

Message from the Managing Director

This issue of The Docket highlights an array of new grant proposals and other initiatives underway at the Justice Center for Research. What is notable about these new initiatives is that we see a steady increase in faculty and researchers, both within PSU and outside, approaching the Center for assistance with grant applications and to partner with us on them. This advances the mission of the Center to foster and facilitate research. Also in this issue we bid adieu to our Research Assistants Courtney Meyer and Laura Winger, both of whom will be leaving in July. Courtney will be pursuing her Ph.D. at Widener University, and Laura is taking a position in institutional research at SUNY Cortland. They have both done tremendous work for us over the past two years and have been an important part of the Center. We are sorry to see them leave, but know that they are moving on in furtherance of their long term career goals. We wish them both great luck and know they will be successful. Thanks Laura and Courtney!

PENN STATE JUSTICE CENTER FOR RESEARCH

Doris L. MacKenzie, Director
Gary Zajac, Managing Director

Dr. Gary Zajac

New Projects

- **Centre County Correctional Facility** - The Justice Center for Research recently established a relationship with the Centre County Correctional Facility to assist in the facility's efforts to create a data system to track recidivism for its offenders. Collecting and analyzing data on recidivism is important for the facility to understand the behavior of the offenders and to predict the likelihood of the inmates reoffending after they are released. This data will be useful in terms of conducting future studies on effectiveness.
- **Young Adult Offender Program at SCI Pine Grove** - At the request of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC), Drs. Gary Zajac and Michaela Soyer have been working to develop an evaluation plan for the Young Adult Offender Program (YAOP) at the State Correctional Institute at Pine Grove. Young Adult Offenders are those who were under 18 but convicted as adults and sentenced to the state system. The PADOC is very interested in undertaking some evaluation of this program, which was last examined over 12 years ago by Dr. Zajac and other colleagues. He has also been advising the PADOC on improved offender assessment practices for the YAOP.

Inmate Interviews at SCI Huntingdon

- Justice Center Postdoc, Dr. Michaela Soyer, and Research Assistant Courtney Meyer have begun conducting interviews with inmates at the State Correctional Facility at Huntingdon. These interviews are being conducted as part of a pilot study that will be included in grant resubmissions to NSF and NIH by faculty affiliate Dr. Derek Kreager and Dr. Gary Zajac. The proposed study for resubmissions to both NSF and NIH involves investigating offenders' social ties of trust, respect, dislike, and time spent with specific inmates. Inmates are also interviewed about their pre-prison social ties such as family relationships and friendships. This information will allow the research team to determine how these pre-prison relationships are affected by the inmates' incarceration. Overall, this project seeks to improve inmate and ex-inmate health and well-being by seeking to understand the prison social system and its connections with inmate risk and rehabilitative behaviors. The Justice Center has provided support to this pilot research through its Faculty Resources program.

Grant Submissions

- In collaboration with RTI, International, Dr. Gary Zajac and Dr. Michaela Soyer have submitted an application to NIJ on “Research on Offender Decision-Making and Desistance from Crime: An Investigation of Burglar Motivation and Reoffending.” Dr. Matthew DeMichele, a former postdoc at the Justice Center, is serving as the Principal Investigator from RTI on this project, and approached the Justice Center to collaborate on this. The team has proposed a multisite study to develop a burglar taxonomy that will directly inform law enforcement and corrections policies. Researchers will partner with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections and the North Carolina Department of Public Safety to conduct in-depth interviews with 200 incarcerated burglars. The purpose of the study is to identify the motivations and decision-making factors associated with specific types of burglary offenders, and link those typologies to post-release behavior. Dr. Zajac will serve as the PI for Penn State and Dr. Soyer will be the lead interviewer.
- A team of researchers including Dr. Martha Wadsworth (Psychology), Dr. Sandra Azar (Psychology), Dr. Mark Feinberg (Prevention Research Center), and Dr. Gary Zajac have submitted an NIJ grant on “Pathways to Resilience in Youths with Multiple Violence Exposures.” Dr. Wadsworth had approached Dr. Zajac earlier this year to collaborate on this proposal. The purpose of the study is to investigate the casual mechanisms that link children’s violence exposure to delinquency, PTSD, and substance use. This will be accomplished through the use of an intervention program called Building a Strong Identity and Coping Skills (BaSICS) which is designed to build resilience and prevent delinquency, early substance use, and PTSD in poor urban minority early adolescents exposed to high levels of violence and victimization. The project will target adolescents in Harrisburg, PA where there is a high violent crime rate, 30% of residents live in poverty, and there is a large minority population.
- Justice Center Postdoc, Dr. Susan McNeeley, along with faculty affiliate Dr. Corina Graif, applied for the NIJ Data Resources Program: Funding for the Analysis of Existing Data. Their project will examine the effects of non-residential neighborhoods in which families spend time on youth delinquency and victimization.
- Dr. Gary Zajac and Dr. Michaela Soyer submitted an NIJ application for research on “sentinel events” and criminal justice system errors. Their proposed project entitled, “Organizational Learning in Response to Sentinel Events in Criminal Justice Systems” focuses on the organizational and systems response to key sentinel events in several states’ correctional systems. For example, in 2008, a recently released parolee killed a police officer in Philadelphia which triggered a moratorium on parole and a system-wide examination of parole practices. These types of events indicate a need to examine how correctional organizations respond to sentinel events that constitute a system-level crisis. The proposed study would involve conducting in-depth interviews with up to 50 key informants within the Pennsylvania correctional system about the event. There would also be a detailed review of archival agency materials related to the event such as memos, reports, and analyses. Dr. Gary Zajac would serve as PI and Dr. Michaela Soyer would be the co-PI.
- Dr. Susan McNeeley and faculty affiliate Dr. John Kramer, applied to the American Sociological Association’s Fund for the Advancement of the Discipline to fund the qualitative study for interviewing prosecutors about the use of the death penalty.

New Collaborations

- A Penn State alum, currently working at The Protection Institute (a protection, safety and security solutions company), recently contacted the Justice and Safety Institute and the Justice Center regarding a potential collaboration for an NIJ grant on “Developing Knowledge About What Works to Make Schools Safe.” The Justice Center has connected the alum with Andy Mazzara at Penn State’s Applied Research Laboratory (ARL). The Justice Center may play a role in the proposed project which involves a partnership with the Alabama State Department of Education.
- The Justice Center for Research recently supported an application for a proposal from ARL to NIJ to serve as the National Criminal Justice Technology Information Resource Center. This Center would involve the criminal justice communities of practice, including law enforcement, corrections, and courts. The Justice Center is looking forward to participating in this NIJ Center.

Justice Center Live Streams Presentations

This spring, the Justice Center hosted several lectures through the Criminology Forum lecture series. These presentations were streamed live via Adobe Connect to affiliates of the Justice Center who are not located at the University Park campus. Several faculty from the Penn State Harrisburg campus, as well as colleagues at the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing were able to view the presentations. The Justice Center plans to continue using this technology for future presentations as a way to strengthen connections with faculty at other Penn State campuses as well as other affiliates and supporters of the Center. Look for announcements in the fall about our upcoming lectures.

Awards

Congratulations to Julia Laskorunsky and Robert Hutchison, Justice Center graduate assistants, on their recent poster and paper! Julia won third place in the social and behavior sciences category of the 2014 Graduate Exhibition contest for her poster featuring her research on utilizing a risk assessment instrument at the time of sentencing. Robert and his colleague Brendan Lantz received an honorable mention for the Fifth Annual Criminology Graduate Student Working Paper Competition for their paper investigating the implications of group membership for persistence and desistance.

National Children’s Alliance Leadership Conference

Dr. Kate Staley and Dr. Amy Marshall, Associate Professor of Psychology, lead a 2 hour workshop at the National Children’s Alliance Leadership Conference in early June in Washington, DC. The conference aimed to provide continuing education, networking opportunities, and exposure to innovative programs and ideas for child advocate leaders. Dr. Staley and Dr. Marshall collaborated to provide an interdisciplinary perspective on their topic: *Child exposure to intimate partner violence: Theory, impacts, and co-occurring parent-to-child violence.*

Reentry Planning Committee

The Centre County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) which is composed of a variety of stakeholders from county government, the criminal justice field, the courts, law enforcement and victim service/advocacy organizations has identified offender reentry as a top priority for Centre County. CJAB has been awarded grant funds to assist them in developing a comprehensive reentry plan for offenders. Doris MacKenzie has been asked to serve on the Reentry Planning Committee.

Departures

- Laura Winger has accepted an offer as Assistant for Institutional Research at SUNY Cortland. Working in the Institutional Research and Analysis office, Laura will gather, analyze, and report institutional data that will help inform strategic planning, evaluation of academic and administrative programs, and other improvement efforts at the institution. She will also contribute to research on topics such as faculty workload, enrollment patterns, and other ad hoc requests from various campus stakeholders. While working at the Justice Center, Laura completed Penn State's graduate certificate program in institutional research. This program, offered through the College of Education, provided Laura with a solid foundation of institutional research knowledge that she will take into this next position. Laura's long term goals involve advancing within the field of institutional research and developing expertise in the area of enrollment management.
- Courtney Meyer will be pursuing a Ph.D. in Human Sexuality at Widener University. She plans to complete the Sexuality Education track in the program where she will be trained to educate others about human sexuality. This next step will prepare Courtney for her future career goal of being a Director of a Women's Center at a university.

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