

***Online Assessment Tracking Database***

Sam Houston State University (SHSU)  
2014 - 2015

**Criminal Justice BA/BS**

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**Goal****Promote And Support The Development And Delivery Of A Rigorous, Contemporary Curriculum.** 🔑

In support of a major goal of our department, we will collectively deliver a rigorous, contemporary curriculum to prepare our undergraduate students with the knowledge and skills to be a successful, and highly employable individual within the criminal justice workforce. Our students will demonstrate comprehensive both comprehensive knowledge and scientific skills as expected by the criminal justice workforce. Specifically, our curriculum will provide a foundation for students to build comprehensive knowledge of key criminal justice content areas as taught within traditional criminal justice and criminology programs. Through their coursework in our department, students should be able to demonstrate an ability to engage in scientific writing on criminal justice topics at a level that is expected by the criminal justice workforce.

**Objective (L)****Exhibit Comprehensive Knowledge Of Criminal Justice Concepts** 🔑

As part of our department's primary objectives as stated in our Departmental strategic plan (see attached), we aim to "promote and support the development and delivery of a rigorous, contemporary curriculum." This goal directly aligns with the College of Criminal Justice goal of delivery a high quality education to our undergraduate students given that we are the only undergraduate program in the College as of this date. It follows that our students will have developed a sufficient level of substantive knowledge on various criminal justice topics. To assess our department's success in meeting this strategic goal, it is expected that graduating seniors will exhibit comprehensive knowledge of core criminal justice coursework.

**Indicator****Senior Exit Exam** 🔑

Each semester, graduating seniors are asked to complete an online exit exam. This exam provides faculty a means of assessing students' comprehension and retention on key concepts taught during their educational experience. The 60-item exit exam, created by faculty, assesses learning in core areas of criminal justice content.

**Criterion****70% Average Student Achievement Score On Exit Exam** 🔑

Graduating students will achieve an average of 70% on the exit survey. Last year this average was below 70% but our department will continue to strive toward this goal.

**Finding****Student Participation In Exit Exam Declining, Achievement Levels Declined** 🔑

A senior exit knowledge survey was conducted with the 2014-2015 graduates using Survey Monkey in an online capacity. Last year, 40 percent of graduates (144 of 362 students) responded; this year, fewer graduates (23 percent, or 70 of 303 students) responded. Of the students participating in the exit exam, only 56 students completed at least half of the 60 question non-credit based exam. The number of graduates participating in the non-credit based

assessment has continued to decline over the last few years despite additional encouragement from the Department. This year, we aimed to increase our response rate this year by incentivizing participation with an entry into a drawing for SHSU goods and sending multiple reminders to graduating students. It is concerning that the participation rate of graduates is declining as this sample is likely not representative of the larger graduating class.

During the last assessment cycle, we recognized the need to consider the extent to which our assessment survey aligns with the courses that were likely to have been completed at SHSU given the large number of transfer students served by our Department. Initially, we anticipated re-designing the survey to focus on measuring retention of upper level courses. Upon further deliberation, it was decided that it would be best to first determine how many of our respondents are students who transfer into SHSU from a community college, complete our BA or BS in Criminal Justice degree, AND respond to the Exit Exam. Results indicated that 32.61 percent of the respondents were transfer students. Our criterion for this objective was an achievement level of 70% across seven content areas. Results indicated the average student achievement levels failed to meet this goal.

#### Action

#### Examination Of Alignment Between Exit Exam Content And Current Coursework

A department level undergraduate program assessment committee has been developed to improve our assessment efforts. This committee will strategize a more effective approach in garnering an overview of the knowledge gained and retained by our students as well as increasing our student response rate.

The finding that approximately one third of our respondents are transfer students will serve to inform an outstanding concern from the prior assessment cycle. Specifically, it is apparent that the exit survey targets courses offered at the 200 level. Given that a proportion of our students complete these courses at the community college level, we may not be accurately assessing knowledge gained at SHSU. This year, the CJC Undergraduate Program Assessment Committee will consider a new approach that will target knowledge gained in 300 and 400 level courses thereby ensuring a more accurate assessment of our program.

Our failure to achieve our stated benchmark, it is evident that a two pronged approach is needed if we plan to continue on this same path of assessment. First, increased participation rates from our undergraduate students to an acceptable rate will be required for results to be valid. Second, a review of current course content and exit exam questions to ensure that question accurately reflect the most recent material provided in these core courses.

A more global consideration for next year's assessment is also needed. It is increasingly apparent that the exit survey targets courses offered at the 200 level. A reasonably large proportion of our students complete these courses at the community college level. Thus, we may not be measuring knowledge transfer occurring at SHSU. At minimum, we need to include questions on the exit survey that query whether the courses were completed within our Department or credit was transferred. It may also be more reasonable to include questions on the exit survey that target 300 and 400 level courses thereby ensuring a more accurate assessment of our program. The new undergraduate assessment committee has been tasked with a full review of these issues.

## Objective (L)

### Competence In Scientific Writing Skills 🔑

As the next generation of individuals are developed for the criminal justice workforce, it is increasingly apparent that employable candidates must be able to engage in scientific writing related to their field of study. In criminal justice, job candidates are expected to demonstrate skills and abilities that would allow them to research topic and provide scientific summaries of the knowledge gained during their research. While the specific aspects of any position will vary, our department will ensure that our students demonstrate competence in their scientific writing skills.

## Indicator

### Students Will Produce High Quality Scientific Writing On Contemporary Criminal Justice Topics 🔑🔑

Undergraduate criminal justice students will demonstrate their scientific writing ability in their required Research Methods course (CRIJ 3378). Scientific writing skills will be scored by a common rubric agreed upon by a faculty committee. Each instructor will utilize this common rubric when grading the student's scientific writing. The following five domains of the student's scientific writing ability will be considered: Structure and Organization, Writing and Grammar, Appropriateness of the Proposed Methodology, Statement of Research Purpose, and Inclusion of Appropriate and Relevant Prior Research. The criteria used to assess this indicator is attached.

## Criterion

### The Majority Of Students Will Score At 75% Or Above On The Research Paper Proposal Scoring Rubric. 🔑🔑

The majority of students will score at 75% or above on the scientific writing assessment scoring rubric.

## Finding

### Student Competence In Scientific Writing And Research Skills Surpasses Goal. 🔑

To assess the writing ability of undergraduate criminal justice majors, our department selected a common course within which instructors would utilize a common rubric to evaluate student writing ability and report out for assessment purposes. The CRIJ 3378 Research Methods course was selected as the class that would be used to assess student writing since this class is a

required course, and a course that students tend to complete toward the end of their matriculation despite its 300-level designation.

A group of faculty members and instructors who are typically responsible for teaching CRIJ 3378 met last academic year in conjunction with the department chair to discuss this assessment goal, the CRIJ 3378 course, revision of the common scoring rubric, as well as the common type of assignment that would be assigned and subsequently evaluated by the instructor. The group was aware that in addition to providing feedback to the instructors and the department, this information would be included as part of the departmental assessment efforts.

The working group ultimately developed a rubric that would assess the writing ability of students in five domains: Structure and Organization of the paper, Writing and Grammar, Appropriateness of the Proposed Methodology, Statement of Research Purpose, and Inclusion of Appropriate and Relevant Prior Research. Scores for each domain ranged from 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent). The domain scores were also averaged to determine the overall score achieved by this subset of criminal justice students. The initial goal set for this degree plan was that students would achieve an average score of 75 percent or higher on this writing assessment.

Three sections of CRIJ 3378 Research Methods were selected for assessment as an initial pilot test of this new instrument and assessment approach. The writing ability of the students from CRIJ 3378 Research Methods was assessed in three class sections using a common scoring rubric (see attached). Across the five domains, the average student scored 83 percent. This finding demonstrates that our students have met and exceeded our stated goal.

The domains titled "Structure and Organization of the paper" and "Statement of Research Purpose" garnered the highest student scores. The weakest student scores existed in the "Writing and Grammar" domain. Specifically, the following class averages were found for each domain in the rubric:

Structure and Organization of the paper (4.4, 4.8, 2.9)  
Writing and Grammar (3.2, 4.2, 3.0)  
Appropriateness of the Proposed Methodology (3.5, 4.8, 3.3)  
Statement of Research Purpose (4.6, 4.8, 2.9)  
Inclusion of Appropriate and Relevant Prior Research (3.9, 3.7, n/a)

In comparison to findings from the prior academic assessment cycle, all domains related to broader,

contextual skills improved; whereas, the writing and grammar score did not improve, but was relatively stable.

As noted in our prior Actions statement, we have continued to encourage all instructors to devote additional time and effort to writing assignments in the various lower division prerequisite courses.

#### Action

#### **Development Of Scientific Writing Skills Through The Criminal Justice Curriculum Followed By Increased Depth And Breath Of Assessment Of Skills** 🔑

Our future actions related to enhancing the scientific writing ability of our undergraduate criminal justice majors will focus on three aspects: [1] continued encouragement of scientific writing development in lower division courses, [2] increased breadth and depth of student scientific writing assessment, and [3] increased reliability of measuring our student's weakest area of scientific writing – "Writing and Grammar."

We will encourage instructors to assign scientific written assignments and projects throughout our courses in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology and specifically target our lower division classes for increased writing development. This systematic approach will better prepare the scientific writing skills of our students as they progress throughout our degree plans.

A significant modification in the approach to the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology course scheduling will be undertaken for the 2015-2016 academic year. The CRIJ 3378 Research Methods course will increasingly be offered in smaller sections (30 students vs. 200 students) in future semesters. By scheduling fewer students in our course sections, we will be able to increase the depth and breadth of our student scientific writing assessment efforts. Instructors will also be able to engage students in a higher level of scientific writing enhanced approaches such as a greater number of assignments, assignments that build upon earlier drafts, and the inclusion of significant amounts of feedback, thereby increasing the depth of our assessment efforts. Next, this approach with smaller course sections will ensure quality scientific writing assignments are required as part of the course syllabi, and all students in those courses will be appropriately assessed on their scientific writing ability, thereby increasing our breadth of student assessment.

Our final action item for the next assessment cycle will focus on discussion of the reliability and validity of measuring the weakest area of our students scientific writing categorized as "writing and grammar". As demonstrated in the scores listed earlier, significant variation between instructors can occur on this measure. Given that it is the weakest skill, we will tackle this aspect in greater depth. Faculty will consider utilizing available electronic tools such as the grammar check feature in Turnitin.com to improve our consistency across instructors in measuring this concept. If all students were required to electronically submit their course assignments through turnitin.com, instructors could record

the grammar check score which is an automatic function within the program. Other alternatives will be discussed among instructors.

## Goal

### **Development Of Scientific Writing Skills Appropriate For Criminal Justice Workforce Candidates** 🔑

A key component of the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology Strategic Plan is the goal in which we aim to collectively "Promote and support the development and delivery of a rigorous, contemporary curriculum." As a part of these efforts it is critical that our students development strong scientific writing skills over the course of their studies. As students near the completion of their undergraduate degree, common assessment of student writing abilities should find that the vast majority of our students are strong scientific writers.

## Objective (L)

### **Competence In Scientific Writing Skills** 🔑

As the next generation of individuals are developed for the criminal justice workforce, it is increasingly apparent that employable candidates must be able to engage in scientific writing related to their field of study. In criminal justice, job candidates are expected to demonstrate skills and abilities that would allow them to research topic and provide scientific summaries of the knowledge gained during their research. While the specific aspects of any position will vary, our department will ensure that our students demonstrate competence in their scientific writing skills.

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### **Previous Cycle's "Plan for Continuous Improvement"**

As indicated in detail in our findings on comprehensive knowledge, this assessment cycle our Departmental faculty will need to reexamine the undergraduate curriculum and its alignment with assessment protocol. We have been utilizing the same survey questions for a number of years and must update both our process of assessment and likely the content of our assessment materials. Regarding the assessment of writing and research skills, our primary goal will be to capture a greater number of research methods sections taught by our faculty to more fully assess student ability. These steps will provide us better data upon which we can improve our undergraduate program performance.

Certainly a first step is to determine a better approach to assessment that will include a large subset of our undergraduate students. The current sample size is small by comparison and limited to four sections of a course that used a common assessment rubric. Additional faculty "buy in" will be needed to achieve this goal. The Department Chair will accept the responsibility for strongly encouraging faculty utilize this common rubric (or a redesigned version of the rubric) to grade a research paper. Further, faculty will provide consideration if perhaps assessing papers in senior level writing enhanced classes will increase the validity of our efforts.

**Please detail the elements of your previous "Plan for Continuous Improvement" that were implemented. If elements were not implemented please explain why, along with any contextual challenges you may have faced that prevented their implementation.**

We have continued to struggle with appropriate assessment of our objectives for the BA/BS in Criminal Justice using the current approach. The Department has continued to follow the approach that has been used by the College for several years making small modifications to the process that has been in place. With regard to the exit exam, a working group recognized potential misalignment of the exam content given the increasing number of transfer students who complete core criminal justice courses elsewhere. To measure the extent of this issue, we continued with the benchmark exam but included another indicator of transfer status. The information was an intermediate step required to further the suggestions of the previous cycle's plan for continuous improvement.

Additionally during this academic cycle, the department chair convened faculty and instructors who were primarily responsible for CRIJ 3378 Research Methods as part of a series of meetings to improve the department assessment of the goals stated as well as share feedback on our ongoing efforts.

The prior cycle's plan included a goal of obtaining a larger subset of undergraduate students who would participate in the writing assessment process. As this goal was discussed, the working group recognized an intermediate step of redesigning the assessment tool and course scheduling was a greater need than collecting a higher number of assessments. First and foremost, the group engaged in work to redesign and test an assessment instrument (i.e., common rubric) that could be used in a variety of CRIJ 3378 Research Methods sections regardless of the instructor. This instrument was finalized and disseminated to other instructors for comment. Once the common rubric was agreed upon, it was put into use for assessing student writing consistent with our goals.

The department chair also engaged in a series of individualized meetings regarding course scheduling to determine an alternative approach to offering the CRIJ 3378 Research Methods course. This course is an ideal assessment environment given the content geared toward scientific writing and potential for common assessment. Yet, holding large lecture sections (i.e., 200 students) was not ideal for the instructor to provide a consistent assignment that would also be expected in smaller, writing intensive sections of the course. The department chair determined that to facilitate both our efforts in improving our student's scientific writing ability as well as subsequent assessment efforts, smaller course sections should be scheduled. This change in administrative approach, informed by last year's assessment cycle knowledge, will be enacted for the Spring 2016 academic semester.

In summary, while the initial conclusion made during last cycle's plan for continuous improvement was to increase the number of data points collected, enhanced process that included intermediate steps was an agreed upon priority to enhance our assessment efforts.

**Plan for Continuous Improvement - Please detail your plan for improvement that you have developed based on what you learned from your 2014 - 2015 Cycle Findings.**

As the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology begins its third year as a distinct department, it is increasingly evident that additional focus needs to be placed on the assessment plan. The first two years of assessment were relatively transitory as the organizational structure of both the College and the Department have occurred. Entering into the new academic year, a renewed emphasis on "doing something more" is underway but potentially not apparent as part of the documented assessment plan to date.

First and foremost, to improve our assessment ability of the BA/BS in Criminal Justice, a working group/committee comprised of Department of CJC faculty members will be convened beginning in August 2016. For many years, the assessment of this degree plan existed at the College level which was then turned over to the department chair to perform in consultation with faculty. Enhanced inclusion of faculty in this process and diffusion of this responsibility will allow for the stimulation of both faculty "buy in" and new ideas for approaches to assessing student learning across the curriculum. The department has historically relied upon a post test only/ exit exam strategy with our graduating seniors as a major criteria for assessment in addition to assessing scientific writing. Additional efforts for assessment of student during their studies will be considered. It would behoove the department to have a number of approaches to ongoing feedback rather than relying on "end of the line" product assessment.

If the avenues of assessment are to continue, a key aspect for the improvement of our assessment efforts will include obtaining a large subset of our undergraduate students for the scientific writing assessment. The current sample size is small by comparison and limited to three sections of a course that used a common assessment rubric. Additional faculty and instructor "buy in" will be needed to achieve this goal. The Department Chair will accept the responsibility for strongly encouraging faculty utilize this redesigned rubric to grade a scientific writing assignment.

We will also provide specific feedback to all of our faculty and instructors regarding the strengths and weaknesses displayed by our students in their writing so that broad based efforts can be made by all faculty members to develop our student's scientific writing ability.

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