

CEHD Grant Application Form

Application

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| Applicant Name: | Jeffrey N. Jones |
| Title: | Associate Professor |
| Department: | Teaching, Learning, and Educational Studies |
| Title of Proposal: | Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court |
| Amount Requested: | \$2000 |
| Dates of Project: | 11/15/13--11/14/14 |

Evaluation Guidelines

| | Strongly Agree 5 | Agree 4 | Undecided 3 | Disagree 2 | Strongly Disagree 1 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| The proposed research/creative activity is well conceived and organized. | <input type="radio"/> |
| The proposed work will increase the likelihood that the applicant will secure external funding in the future. | <input type="radio"/> |
| The methods and/or procedures are clearly stated and appropriate for the proposed activity. | <input type="radio"/> |
| The plans for data analysis or evaluation critique are clearly stated and appropriate for the proposed activity. | <input type="radio"/> |
| The costs for the proposed budget are clearly itemized and justified. | <input type="radio"/> |
| This project has the potential to advance the scholarly/creative reputation of WMU. | <input type="radio"/> |

Project title: Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court

Project purpose:

There exists a potential for juvenile and young adult courts to look beyond the application of legal consequences—to enjoin individuals in meaningful personal transformation. Indeed, such interventions may alter social and academic trajectories in the short and long term. The local 8th District Court is partnering with multiple community-based organizations (County Health Department, Community Mental Health, Speak it Forward/Kinetic Effect, Big Brothers/Big Sisters) and has created the Young Adult Diversion Program. The purpose of the program is to identify and elevate individual strengths, to empower young adults placed at risk, and to break the cycle of recidivism. It seeks to remedy the symptoms of trauma, and further, to address the roots of maladaptive patterns of behavior.

We are initiating an applied study of organizational context, strategies, and participant experience in the YADC, using observations of planning meetings, court sessions, and youth programming, participant surveys, and interviews to determine how involvement affects participants' perceptions and outcomes.

Background:

The juvenile and young adult courts are complicated and enigmatic systems, filled with contested spaces and conflicting priorities. One example of this systemic paradox is the balance between individualized rehabilitation (the ideal of the juvenile system) and proportional punishment (the mandate of the adult system). There are an increasing number of alternative interventions to engage young adults in prosocial activity, in hopes of altering social, academic, and career outcomes (Berger, 1996). Wilson & Hoge (2012) documented that diversion programs are more effective than traditional court interventions in a meta-analysis of 73 programs across 45 studies that used recidivism as an outcome.

Juvenile justice and young adult courts straddle the years of late adolescence and emerging adulthood. Developmentally, individuals in the young adult court (aged 17-21) are still formalizing adult roles and assuming responsibilities. While self-regulation, decision-making, and brain functioning are not fully developed, there is also a real potential to intervene in these years, as developmental and social trajectories are malleable (Gibson, & Krohn, 2012). In terms of developmental variation, there is increasing attention on gender-specific pathways and treatment conditions (Hodgdon, 2013), as well as how systems of justice differentially affect female and male participants (Watson, & Edelman, 2012; Nurse, 2010).

A majority of diversion programs intervene in the lives of participants, and rightly so. Individuals in this population have more traumatic life experiences and mental health needs. In a study of juvenile and young adult prevalence rates, 68% of young offenders were found to have one psychiatric disorder, and 43% had two or more (Washburn, et al., 2008). There are various ways to integrate counseling and mental health services in diversion programs, and multiple perspectives on diagnostic testing and screening (Vincent, & Grisso, 2005).

Community psychology and the prevention sciences provide a socio-ecological framework to view the complexities of development within and across social contexts. Comprehensive diversion approaches address the multiple ecological realities that face young offenders, and may be more able to uncover needs, provide appropriate and targeted support, and allow for healing to take place and for personal growth to flourish (Foster, et al., 2005).

Methods and plan of work:

This is a qualitative-dominant mixed methods study. We will use a survey to assess developmental assets and quality of life indicators. We will use these surveys to inform interviews with participants, and will contextualize these data sources with observations at YADC planning, court, and programming sessions.

We take an interpretive ethnographic approach, a cultural view of qualitative research that draws inferences grounded in field observation and inquiry based on interactions with participants (Denzin, 1989). We assume that program influences are determined by the ways in which individual participants interact with, and interpret, such programming. We utilize surveys, interviews, and observations to gain access to perceptions and experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). We are further guided by narrative inquiry. Individuals explain their experiences through culturally-influenced story form, and narrative inquiry is a study of the stories that people live and tell (Clandinin, 2000; McAdams, 1993).

The first survey will assess quality of life indicators (Patrick, Edwards, & Topolski, 2002), and the second focuses on developmental assets (Klein, et al., 2006), career aspirations, and efficacy. These will be given to participants (when possible) as they enter and exit the program. The first interviews with YADC participants will assess individuals' pathways into and through the juvenile and young adult court systems. The second will assess their psychosocial experiences in the program and examine their ideas for moving forward. The interview questions are informed by the literature on social-cognitive perspectives of motivation, interpersonal relationships, and career preparation and readiness, and parallel the constructs in the surveys.

The analytic process, consistent with interpretive and inductive research, is iterative throughout the course of the study as researchers observe themes, patterns, and associations within the data (Merriam, 2002). Observations gather data that are independent of participant and coordinator

perceptions, and interviews aid the discovery of meanings that individuals assign to observed interactions (Seidman, Tseng, & Weisner, 2006). Field notes will be typed and compiled, and interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Field notes will be used to situate themes and patterns identified in the analysis of survey and interview data.

Focused codes will be created for preexisting theoretical constructs and open codes will originate through onsite observation and analysis. These codes will be informed by survey constructs and applied to all field notes and interview transcriptions. We will utilize NVivo, a qualitative software program, to organize and revise codes, determine inter-rater reliability, and to analyze data. Several strategies will promote the reliability of findings, including a prolonged engagement in the research setting, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, thick description, and reflexive journaling. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This population of young adults is a vulnerable group and protected class because of their involvement in the justice system. As such, we have contacted several WMU faculty who do research on juvenile and young adult populations, and have consulted recent research in this area (specifically National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2013; Wolbransky, Goldstein, Giallella, & Heilbrun, 2013) to identify appropriate measures to ensure ethical and proper research.

Budget and justification:

(omitted)

Anticipated outcomes:

This research will yield multiple pieces of scholarship that include national-level conference presentations and a series of journal articles on court-community partnerships and the effects of diversion on participant experience. This research may develop into dissertation research for Ricky Pope (doctoral student in CECP), and this project will provide an apprenticeship for Brittany Tinnon, a criminology/sociology student who is pursuing a career in juvenile justice. Further, this research will provide formative and summative evaluative information for the 8th District Court and the Young Adult Diversion Court team.

Plans for continuing research activity:

This is a multi-year project with the potential to grow in scope and scale. We will look to multiple sources of funding to support the implementation of this research, including internal (FRACAA, SFSA) and external (community foundations, federal agencies) sources. These CEHD/ Merze Tate funds will allow us to jump-start this project to begin this important work immediately. I value the work of the YADC group and see this as an opportunity to make a contribution to the local community, the literature on juvenile justice and diversion, and to mentor students in applied research.

This support would represent a real and tangible college investment in positive youth

development for those individuals placed at risk, and would demonstrate the College of Education and Human Development commitment to meaningful community engagement.

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