



Presidential Address: Widening the Net of Education, Research and Scholarship, and Service and Community Engagement in Criminology and Criminal Justice

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Introduction

I would like to begin by emphasizing the absolute honor it has been serving as the Southern Criminal Justice Association's (SCJA) president. When I was handed the proverbial and actual gavel from the outgoing SCJA President, Dr. John Stogner, at the annual SCJA conference in Nashville, Tennessee in September 2019, I humbly took the platform to address the SCJA members and community. It was a time (at least from my perspective) of excitement and intrigue about the upcoming year for SCJA and the anticipation of the 2020 SCJA conference in Biloxi, Mississippi at the Beau Rivage Resort & Casino. Little did I know...March 2020 had a surprise of pandemic proportion (no pun intended) for me, the SCJA members and community, and the world. As I continued to serve as SCJA President during the COVID-19 pandemic, what immediately became apparent to me was the resolve of the SCJA Executive Board and my SCJA community and friends to be resilient and re-focus on what matters...and what matters is humanity. It is within this vein and lens where the theme of the SCJA 2020 conference (turned Virtual Research Showcase), "*Widening the Net of Education and Scholarship in Criminology and Criminal Justice*", became something even larger than what I initially envisioned in early 2019...and hence, the expanded title of this paper, "*Widening the Net of Education, Research and Scholarship, and Service and Community Engagement in Criminology and Criminal Justice*".

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What does Interdisciplinary Mean?

I am fairly confident that I would be unable to find an academic these days that has not heard the word *interdisciplinary*. In fact, the word interdisciplinary (and related variations such as multidisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, trans-disciplinary) has become a “buzz word” and is fairly ubiquitous in the ivory tower in recent years. Essentially, interdisciplinary in the academic setting refers to any activity that may include education, research and scholarship, and service and community engagement that involves more than one discipline. *Interdisciplinary education* may come in the form of a dual degree program in social work and criminal justice, for example. *Interdisciplinary research and scholarship* may be exemplified as an experiment on memory recall for eyewitnesses of a crime, which may include researchers and scholars from psychology and criminal justice. *Interdisciplinary service and community engagement* may emerge from a local jail that partners with criminal justice faculty and students, nutrition sciences faculty and students, and exercise science faculty and students to develop and administer a health and wellness program for the correctional officers and inmates. These are just a few of the many possible examples of the word “interdisciplinary” in action in the academic arena.

Why does Interdisciplinary Education Matter?

Historically, and certainly currently, academic disciplines are “siloed”. Specifically, chemistry departments have their own degree programs and students in chemistry, engineering departments have their own degree programs and students in engineering, and criminology/criminal justice (CCJ) departments have their own degree programs and students in CCJ. There is nothing intrinsically problematic about these units being structurally and operationally distinct. However, having an insular focus and being operational only within the disciplinary fencelines does potentially limit broader-based knowledge and interconnectivity among students when and where overlapping interests exist or where inquisitive minds may drift. This is certainly not to suggest that there should only be “one major” or a core set of a handful of interdisciplinary majors per se, but it is mentioned to alternatively suggest that potential interconnectivity should at least be explored more across disciplines in the hopes that this dialogue may lead to more opportunities for students to customize their own educational interests, goals, and course map under a larger scaffolding of a major. For instance, connectivity between naturally overlapping and/or seemingly unrelated curriculums (where a convergence is later identified) could be designed and managed as interdisciplinary certificate programs, dual degree programs, or as suggested electives that may be embedded as major core course requirements for one major but offered in another discipline (i.e., chemistry majors are required to take two criminal justice classes in crime scene investigation) or embedded as required elective courses

within a major (i.e., psychology majors are required to choose two courses from a list of 10 criminal justice courses). Ultimately, interdisciplinary curriculum and degree programs “widen the net” and produce learners that have a much broader knowledge base with greater opportunities for graduate education and diverse career paths.

Why does Interdisciplinary Research & Scholarship Matter?

Similar to education and related degree programs, research and scholarship is also primarily “siloes” in academic disciplines. This is indeed unfortunate as much of what criminologists and criminal justice (CCJ) scholars research is inherently interdisciplinary in its focus, methodology, and implications. For example, CCJ scholars study “crime”; sociologists often study “deviance”; and psychologists frequently study “psychopathy”. When you review the operationalization and measurement of these “discipline-specific” terms, they are essentially referring to the same general construct and phenomenon. In another vein, crime is something that affects everyone in society either directly or indirectly, through victimization or perpetration, and/or via exposure from the media, etc. Thus, CCJ research and scholarship should engage interdisciplinary networks to broaden its readership and impact. Also, there are bright minds in every discipline...why shouldn't we work together to examine a global issue?

Representative examples of successful interdisciplinary partnerships that I have been involved in during my career include: an interdisciplinary team of criminologists, psychologists, and epidemiologists examining risk and protective factors and associated delinquent outcomes among Hispanic youth (Jennings et al., 2010a, 2010b, 2016, 2019), an interdisciplinary team of criminologists, psychologists, and epidemiologists studying sex differences in delinquency (Jennings et al., 2010c), multi-level risk factors for delinquency (Jennings et al., 2011), and the victim-offender overlap (Jennings & Komro, 2011) among urban youth; and an interdisciplinary team of criminologists, public health scholars, and epidemiologists analyzing prescription drug monitoring programs (Perez et al., 2017) and opioid-related effects on criminal justice and public health outcomes (Jennings et al., 2020).

Just for an illustrative example, see Table 1 for a summary of discipline-specific and interdisciplinary keyword searches and “hits/results” for criminology and criminal justice (CCJ) and related disciplines (i.e., psychology, sociology, and public health) performed in Google Scholar in May 2021. As can be seen, discipline-specific searches yield the largest volume of hits/results with the largest volume of results being generated for sociology (5,090,000 results) followed by psychology (4,420,000 results), public health (2,620,000 results), criminal justice (1,530,000 results), and criminology (978,000 results). Comparatively, interdisciplinary searches including *only* criminology and a related discipline (i.e., criminal justice, psychology, sociology, and public health) produce results that are fairly comparable for criminology and psychology (651,000 results) and criminology and sociology (638,000 results) with a slightly lesser volume for criminology and criminal justice (522,000 results). The smallest volume of results is for criminology and public

Table 1 Google Scholar Results for Discipline-Specific and Interdisciplinary Keyword Searches

Keyword Searches	Results
Discipline-Specific Searches	
Criminology	978,000
Criminal Justice	1,530,000
Psychology	4,420,000
Sociology	5,090,000
Public Health	2,620,000
Interdisciplinary Searches (Criminology)	
Criminology AND Criminal Justice	522,000
Criminology AND Psychology	651,000
Criminology AND Sociology	638,000
Criminology AND Public Health	233,000
Interdisciplinary Searches (Criminal Justice)	
Criminal Justice AND Criminology	482,000
Criminal Justice AND Psychology	900,000
Criminal Justice AND Sociology	417,000
Criminal Justice AND Public Health	318,000
Interdisciplinary Searches (CCJ)	
Criminology AND Criminal Justice AND Psychology	933,000
Criminology AND Criminal Justice AND Sociology	398,000
Criminology AND Criminal Justice AND Public Health	316,000

health (233,000 results). In contrast, interdisciplinary searches including *only* criminal justice and psychology yield a very large volume of results (900,000 results) relative to criminal justice and criminology (482,000 results), criminal justice and sociology (417,000 results), and criminal justice and public health (318,000 results). Finally, interdisciplinary searches that include *both* criminology and criminal justice (CCJ) and a related discipline reveal the following volume of results: psychology (933,000 results), sociology (398,000 results), and public health (316,000 results).

The “Top 5” hits/results for the CCJ and a related discipline interdisciplinary searches are displayed in Table 2. Specifically, the top results for the CCJ and psychology interdisciplinary search includes: classic books entitled *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct* (Blackburn, 1993), *The Psychology of Criminal Justice* (Stephenson, 1992), *The Borderland of Criminal Justice: Essays in Law and Criminology* (Allen, 1964), and *Psychology and Criminal Justice* (Ellison & Buckout, 1981), as well as a peer-reviewed article on mixed-methods research in criminology and criminal justice (Trahan & Stewart, 2013). Regarding the Top 5 hits/results for interdisciplinary CCJ and sociology search, the majority of the top results are publication productivity studies (Snell et al., 2009; Sorensen et al., 2006), in addition to classic essays on criminology and criminal justice as professions in higher education (Morn, 1980) and cultural criminology (Ferrell, 2007) and a peer-reviewed article on the institutional placement of criminology within sociology and criminal justice (Triplett & Monk Turner, 2010). Finally, a series of publications (largely authored by Akers

Table 2 Google Scholar “Top 5” Results for Interdisciplinary Keyword Searches

Keyword Searches	Results
Interdisciplinary Searches (CCJ)	
Criminology AND Criminal Justice AND Psychology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Blackburn (1993) 2. Stephenson (1992) 3. Allen (1964) 4. Trahan and Stewart (2013) 5. Ellison and Buckhout (1981)
Criminology AND Criminal Justice AND Sociology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sorensen et al. (2006) 2. Morn (1980) 3. Ferrell (2007) 4. Triplett and Monk Turner (2010) 5. Snell et al. (2009)
Criminology AND Criminal Justice AND Public Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Akers and Lanier (2009) 2. Akers et al. (2012) 3. Welsh et al. (2014) 4. Waltermaurer and Akers (2014) 5. Lanier (2010)

and/or Lanier) represent the Top 5 hits/results for the CCJ and public health interdisciplinary search (Akers & Lanier, 2009; Akers et al., 2012; Lanier, 2010; Waltermaurer & Akers, 2014) along with a peer-reviewed publication on the emerging link between public health and criminology (Welsh et al., 2014).

Beyond the total volume of hits/results for CCJ and related discipline interdisciplinary searches, Fig. 1 provides a graphical illustration of the trends in the interdisciplinary hits/results since 2000 broken into four categories: 2000–2005, 2005–2010, 2010–2015, and 2015–2020. As displayed, the CCJ and related discipline hits/results predominantly follow a linear and upward trend over time with less than 15,000 results for a CCJ and psychology interdisciplinary search for 2000–2005, more than doubling the search results in 2010–2015, and remaining at a high volume for the 2015–2020 search results (i.e., approximately 25,000 results). Similar observations can be made for the CCJ and sociology interdisciplinary searches, which generated less than 15,000 results for the 2000–2005 search, but consistently climbed over time and nearly doubled for the 2015–2020 search. The trends in the volume of hits/results for the CCJ and public health interdisciplinary search yielded even more dramatic increases as slightly more than 5,000 results were generated for the 2000–2005 search, yet this volume of results more than tripled to nearly 20,000 results for the 2015–2020 search.

Why does Interdisciplinary Service & Community Engagement Matter?

Interdisciplinary service and community engagement serves many purposes, but it can both emerge from and inform interdisciplinary education and interdisciplinary research and scholarship. For example, serving on a university committee

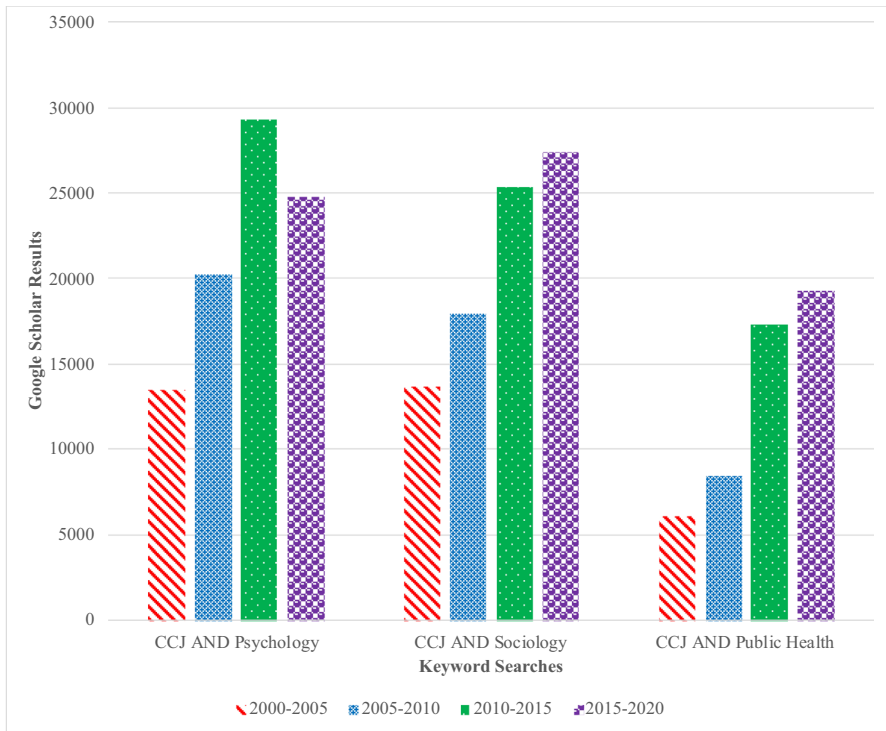


Fig. 1 Trends in Google Scholar Results for CCJ and Interdisciplinary Keyword Searches, 2000–2020

that focuses on curriculum can lead to brainstorming and conversations around the development of interdisciplinary educational opportunities as new course proposals or degree programs that are being considered may “spark the interest” of a committee member in another discipline where they may see a possible connection between their academic unit’s curriculum and that of which is being proposed by another academic unit.

Relatedly, again crime is everyone’s concern, and this shared concern exists in the ivory tower and exists in the community. CCJ educators and scholars certainly do not have all of the answers for how to prevent crime as we draw from many theoretical frameworks and evidence-based best practices when making suggestions for prioritization to address crime. And, this theoretical, empirical, and policy-focused evidence is derived from many applications and observations with a diverse community of stakeholders and constituencies. For instance, considering and implementing crime prevention strategies in schools could involve scientific (academic) experts, school resource officers, school district representatives, school administrators, school teachers, school guidance counselors, local county or city law enforcement, parents, engineers, architects, contractors, and any number of vendors. Narrowly limiting school crime reduction efforts to being informed by only CCJ scholars or counselors or engineers, etc. versus exploring

and engaging an interdisciplinary and multifaceted team of experts runs the risk of not producing the most comprehensive approach to address the problem.

Conclusions & Directions for Future Education, Research and Scholarship, and Service and Community Engagement in Criminology and Criminal Justice

Taken together, I would like to close my Presidential Address by offering a series of suggestions and recommendations for us as CCJ educators, CCJ researchers and scholars, CCJ students, and as CCJ practitioners to consider moving forward. In my opinion, it is clear that interdisciplinary work is highly valuable, useful, and has far reaching implications for policy and practice. Specifically, I encourage the CCJ community to:

- 1). Infuse interdisciplinary topics into your existing courses.
- 2). Build new courses on interdisciplinary topics into your existing curriculum.
- 3). Explore interdisciplinary curriculum with other academic units beyond the CCJ Department.
- 4). Engage in interdisciplinary research and scholarship.
- 5). Submit research and scholarship products to interdisciplinary journal outlets.
- 6). Explore and foster interdisciplinary co-authorship/investigator networks for research and scholarship.
- 7). Seek out interdisciplinary service opportunities at the university and in the profession.
- 8). Promote interdisciplinary service and community engagement with a broad group of stakeholders.

Ultimately, should we as a CCJ community embrace and work toward the activities outlined above, I am confident that this “widening of the net” will move the needle on providing an unmatched educational experience for CCJ learners, broaden the reach and impact of CCJ research and scholarship, and work toward addressing crime and related issues from an interdisciplinary lens.

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