommendation #6: It was clear that the majority faculty and students we spoke to feel the curriculum is heavier on legal issues courses than is desired. This focus seems to be a product of “the way it’s always been done” rather than addressing a specific need seen in the field. A common sentiment was that these classes often seemed better suited for law students because of the focus on case law and writing legal briefs. A preference was stated for either having fewer of these classes, only one, or removing them from the required curriculum, making them an elective choice. Or, if they continued to remain required, tailoring these classes to the study of modern issues and to the goal of training research scientists rather than lawyers.

- Response: There are technically no required legal courses in the Ph.D. curriculum. However, there are required electives and students must enroll in at least 2 of 4 specific electives (CRIJ 7375 – Legal Aspects of the Criminal Justice System, CRIJ 7338 – Seminar in American Courts, CRIJ 7336 – Seminar in American Corrections, CRIJ 7334 – Seminar in American Policing). Two of these required electives are related to legal issues. Although Ph.D. students are not required to take these legal related electives, generally only 1 required elective is offered per semester, and so they may need to enroll in one to fill their schedule. Additionally, many of our Ph.D. students were in the M.A. program prior to beginning the Ph.D. program, and the M.A. program has one required legal course (CRIJ 5393 – Legal Aspects of the Criminal Justice System). Thus, for students who were in the M.A. program, the legal aspects elective may seem repetitive. At the beginning of the Fall 2024 semester, the Graduate Program Director will ask GSAC to review the Ph.D. curriculum and provide feedback on whether both the legal related required electives (CRIJ 7375 – Legal Aspects of the Criminal Justice System, CRIJ 7338 – Seminar in American Courts) should remain as required electives.

External Reviewer Recommendations: The Portfolio Process

Recommendation #1: There was overwhelming agreement among students and faculty that the most concerning aspect of the portfolio process is the variation across projects. We encourage a tightening up process for more equity and fairness across students. We detected strong consensus that it is intended to be a research portfolio, and included items should reflect that goal. We suggest that a single faculty member be assigned to all portfolio committees as a quality control member. This role could be a service role and might be someone from the GDAC. It could rotate by semester or academic year, depending on the process timing. This faculty member would not be as involved as a committee member would be but would see all the portfolios and could speak to equity and fairness across student experiences.

- Response: For students to be admitted to candidacy they must complete a Research Assessment Portfolio. Students select a portfolio committee which includes a portfolio chair and two additional committee members, and the committee establishes the expectations for the student’s portfolio. At minimum, portfolios must include at least two publishable papers (the student must be first author on one of these and can be first or second author on the other). Although it is not technically required, it is highly recommended that portfolios also

include some type of third component that addresses breadth of knowledge. The portfolio policy was last amended in Spring 2017. As it has been 7 years since this policy has been updated, CJC leadership believes that it is time for the current policy to be reevaluated and potentially updated. The reviewers mentioned that the faculty and Ph.D. students agree that there is too much variation across portfolios. This variation appears to mostly occur with the third component, as this is the portfolio requirement that provides the most flexibility. For example, while many students include a systematic literature review or comprehensive exam style question as their third component, some include non-research components such as teaching materials or job market preparations. In order to reduce the variation across portfolio third components, changes could be made to the portfolio policy. For instance, as the portfolio is meant to be a research assessment portfolio, the policy could provide more rigidity on the expectations for the third component such as not allowing non-research elements or limiting the options for the third component. At the beginning of Fall 2024, the Graduate Program Director will ask for GSAC's feedback on potential changes to the portfolio policy to reduce the variation in portfolio requirements. Additionally, the reviewers mention that it may also be beneficial for "a single faculty member be assigned to all portfolio committees as a quality control member". As ensuring that portfolios are completed at a high quality is important, this is certainly worth considering. CJC leadership and faculty will meet to discuss the best way to implement changes to the portfolio process and ensure more consistency across portfolios.

Recommendation #2: Some faculty and students suggested that hybrid model in which the portfolio is supplemented with a comprehensive exam should be considered. This suggestion reflected a concern that the portfolio model prevents students from achieving the necessary breadth of knowledge—they become experts in their areas of research specialization, but this expertise may come at the expense of generalized knowledge outside their specialties. This issue is challenging, with important tradeoffs with all options, and it relates to key pedagogical questions about what the program seeks to accomplish. It is rare to find uniform consensus, but devoting a faculty meeting to these questions might help inform revisions to the current process. Also, these decisions can be informed by a focus group with students who have completed the process.

- **Response:** In Fall 2023 CJC leadership conducted a faculty survey to gauge faculty perceptions of the portfolio process. The results of this survey indicated that approximately 67% of the responding faculty were in favor of a hybrid model that included both a portfolio and some type of comprehensive or qualifying exam. Additionally, 22% of responding faculty were in favor of only doing comprehensive exams and 11% were supportive of keeping the portfolio process the same. Focus groups were also conducted in Fall 2023 to provide faculty a forum to discuss their thoughts on the portfolio process. The conversation at these focus groups was largely reflective of the survey results. As a large percentage of the faculty are in favor of a hybrid model, this is certainly worth considering and further discussions with the faculty are warranted. With that being said, focus groups with Ph.D. students were also conducted about the portfolio process, and unlike faculty, the majority of the students were happy with the portfolio process. Thus, if changes are made to the portfolio process (particularly the inclusion of some type of exam), they must balance both faculty and student needs.

Recommendation #3: The portfolio process is part of what appears to be a third year-bottleneck in which students experience a convergence of many key milestones. Any revisions to the portfolio process might take this bottleneck into account.

- Response: In the fall of their 3rd year Ph.D. students generally teach their own class for the first time. Additionally, they enroll in classes this semester (anywhere from 1 to 3 courses depending on whether they enrolled in summer classes previously) and work on completing the requirements for their portfolio. Thus, in the fall of their 3rd year, Ph.D. students are teaching, taking classes, and working on their portfolio. As Ph.D. students have various requirements competing for their attention this semester, this can lead to a bottleneck. As such, it may be beneficial to adjust some of the required coursework in this semester so that students have more time to work on their portfolio requirements. For example, one option could be to create a way for students to earn course credit towards the portfolio. This would adjust the students' workload in the fall of their 3rd year which should allow them to dedicate more time to their portfolio requirements. At the beginning of the Fall 2024 semester, the Graduate Program Director will ask GSAC to consider whether it would be beneficial for students to receive credit hours towards their portfolio.

External Reviewer Recommendations: Faculty

Recommendation #1: CJC administration is encouraged to work with faculty to ensure that funded projects receive strong staffing of graduate students. Challenges in this area were mentioned, with funded projects having a difficult time getting the optimal pick of graduate assistants (with some students seemingly “locked” into other assignments). Given the emphasis on external funding, CJC might consider reviewing how they assign graduate students.

- Response: Graduate assistants are generally assigned to faculty by the Graduate Program Director several months before the start of a new semester. When possible, the Graduate Program Director tries to match up students and faculty that have similar research interests. This process is also used for assigning students to externally funded projects, so students with research interests in the area of the externally funded project are prioritized for these assignments. Of course, this is not always possible and greatly depends on student availability. The Graduate Program Director generally solicits feedback from the PIs of externally funded projects to determine which graduate students they would like to have assigned to their projects and makes every effort to accommodate these requests.

Recommendation #2: All reasonable efforts should be made to prioritize retention of high-achieving faculty. Salary increases for high-achieving faculty are essential, and as a practical matter, this often requires financial assistance from higher levels of the University. Such assistance should be a key priority. This effort certainly can include matching received offers, but retention efforts ideally should begin before that—successful retention often begins with proactive salary improvements for high-achieving faculty in a good position to receive offers from other programs.

- Response: Retention of high-achieving faculty has been an area for concern in CJC, as it is in many departments, for some time. CJC leadership agrees that retention of high-achieving faculty is a top-priority. Unfortunately, issues surrounding salary improvements and other resources that aid with faculty retention are not decided at the department level. CJC leadership will advocate to higher levels of administration, including both college and university level, about the importance of retaining high-achieving faculty. It is important for higher levels of administration to understand that the success of research focused graduate programs is highly dependent on the faculty who train and mentor graduate students.

External Reviewer Recommendations: Students and Their Experience

Recommendation #1: Students noted the turnover in graduate directors—five graduate directors in six years. They spoke very highly of the current Director, Jason Ingram. They perceived that the College might better incentivize the role of Graduate Director to prevent future turnover.

- Response: Several changes occurred to the CJC department leadership team after the external reviewers site visit. First, the CJC Department Chair, Dr. Erin Orrick, was appointed as the new Associate Dean for Programs and Assessment. As such, CJC needed a new Department Chair, and Dr. Jason Ingram, who served as the Assistant Chair and Graduate Program Director, was appointed as the new department chair. Dr. Wanda Leal, who previously served as the CJC Director of Academic Programs, was then appointed as the new CJC Graduate Program Director. In her previous role, Dr. Leal worked closely with Dr. Ingram on graduate program related tasks. As Dr. Leal was already involved with the graduate program and graduate students in an administrative capacity, her transition to Graduate Program Director should be minimally disruptive to graduate students. We are sympathetic to the concern of graduate students regarding graduate director turnover and believe that moving forward there will be more continuity in this position.

Recommendation #2: While they are not privy to the innerworkings of faculty positions, they noted faculty turnover as an area of concern.

- Response: Faculty turnover is certainly an important issue for graduate students. When a graduate student's faculty mentor leaves SHSU, students are often left feeling as though they are in a vulnerable situation. For example, if they had already begun working on their portfolio or dissertation with the faculty member who left, students may feel as though they will be "starting over" with a new faculty member which could put them behind. In situations when a student's faculty mentor leaves the university after a portfolio or dissertation has been started but before completion, the Graduate Program Director meets with the student to discuss their feelings about the situation and discuss the student's options moving forward. Additionally, while faculty retention efforts are not generally made at the department level, CJC leadership will advocate to higher levels of administration, including both college and university level, the importance of retaining high-achieving faculty for the continued success of the graduate programs.

Recommendation #3: The graduate student desire for more elective course and a variety of choices, including independent studies. They also specifically mentioned an interest in courses

on qualitative methods and data management, with the latter covering different statistical packages or folding this topic into an existing research methods course.

- Response: As mentioned above, student preference for more electives or a wider variety of choices is understandable and one that students have expressed to CJC leadership previously. As such, CJC leadership is certainly interested in findings way to provide more elective offerings for students. At the beginning of Fall 2024, the Graduate Program Director will ask GSAC to review the Ph.D. curriculum to determine whether all the required courses and required electives should remain required in order to potentially allow more flexibility in student schedules for elective offerings. Additionally, based on student feedback Qualitative Research Design is being offered in Fall 2024 and Data Management is being offered in Spring 2025. If students note benefit from these electives, we will try to integrate them into the elective rotation as feasible.

Recommendation #4: Similarly, as noted above, students noted perceived redundancy in courses, with this including PhD courses that were similar to courses they took earning their MA degree at SHSU. They also noted instances in which they took electives of little interest in response to limited offerings and the requirement to take courses (instead of directed individual studies).

- Response: Students who completed our M.A. program prior to beginning the Ph.D. program take 2 years of courses for the M.A. program and then must complete 2.5 additional years of courses for the Ph.D. program. As such, these students often perceive redundancy in the curriculum and have expressed that some of their Ph.D. courses are similar to the courses they took during the M.A. program. Additionally, when students join the Ph.D. program, either from our M.A. program or from a different master's program, they are not permitted to waive Ph.D. courses even if they took similar courses for their master's degree. At the beginning of Fall 2024, the Graduate Program Director will ask GSAC to review the Ph.D. curriculum and discuss these potential redundancies and what can be done to reduce or eliminate them. GSAC will also discuss potential avenues that allow students to take more electives, such as revising the curriculum to reduce the number of required courses. Additionally, while we certainly appreciate student desires to take electives that they are interested in, courses can provide important knowledge and context even if students are not interested in the topic.

Recommendation #5: The students seemed satisfied with their offices and workspace but voiced concerns about the computers being old and unreliable. The same complaint was voiced about the printers. Regular life-cycle replacement of computers seems like something that could be included in the budget, staggered if need be.

- Response: If students are having issues with their office computers or other office technology, they need to convey this information to the Graduate Program Director or Office Manager. The Graduate Program Director will attend the first Graduate Student Organization (GSO) meeting in Fall 2024 and provide students with information on who they should report these types of problems to. Additionally, CJC leadership agrees that regular life-cycle replacement of computers should be included in the budget. However, as the budget is largely managed at the college-level, this will need to be discussed with college-level administration.

Recommendation #6: Other requests they had were for some Zoom options for Brownbag events because not all students live in Huntsville. They also requested some online courses, although we would note that in the post-pandemic era, this practice is not common for ADPCCJ member programs.

- Response: As this is a face-to-face program, we do not offer online Ph.D. courses and do not plan on offering online Ph.D. courses in the future. However, we can look into providing Zoom options for Brownbag events or other professional development events. The GSO oversees the creation of Brownbag schedule, selecting the Brownbag topics, inviting faculty to participate in Brownbags, and conveying information about Brownbags to students. The Graduate Program Director serves as the faculty advisor for GSO and works closely with GSO on all their events. As such, the Graduate Program Director will discuss the possibility of providing a Zoom option for Brownbags or changing the days of these events to be more convenient for graduate students.

Recommendation #7: There does not seem to be a formal feedback mechanism in place for graduate students to utilize. They mentioned wanting a way to request classes and provide feedback on job candidates. The students would appreciate any formal mechanisms that could be created for them to provide routine feedback that could inform key decisions.

- Response: In preparation for the program review, the Graduate Program Director held several focus groups with graduate students, and graduate students were sent an anonymous survey to provide feedback on various department processes. One suggestion that came up several times was to implement some type of mechanism for students to provide feedback. There is currently no formal feedback system for graduate students to express their thoughts on a variety of important department issues. Currently when students want to express their views, they speak with the Graduate Program Director. However, we recognize that this is not always the best system because students may not always wish to speak directly to the Graduate Program Director, particularly if they believe their comment would be controversial. As such, the Graduate Program Director will be creating a formal feedback system for graduate students. For example, an anonymous Qualtrics survey could be created that has one open-ended question where students could submit any feedback they have. Students could choose whether they would like to remain anonymous by not including their name or could choose to include their name if they would like the Graduate Program Director to follow up with them about their comment. The Graduate Program Director will attend the first GSO meeting of the Fall 2024 semester to discuss the idea of this formal feedback system and collect feedback on the implementation of it. As for feedback on faculty job candidates, CJC leadership is certainly interested in hearing the opinions of graduate students. After a job candidate's visit, faculty are sent a survey where they can provide feedback on the candidate. Graduate students can also be sent this survey so that they can provide feedback on faculty candidates. Additionally, for feedback on courses, graduate students are encouraged to complete their course evaluations at the end of every semester to provide feedback on the courses they are taking.

From: Leal, Wanda

Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2025 1:09 PM

To: Hendrickson, Ken; Ingram, Jason; Boisvert, Danielle

Subject: Re: GPR Inspired Changes to CJ PhD

Hi Ken,

We really appreciated the great feedback that we received from the external reviewers and feel like we got a lot out of the external program review. Below are the major issues that the reviewers noted about the PhD program and the changes that we implemented as a result. Let me know if you have any questions about any of the changes we made.

The external reviewers identified several issues with the PhD curriculum including:

1. Students experience a bottleneck in the fall of their third year since they are taking classes, teaching a class for the first time, and working on their portfolio. This bottleneck results in delays in portfolio completion, which is how students advance to candidacy.
2. There is significant overlap with the MA curriculum, which is problematic as a large portion of our PhD students were part of our MA program.
3. The curriculum is coursework heavy, which can result in students having less time to collaborate with faculty on research projects.

To address these issues, we revised the curriculum in the following ways:

1. With the revised curriculum, students will enroll in CRIJ 7373 (Research Practicum) in their third year (both in fall and in spring). These hours will be used for students to work on their portfolio to ensure that they are able to complete it by the end of their third year. Additionally, students will also be permitted to register for CRIJ 7070 (Independent Studies in CJ) during their third year in the place of an elective if they choose.

2. We streamlined the PhD curriculum and removed redundancy with MA program. Some of this was done by changing the requirements of the MA program, while some was done at the PhD level. For example, at the MA level we removed CRIJ 5393 (Legal Aspects of the Criminal Justice System) as a required course since it is part of the PhD curriculum. At the PhD level, we removed CRIJ 7389 (Advanced Statistics II) as a required course and now require that students take at least two advanced methods or statistics electives that are offered each semester.
3. Now that students register for CRIJ 7373 (Research Practicum) and can choose to register for CRIJ 7070 (Independent Studies in CJ) in their third year, the number of courses that they take has been reduced but the number of required hours for the program remains the same.

Best,
Wanda

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