

University of Missouri – St. Louis

**Department of Criminology
and Criminal Justice
One University Boulevard
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4400**

May 11, 2009

Dr. Sherry F. Queener
Director of Graduate Office, IUPUI
Associate Dean, UI Graduate School

Dear Dr. Queener:

I am writing in response to your request to comment on the proposed Masters of Science degree in Criminal Justice & Public Safety (MCJPS) to be administered by the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at IUPUI. I have been asked to comment on how this program compares to standards in the field of criminal justice, how this program would compete against other M.S. programs dedicated to criminal justice and public safety, and on the proposed curriculum. As a former chairperson of a department offering the B.S., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees in Criminology & Criminal Justice, I am happy to share my insights about the proposed program.

As the title suggests, the MCJPS program is focused on providing graduate training for working professionals in the field of criminal justice and public safety. It is quite unusual that universities in Indiana do not already offer the M.A. or M.S. degree in criminal justice as this is typically the case in most states. Of course, universities in Indiana do offer some way for students interested in criminal justice to obtain advanced training (e.g., a SPEA graduate degree with specialization in criminal justice, or graduate training in sociology with some emphasis on criminology). Indiana students also have the option of obtaining the M.A. or M.S. degree in criminal justice at universities in neighboring states. But the proposed M.S. program will be much more attractive to potential students than existing options, not only because of accessibility, but because of the additional emphasis on public safety and risk management. The typical Master's degree in criminal justice tends to be focused more generally on social science topics and provides less insight into the practical management issues that confront professionals on a routine basis, or the new challenges they will face. While the general social science programs help students develop the research skills necessary to work as analysts within criminal justice agencies (or as future academics), they do not help prepare the leaders of those agencies with the practical information that is necessary for maintaining public safety and operating criminal justice agencies. The MCJPS program seeks to do both, and judging from the curriculum, its graduates will be leaders at state and local agencies.

The curriculum appears to be rigorous, requiring 24 hours of core coursework that is similar to many existing M.A. and M.S. programs in criminal justice (such as my own). However, the additional 12 hours of coursework (in which students select from one of two areas of concentration) are quite unique, ranging from crisis management, to public finance and budgeting, to environmental risk analysis. I am certain that these are the kinds of courses that students at my own university would like to take, yet we do not offer anything along these lines. The experiential component is also an asset of the proposed program and most degrees in criminal justice recommend something similar. But the proposed program also offers a "mid-career option" for experiential learning which takes into account the fact that many of the graduate students will be working professionals who

want to upgrade and update important skills. Overall, the curriculum is well-developed and logical, and I believe that students will find the coursework attractive because it is easy to see how the material will be useful for their careers. Student in this program should also be able to develop important professional networks.

The proposed M.S. degree will occupy a unique niche among criminal justice programs in the Midwest. The closest competitor program that offers a practical emphasis is at the University of Cincinnati, and they have maintained a very large M.A. program for many years. However, working professionals must stay close to home and so the SPEA MCJPS program is likely to draw most of its students from the Indianapolis region. It may also draw from Illinois and Kentucky because of the lack of this kind of program in those state university systems. Given the level of demand for admission to the M.A. program at my own university, I suspect that the proposal underestimates the anticipated number of interested students. But I assume that this is a problem that IUPUI will be happy to address when it arises.

In the short term, the addition of one full-time faculty member is probably sufficient for the proposed cohort size, but should the number of students in each cohort be larger than proposed, additional faculty will be necessary. I am not certain how many of the courses will be taught by adjunct faculty, but it seems reasonable to assume that some adjunct teaching will be necessary given the highly specialized nature of some of the courses. Also, the planning committee for this program should consider how the program will operate if the majority of students admitted to the program are unable to take a full-time load of courses. In my own program, most Master's degree students select part-time status (typically 2 courses per semester) because they are employed full-time as police chiefs, federal and state probation and parole officers, etc. and because our courses are demanding. I urge the planning committee to admit part-time students to the program because they are precisely the kinds of professionals that will be most interested in obtaining the M.S. in criminal justice and public safety.

In sum, I believe that the MCJPS program will serve an important need in Indiana and that it will offer a unique and valuable curriculum in the region. The proposal is well-developed and the curriculum is logical and useful. Also, it is clear from the student survey results and the many letters of support that the program will be in demand. In my view, it is likely to be very successful immediately and for many years to come.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about my assessment.

Sincerely,

Janet L Lauritsen

Janet L. Lauritsen, Ph.D.
Professor of Criminology & Criminal Justice