



PennState
College of the Liberal Arts

CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH CENTER

Jeffery Ulmer, Director
Gary Zajac, Managing Director
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Elaine Arsenault, Docket Editor

The Docket November 2024

Message from the Director

Fall of 2024 has been a busy time. We have new projects, new people, and new investments in the future of the CJRC. First, we have enjoyed a vibrant speaker series with the Department of Sociology and Criminology. We had a farewell talk from Megan Kurlychek, outgoing associate director of the CJRC, and heard from the Criminology Graduate Program paper competition award winners, Joseph Risi, Ashley Rodriguez, and Emerson Waite. We finished up with a fascinating presentation of new research from J.C. Barnes of the University of Cincinnati. We also had another, even bigger and more successful Career Expo with the Department of Sociology and Criminology, organized by Joy Vincent-Killian. Furthermore, our staff and faculty scholars here and at Penn State Abington are hard at work on a wide variety of research projects and funding proposals that should yield important social scientific knowledge as well as criminal justice policy guidance.

I would like to welcome our new postdoctoral and graduate students, and I would like to announce that Holly Nguyen, associate professor of criminology and sociology, will begin as associate director of the CJRC in the spring!

Finally, as noted above, associate director Megan Kurlychek is leaving for warmer climates at Florida State University. I want to thank her personally for all her tireless work on behalf of the CJRC over the years, and wish her all the best in her university home.

Jeffery Ulmer
CJRC Director

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Criminal Justice Research Center Welcomes New Personnel

Nicolette Bardele is a postdoctoral scholar at Penn State's Criminal Justice Research Center. Her research and teaching interests are at the intersection of criminal justice, rural and urban sociology, and social inequality. She has used both qualitative and quantitative methods to study how spatial and temporal context shape the experience and administration of probation/parole across communities along the rural-urban continuum in the United States. Bardele received her master of arts and doctoral degree in sociology from Harvard University and her bachelor of arts in sociology and statistics from the University of Notre Dame.

Nicholas Goldrosen is a postdoctoral scholar with the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing and the Criminal Justice Research Center at Penn State. His research broadly focuses on the exercise of discretion in the criminal legal system and its implications for procedural and distributive justice. Specific strands of his work focus on sentencing, law enforcement misconduct, prosecutorial discretion, and criminal justice reform. He received his doctoral degree and master degree of philosophy in criminology from the University of Cambridge and his bachelor of arts degree from Williams College.

Ryan Bowman is a graduate student at the Criminal Justice Research Center and doctoral student in the Department of Criminology at Penn State. His research interests include sentencing, recidivism, racial and ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system, and incidents of mass violence. Ryan received a bachelor of arts degree in criminology and political science from Villanova University. While at Penn State he has conducted qualitative research on perpetrators of mass violence, analyzed years of data from the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing, and defended a master's thesis on how county-level racial and ethnic composition changes can influence individual-level sentencing outcomes.



Nicolette Bardele



Nicholas Goldrosen



Ryan Bowman

Criminal Justice Research Center Departures

Yiwen Zhang was a graduate student at the CJRC started a new position as a postdoctoral scholar at the University of California, Irvine in the Department of Criminology, Law, and Society.

Julia Dillavou was a graduate student at the CJRC and is currently on the market.

Dorothy Du, Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing postdoctoral scholar at the CJRC, joined the Department of Criminal Justice at North Carolina A&T State University as an assistant professor.

Fall Criminology Speaker Series

This fall the CJRC and Department and Sociology and Criminology were delighted to hear from the following speakers:

Megan Kurlychek, presenting on "A New Lens on Cumulative Disadvantage."

Emerson Waite, Ashley Rodriguez, and Joseph Risi, CJRC Graduate Awardees Presentations.

J.C. Barnes, "Using Risk of Crime Detection to Study Change in Mechanisms of Decision-Making."

2024 Criminology Speaker Series

The Criminology Speaker Series for 2024 featured a diverse range of speakers who shared their research and expertise on assorted topics in criminology. In case you missed any of the presentations we encourage you to view them below.

["Non-Academic Career Panel"](#) — Alexia Cooper

["Modeling 'Remorse Bias' in the Sentencing of Violent Offenses"](#) — Colleen Berryessa

["A New Lens on Cumulative Disadvantage"](#) — Megan Kurlychek

["CJRC Graduate Awardees Presentations"](#) — Emerson Waite, Ashley Rodriguez, and Joseph Risi

["Using Risk of Crime Detection to Study Change in Mechanisms of Decision-Making"](#) — J.C. Barnes

Corrections Innovation Day

Collaboration between academics and correctional professionals can foster transformative ideas. To unlock this potential, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PA DOC) and Penn State's Criminal Justice Research Center (CJRC) hosted Corrections Innovation Day 2024 on July 31, 2024. This event brought together a diverse array of correctional practitioners and academic researchers for a one-day conference, generously sponsored by Arnold Ventures. Through a series of small-group discussions, seventy participants shared insights, tackled challenges, and brainstormed testable solutions to four key issues currently facing Pennsylvania's correctional system. Issues discussed included: 1. Recidivism Reduction, 2. PA DOC Staff Wellness, 3. Reducing In-Prison Violence, and 4. Restrictive Housing (Solitary Confinement) Reform. Each group discussion was professionally facilitated by staff from Penn State's Survey Research Center, and documented by trained notetakers who documented each discussion. A report summarizing the Innovation Day's organization, planning lessons learned, discussion themes, and next steps is available on CJRC's website. By all accounts, the Innovation Day was a success. As illustrated in the quotes below, participants appreciated the inter-disciplinary dialogue, researcher-practitioner connections, and innovative ideas fostered by the event:

"I really appreciated having all of the outside influence from educators, professors...from outside the Department of Corrections...We talk about being institutionalized so much—when you work inside [prison] all the time and you don't get outside perspectives—you're institutionalized. So you know just hearing their ideas, their perspective just kinda' opened up new ideas...it was extraordinary to me some of the ideas that they threw around that we can do for our own and for the mental wellness of our staff. I'm really excited to take those back to SCI Greene." — *Natalie Gordon, Corrections Officer, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections*

"I really thought it was time well spent. I thought recidivism reduction plans that were coming up and people's ideas and recommendations were very interesting, dynamic in some ways, and the nice thing is that I believe—truly believe—that this is going to have some follow up to it." — *Daniel McIntyre, Director of Reentry, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections*

"This [event] helped bring so much context to...the type of research that I'm normally doing. I think that it's going to inform the way that I...interpret things a lot moving forward. Researchers and practitioners definitely need to talk more. I think that it would make science progress a lot more quickly." — *Claudia Anderson, Assistant Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Florida State University*

"As academics, we often work really apart from those on the front lines. This is such a really rare but valuable opportunity to connect with people working directly in the system, and I'm really appreciative of it." — *Michael Mueller Smith, Associate Professor of Economics, University of Michigan*

"I think it went really well. It was a really interesting mix of practitioners and academics. It allowed us to introduce ideas from academia, and them to educate us on the realities of working and living in the world of corrections. So, I thought it was a great day." — *Natasha Frost, Associate Dean of Research and Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Northeastern University*

Promotion at Penn State Abington CJRC

Glenn Sterner, CJRC - Abington - faculty lead, was recently promoted to associate professor of criminal justice at Penn State Abington. This past spring, Glenn was also recognized at the College of the Liberal Arts Annual Researcher Appreciation Reception for receiving his tenth grant during the past year. Congrats Glenn!

CJRC Researcher Receives “We Are!” Shoutout in Penn State Today

Elaine Arsenault, CJRC researcher, was recognized with a [“We Are! shoutout”](#) for her work at the CJRC. “The “We Are!” series recognizes faculty, staff and students for Penn State-related work they’ve done that goes above and beyond their professional duties or responsibilities as students.”

Elaine’s nominator wrote: “I work with Elaine at the Criminal Justice Research Center and we recently had an urgent project come up that required a quick turnaround. Elaine was extremely helpful in assisting the team to get through the work in time. Her flexibility in taking on this project with short notice is greatly appreciated.”

In July, Elaine also completed The Transition to Supervision course offered by Penn State Human Resources. The Transition to Supervision course focuses on leadership in the workplace.

OUTREACH AND ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

2024 Criminal Justice Career Expo



Criminal Justice Career Expo

The annual Criminal Justice Career Expo, held on September 26, 2024, at the Alumni Hall of the HUB-Robeson Center, was a record-breaking success. It attracted 600 attendees and featured 63 tables representing a diverse array of federal and state agencies. This event provided an invaluable platform for students to explore career and internship opportunities, network with industry professionals, and gain essential insights into various career paths within the criminal justice field.

Organized by the Criminal Justice Research Center (CJRC) and the Department of Sociology and Criminology, the Expo showcased a wide range of participants. A total of 63 agencies with 161 representatives participated in the Expo, with notable attendees including ATF, CIA, DEA, DIA, FBI, NCIS, the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General, U.S. Marshals Service, U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Supreme Court Police, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U. S. Capitol Police, and Pentagon Force Protection. The FBI had a line with a wait of ninety minutes for nearly five hours, leaving finally at 5:00 p.m. Additionally, representatives from the Pennsylvania State Police were joined by the Maryland State Police and the Delaware State Police. The extensive representation ensured that students could explore numerous career options and engage directly with professionals from different fields in criminal justice.

Running from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., the Expo offered students a convenient four-hour window during the two lunch periods on a Thursday to interact with agency representatives, share their resumes, and learn more about careers and employment opportunities.

Dean Clarence Lang of the College of the Liberal Arts visited and spoke with Penn State alumni. The Alumni Hall was at capacity, and as professionally dressed students patiently waited in hour-plus lines, Dean Lang spoke with undergraduates about their career interests.

Faculty from the Department of Sociology and Criminology recognized the importance of hands-on experience and networking, integrating the Expo into their curriculum as a replacement for traditional classroom lectures. This approach highlighted the event's significance in providing practical, real-world insights for students pursuing careers in their chosen fields. Attendees explored roles in corrections, domestic relations, postal investigations, probation, forensics, law enforcement, court systems, and even the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

The legal sector was also well represented, featuring representatives from the Pennsylvania State Attorney General's office and county District Attorney's offices, including Blair, Montgomery, Crawford, York, Dauphin, and Lehigh. Representatives stated their interest in the next opportunities to return to Penn State and recruit.

[View the Penn State story on this event.](#)

COURTS AND SENTENCING

New Project: Community Building among Older Men Returning from Incarceration: The Cumberland House Reentry Project (CHRP)

The Community Building among Older Men Returning from Incarceration: The Cumberland House Reentry Project (CHRP) was recently awarded \$328,037 by The National Institutes of Health's National Institute of Aging. Over fifty years of punitive criminal justice policies have created a growing population of older incarcerated individuals who are now eligible for community release but lack the social or economic capital to rebuild their lives. This study will evaluate a novel peer-run program based on network principles to help older, previously incarcerated men transition from prison to the community. This project is led by Derek Kreager, former CJRC director and liberal arts professor of sociology and criminology. Additional investigators include: David Schaefer, professor of sociology (University of California, Irvine); Sarah Brothers, assistant professor of sociology and public policy (Penn State) and CJRC faculty affiliate; Kristina Brant, assistant professor of rural sociology (Penn State); Brandy Henry, assistant professor of education (Penn State); and Nicolette Bardele, CJRC postdoctoral scholar.

The Penn State SSRI and CJRC provided seed funding for this project.

[Read more in the Penn State Today article.](#)

TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION

Seed Grant Award: Ethical Approaches to Community Engaged Research: A Qualitative Study of Community Advisory Board (CAB) Participation by People with Lived Experience of Drug Use

Sarah Brothers, assistant professor of sociology and public policy and CJRC faculty affiliate, will examine ethical issues related to representative inclusion in Community Advisory Boards, using the case of drug-use research.

New Project: Clean Slate Initiative

The overall goal of this study is to evaluate the impacts of the Clean Slate Initiative on the lives of persons who have had their criminal records sealed. Individuals with criminal records face serious barriers to employment, housing, and other facets of citizenship. As a result, there have been efforts by advocates in recent years to lower these barriers by encouraging state legislatures to pass legislation to seal or expunge criminal records. The project team will aim to determine the effects of the sealing of low-level convictions on employment, housing, and other measures of wellbeing. The principal investigators for this project are Jeffery Ulmer, CJRC director, and Megan Kurlychek, CJRC associate director. The award amount is \$75,000 from RTI, Int. to support this project.

Former Commission Executive Director John Kramer Honored by National Association of Sentencing Commissions

John Kramer, professor emeritus of sociology and criminology and the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing's (PCS) founding executive director (1978–1998) was awarded the Richard P. Kern Memorial Award at this year's National Association of Sentencing Commission's (NASC) annual conference, the Kern Award is presented annually to an individual who contributed greatly to the development of sentencing policy and research. Kramer previously served as the staff director of the United States Sentencing Commission (1996–1998), a professor of criminology at Penn State (1973–2015), and was instrumental in the development of Pennsylvania's first edition of sentencing guidelines. Kramer is also a long-standing faculty affiliate of the CJRC. Kramer joins former commission chair, Steven Chanenson, and former executive director, Mark Bergstrom, as recipients of this prestigious national award.

Kramer was presented the award by current PSC executive director, and vice president of NASC, Matthew Kleiman.



Matthew Kleinman, Executive Director, PCS, John Kramer, and Michelle Hall, executive director of the North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission and president of NASC

CORRECTIONS AND RE-ENTRY

New Deputy Director for Research and Technology at the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing

Noah Painter-Davis is the new deputy director for research and technology at the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing. After eleven years as a faculty member at the University of New Mexico (UNM), Painter-Davis recently returned to Penn State, where he received his master's degree in crime, law, and justice and a dual doctoral degree in sociology and demography. His research focuses on improving the effectiveness of public safety responses by developing and implementing interagency collaborations between criminal justice agencies, behavioral health providers, and community partners. His recent work includes a National Institute of Health-funded Justice Community Opioid Innovation Network study. The study involved developing interagency workgroups in Texas, New Mexico, and Illinois consisting of members of parole and substance use service providers. Painter-Davis worked with these workgroups to identify facilitators and barriers to treatment along the continuum of care, develop action plans, and implement evidence-based practices that improve treatment.

While in New Mexico, he worked with the district attorney's office, behavioral health providers, and community members to evaluate and develop practices to redirect certain youth and young adults from the criminal legal and delinquent systems. He has published extensively on issues related to sentencing and was affiliated with the New Mexico Sentencing Commission as a researcher while at UNM. In 2020, he received the Mentoring and Career Development Award from the William T. Grant Foundation, and in 2019, he received the New Faculty Teacher of the Year Award from the Center for Teaching Excellence at UNM. As deputy director for research, Painter-Davis will primarily be focusing on Pennsylvania Senate Resolution 196, which directed the Commission to conduct a comprehensive study of military veterans involvement in the criminal justice system in Pennsylvania, the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, and current treatment options and gaps.



PUBLIC SAFETY AND CRIME PREVENTION

New Project: Confirmatory Efficacy of the Building a Strong Identity and Coping Skills Program for Low-Income Youths

Building a Strong Identity and Coping Skills (BaSICS) is a group-based program designed for low-income teens that leverages multiple powerful buffers of stress not previously combined in an intervention (e.g., coping, collective action), which together are posited to form a potent elixir to address socioeconomic mental health disparities. BaSICS is designed to (1) teach active, engagement coping skills, (2) cultivate positive sociocultural identity, and (3) foster collaborative coping via group social action, which are theorized to lead to (4) recalibration of stress physiology. In a previous clinical trial also funded by NIMH, in comparison to no-treatment controls, teens randomly assigned to participate in BaSICS acquired engagement coping skills, showed reduced cortisol reactivity, and had medium sized treatment effects on anxiety and depression (reported by themselves and their parents).

The main goal of the proposed trial is to replicate and extend these results in a multisite confirmatory efficacy trial of 360 low-income adolescents referred for mental health services but relegated to clinic waiting lists.

The project team consists of principal investigator, Martha E. Wadsworth (Department of Psychology), and co-investigators, Jarl A. Ahlqvist (Department of Sociology and Criminology), Dara Babinski (Psychiatry Department, College of Medicine), Jason José Bendezú (Department of Psychology), Damon Jones (Prevention Research Center), Jasmin Lagman (Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute, Penn State Health), and Dawn Witherspoon (Department of Psychology).

The Penn State CJRC provided seed funding for this project. In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health made a five-year grant award of \$4,768,156.

New Online Gambling Report by CJRC Researchers

“The Pennsylvania Interactive Gaming Assessment: Online Gambling Report 2023 summarizes three years of survey data from more than 1,800 individuals from across the commonwealth, was developed by Penn State’s Criminal Justice Research Center under contract with the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP). The researchers found online gambling participation increased to 16 percent in 2023 after holding steady at 11 percent in 2021 and 2022. Additionally, Pennsylvania’s online gambling revenue in 2023 was more than \$2.1 billion—a nearly 27 percent increase over the preceding year. Its popularity places the state among the top three online gambling revenue-generators in the nation.”

The report is authored by Glenn Sterner, CJRC – Abington – faculty lead and associate professor of criminal justice, Gillian E. H. Russell, CJRC – Abington – assistant research professor, Amanda M. Ferrara, research operations manager, Penn State Social Science Research Institute’s Survey Research Center, and Miranda P. Kaye, former director of the Survey Research Center.

[Read the report](#) and the [Penn State News article](#).

Seed Grant Award: Through the Lens of Procedural Justice Theory: What are Americans' Opinions on the Use of AI in Policing?

Ahmet Guler, associate teaching professor of criminology and CJRC faculty affiliate, will examine how the use of artificial intelligence (AI) applications in policing affects the public perception of procedural justice.

Criminal Justice Research Center

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