



## Editor's Farewell

J. Mitchell Miller<sup>1</sup>

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To the Stakeholders of *AJ CJ*,

Serving as Editor of the *American Journal of Criminal Justice* over the past six years has been both a privilege and a challenge culminating in the most rewarding of professional experiences. The challenges of operating a scientific journal (securing and maintaining institutional support, finding and training graduate students, recruiting the best scholarship, and the seemingly innumerable organic issues inherent to the publication process) were intensified through our self-imposed “Namesake Initiative”. It seems like just yesterday when we announced this plan to elevate the journal in the discipline rankings – at a Southern Criminal Justice Association reception in Atlanta at the ASC conference. Noting that Criminology & Criminal Justice *was* the only discipline whose journal titled “*American Journal of (discipline)*” wasn’t a tier one publication, our plans to reconfigure to a journal of first look was met with mixed reaction (some didn’t like the idea of losing an easy place to publish) and even some sneering by various partisans of other leading journals (who thought this hill too steep). It took a minute for our reconstruction process to transpire but we’ve now surpassed all expectations and surely silenced all objective doubters.

When assuming leadership of the *Journal* back in 2017, Immediate Past Editor Wesley Jennings had started the enhancement process by nationalizing the editorial board, beginning the long drawn-out process of obtaining an impact factor, increasing overall quality with a tighter acceptance rate, and moving *AJ CJ* into the top third in the discipline with a journal ranking of 35, the first time in the top 50 of the approximately hundred or so titles ranked in our discipline cluster. Building on this momentum, we rose to the 15th spot by the end of our first term in 2020 and postured for more success through acquisition of a Thompson Reuters Journal Impact Factor and membership in the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). Surpassing our stated initiative goal to become a top ten ranked CCJ journal, we realized 2nd and

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3rd place in the leading referenced rankings in 2022. Again, critics voiced that the success was but a result of our thematic “Covid & Crime” issue and that our ascension was driven by excessive self-citations. It is true that the COVID issue, the first of what became many pandemic themed guest issues across several CCJ and related discipline journals, proved a runaway success that accelerated our upward trajectory; but it was the consistency of quality article selection across regular issues and the success of multiple additional special issues that account for our overall success. Also, major publishers calculate every imaginable statistic regarding submissions, time between review steps, acceptance and rejection decisions, and also, self-citation. *AJ CJ* is not even in the top twenty publications in our cluster for self-citation thus belying self-promotion as some schematic end to our rise! The most recent 2023 rankings evidenced that our ascension was indeed not a fluke but reflective of the new “first-look” perspective and associated staying power as we remain among the top CCJ journals.

There are numerous people to thank. The College of Arts & Sciences at the University of North Florida and the Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice provided support that was modified across three deans and three department chairs. Of these, I wish to especially thank Brenda Vose who, as UNF CCJ Department chair, piecemealed necessary graduate student, travel, and other support to ensure a professional operation – we would not have been successful without her! There are numerous other colleagues to thank beginning with the Associate Editors (Julie Baldwin, J.C. Barnes, James Hawdon, and Bryan Miller) who shared and facilitated the namesake vision and provided many hours of regular editorial and reviewer service but also as guest editors and time sacrifice via emergency executive session meetings often during flight layovers or late night. Also, the numerous colleagues who served as regional editors and on the editorial board contributed heavily and are much appreciated. I chose to rotate the board in approximate two-year terms to have more of a working board and involve more people across the discipline. It is common knowledge that reviewer declinations are way up across almost all CCJ journals and, with that in mind, I want to very sincerely thank the hundreds of reviewers whose service enables the refereed process and is the essence of our scholarly progression.

The Managing Editors deserve particular thanks as well for they were the driving engine of the *American* handling the enormous amount of correspondence that goes with the submission process, timelines management, conference exhibit planning, and numerous other tasks of the role. While all moved us along, University of Florida doctoral student Stephanie Koskinen served two split terms in the role. Over the six years with the rise of the journal and increased submission flow, the workload doubled and doubled again but the support staff remained at one person and much of the time this was Stephanie. Along with success, the journal has seen the submission flow increase over 200% which has allowed for greater selectivity and, in turn, woefully longer review periods prompting author inquiry and complaint which she professionally managed. The managing editor work is demanding, constant, and often thankless and Stephanie has proven to be a quiet champion for *AJ CJ*. She did an outstanding job during her master studies at UNF and her willingness to return again when needed while juggling doctoral studies is much appreciated and a vital component to what we’ve been able to accomplish.

Our Springer representative, Erica Gordon-Mallin, has been very supportive and routinely sought ways to promote *AJ CJ* throughout academe and beyond. As the workload grew and grew, coupled with heavy grant travel, rotating managing editors, and practitioner training, I've often been slow to reply and appreciate greatly her patience across the years. Erica has helped us identify several promotional and public relations steps that, though have timed out for me, no doubt will help solidify *AJ CJ* as a leading CCJ outlet going forward.

A last colleague I wish to thank is Holly Ventura Miller. Far beyond help to the *Journal* as a board member, reviewer, guest editor, and author, she worked tirelessly on grants, publications, and other shared academic projects that enabled me to continuously repurpose more time to *AJ CJ* as things became more demanding. I appreciate very much her holistic contributions and doubt that we could have done as well without her.

The *Journal* will move to the University of Cincinnati in January, 2024 under the guidance of incoming Editor J.C. Barnes. J.C. served as Associate Editor during my first term and helped shape the vision that has elevated us to the top of the discipline. I am confident that he will maintain the journal toward its recent success; toward that end I will remain involved for one year in a phasing down process to ensure a smooth and seamless transition of editorial offices and continuation of current editorial management style. Of course, things change with transition and no doubt J.C. will further grow the *Journal* in the years to come – I have every confidence that he will lead us further along a path of success rooted in dissemination of high quality scholarship.

Being Editor of the *American Journal of Criminal Justice* has been perhaps the most rewarding professional experience of my career – in part because of the success we have realized but in equal part because *AJ CJ* is the SCJA journal, my home region and beloved organization for whom the *Journal* is now a rightful pride point! With that, I bid all stakeholders of *AJ CJ* farewell and hope to see you on the conference circuit.

J. Mitchell Miller

Editor, American Journal of Criminal Justice

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