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## Interdisciplinarity@WMU- Phase One planning Template

- 1. Brief Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the proposed interdisciplinary initiative. What types of questions would the initiative ask? What types of complex problems would it seek to solve?

This initiative would launch a new interdisciplinary M.A. program in Crime and Justice Studies that uses existing courses from across multiple units to form a new degree program. Many of these courses (though not all) have marginal enrollment numbers and would benefit from additional students. By using existing courses that do not reach their maximum enrollments, this program would bring new students to campus without requiring any new resources. Currently, we have a very strong B.A. program in Criminal Justice Studies that includes several hundred majors. As of Fall 2020, there were 401 students who selected Criminal Justice / Criminal Justice Studies as their primary major, and many more who selected it as their second major or as a minor. Although the Department of Sociology does offer graduate degrees in Sociology that allow for students to study crime-related topics, there is not a crime focused degree despite having many faculty with relevant expertise and offering courses that are related to crime. This limits our ability to serve students and working professionals in the area who desire a graduate degree in criminal justice or criminology. This new program (both as a stand-alone M.A. and as an accelerated M.A. program) would extend our crime and justice area to the graduate level. Thus we would be able to market to existing undergraduate students, alumni still in the area, and working professionals throughout southwest Michigan.

The nearest comparable programs are at GVSU and MSU. GVSU does not offer a fully in-person degree program, and thus does not serve students or working professionals who desire an in-person experience. MSU does offer an in-person option for their degree, but is over an hour drive from Kalamazoo. For both current students and working professionals, career advancement in criminal justice and other justice-related fields is enhanced with a graduate degree in crime- and justice- related studies.

- 2. Impacted units:** What existing units, programs, and colleges would be involved in the proposed initiative? What other possibilities for collaboration across campus or in the broader community might exist now or in the future?

The core of the program is based in Sociology, which is the home to the Criminal Justice Studies B.A. program and has numerous faculty with relevant degrees and teaching and research experience. However, Sociology does not currently offer a large number of crime and justice focused courses at the graduate level, so expertise in other units will also be utilized. Students will be able to specialize in one of several track options, including: addiction; cybercrime; environmental justice; management and administration; race, power, and inequality; or theory and research. In order to offer each of these tracks, courses have been identified in the

following programs with relevant content: African American and African Studies; Alcohol And Drug Abuse; Anthropology; Climate Change (FCS & GEOG); Cybersecurity; Educational Studies; Evaluation; Public Affairs and Administration; Political Science; and Psychology. The courses identified in other programs outside Sociology are all electives for this proposed degree program, so no one program would be forced to make room for students should their courses reach a maximum (though some programs have offered to provide more sections if there is sufficient demand). We have contacted program directors or department chairs for each of these areas and confirmed (informally) that these courses would be open to students in this proposed program. This program will also strengthen our existing relationships with criminal justice and social services in Kalamazoo and southwest Michigan.

Students will be able to complete a graduate certificate program – such as the Addiction Specialization Certificate, the Climate Change Policy and Management Certificate, and the Cybersecurity: Computer Information Systems Graduate Certificate – as part of the M.A. in Crime and Justice Studies. Eligibility for a certificate program may be subject to separate application and admission into the certificate program.

- 3. Impact on teaching, learning, and curricula:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on teaching, learning, and curricula. How might this initiative help to grow enrollment, including by reaching new audiences of learners through continuing education, dual enrollment, or professional certification? How will the proposed initiative positively impact the training of undergraduate and graduate students? How does it enhance our institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Criminal Justice is a very popular area for higher education, as it provides a foundation for a profession with highly reliable employment opportunities. Our Criminal Justice Studies program at WMU attracts many students and has typically had 300-500 majors consistently over the last decade (currently 401 with it as their primary major). Expanding this to include a graduate program is a natural extension to an already successful program. This is particularly true given the demand for graduate degrees for working professionals in this area. Earning a masters degree is often a requirement or at least a recommendation for career advancement in criminal justice and social services settings, so there is a population of professionals who would be receptive to the opportunity to pursue a graduate degree locally. And because of the critical perspective provided in our courses, issues of ethics, diversity, and equity are addressed. In particular, criminology courses deconstruct myths about racial and ethnic causes of crime and can serve as a foundation for a better understanding of how inequality is reinforced by society's response to crime.

- 4. Impact on research and creative activity:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on research and creative activity. How will this initiative promote discovery and creative scholarship? How might it result in increased external funding?

Although this program is primarily focused on instruction, research opportunities will be enhanced through the presence of additional graduate students with interests in this area. Many of the faculty in Sociology hold degrees in Criminology and would be interested in collaborating with graduate students who share their interest in justice-related studies.

- 5. Efficiencies and/or cost savings:** How might the proposed initiative contribute to increased efficiencies and/or cost savings, for example by reducing administrative positions (e.g. chairs/directors), sharing staff support services and/or by sharing facilities?

This initiative proposes a way to increase revenue without introducing new costs. This would be accomplished by more fully utilizing faculty teaching workload in potentially under-enrolled courses by increasing enrollment and avoiding canceled graduate courses.

- 6. Impact on course offerings and workload:** At present, proposed initiatives will only be feasible and sustainable if they can be supported by existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. Will the proposed initiative streamline existing course or program offerings? Could the initiative help create more equitable and sustainable workload for faculty, for example, by reducing the need to offer under enrolled courses, reducing the frequency of course offerings or eliminating the need to teach some courses?

Although this program does not streamline anything, it does nonetheless address the problem of under-enrolled courses. This program will be supported by existing resources, including courses that are rarely or never fully enrolled.

- 7. Additional Information:** What additional information would you like to provide in support of this proposal?

This proposed program has been reviewed by the faculty of the Criminal Justice Studies program and the faculty approved submitting this proposal. The full proposal with specific courses listed is still a draft and in development, but we hope to have a full proposal reviewed and approved by the full Department of Sociology faculty by the end of March.

**8. Contact**

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