Welcome to our inaugural newsletter

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CRIM NEWS

DIRECTOR’S MESSAGE

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the School of Criminology’s monthly newsletter.

Delivered straight to your inbox at the end of every month, the newsletter will include a collection of announcements, information and feature articles to keep you updated on what’s happening in the School.

The newsletter is part of a new strategy to boost internal and external communications within the School. Over the next few months you’ll see this strategy roll out. We expect revisions to our website to include a section for news and events and the creation of social media opportunities. We will also be producing a quarterly publication, focussed on our academic accomplishments, that will be sent electronically to a wide range of departments of criminology, psychology, sociology and law. We’ll be actively seeking content for stories to share through these new media opportunities.

The key to making these initiatives a success is help from you. We want to hear about your accomplishments. We want you to tell us what interests you. Our goal is to foster a conversation among faculty, students and the community about activities at the School. As these projects start up, you’ll have the opportunity to contribute your own content and to submit requests for news stories.

Now it’s time to grab a cup of coffee, put your feet up and enjoy the newsletter. This month spotlights a recent publication, introduces our newest faculty member and provides helpful tips on applying for admission to our honours program.

Sincerely,
Director Neil Boyd, LL.M.
FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

MEET NEW FACULTY MEMBER DR. NICOLE MYERS

Dr. Nicole Myers joined the School of Criminology in September 2014 as an assistant professor. Her primary areas of interest include bail; remand/pre-trial detention; policing; court processing; sentencing; corrections and criminal justice policy. She teaches two courses: Sociology of Law and a seminar course on correctional practice.

The School of Criminology’s newest faculty member, Nicole Myers has tasked herself with investigating areas for improvement in Canada’s bail system.

“I’m really interested in doing things better. We have these systems and processes, but there has to be more effective, more efficient, and more just ways of doing things. Ways that we can be more transparent and let people know what’s going on so that they believe in a system that’s operating in a way that makes sense,” says Myers of her overall interest in criminal law policy.

Myers’ dissertation, defended in October 2012, explored the troubling fact that Ontario has more people in pre-trial detention who have not been found guilty of a criminal offence, than the
province has in sentenced custody post conviction.

Subsequently, a landmark project for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association collecting bail data from the Yukon, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia further demonstrated that Canada has a pre-trial detention problem across the nation.

A large remand population is problematic for both financial and logistical reasons. It is costly and time consuming to keep the remand population in custody or to see them appear in court multiple times. Additionally, from a personal standpoint, it is an extremely challenging time for the individuals detained, who experience lasting impacts on their lives. What is more, people are being held in detention at a time when they are to be presumed innocent.

“What became clear is that the pre-trial population is not so much a problem because a lot of people are having their bail formally denied and they’re staying in custody until their trial. Instead, we have a lot of people who spend several days in custody waiting for a bail decision to be made,” says Myers. “And so, I was trying to get a handle on how this bail process has come to be so slow and what it is that is feeding the pre-trial detention population.”

After gaining a clearer picture of what is happening in Canada’s bail courts, Myers expanded her research to consider how conditions of release are impacting the pre-trial detention problem.

“Once the court imposes a condition it is a criminal offence to breach that condition. Conditions of release will be things like curfews, don’t talk to certain people, don’t consume alcohol or drugs, and don’t go to particular areas,” says Myers.

“If you look at our crime rates, we know that crime rates are generally going down but charges against the administration of justice have been going up. This suggests, that it is these charges of failing to comply that are really fuelling the bail system because if you break a condition you are almost automatically re-arrested and held in detention for a bail hearing.”

Myers next step is to find out what conditions of release people are breaching. Her access to past records has provided details on the number of people who failed to comply with bail conditions, but the files do not actually give specifics on what condition of their release was violated. She’s now working on getting access to court files that will

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**Why SFU?**

“Simon Fraser has always been on the radar as one of the top schools for criminology. I really wanted to be somewhere with a criminology department. I also wanted a large, research-intensive university, and this really offered all of those pieces.

It was an opportunity to not only go somewhere with a strong program that has been around for a number of years, but an opportunity to go somewhere different. There are some significant differences in how bail operates in Ontario and in British Columbia, so I thought there would be a number of interesting comparisons that can be made across the jurisdictions.

I also really wanted a school that had a graduate program. I wanted to supervise MA and PhD students. It is really important to me because that mentorship was so important when it was my turn going through. It was always clear that I enjoyed that advising role and I wanted to be somewhere that offered those kinds of opportunities.”

*DR. NICOLE MYERS*
tell her the specific charges, along with the consequences, and if people are being released or if they are spending more time in detention.

Her arrival at SFU is helping to secure this data. By using resources available through ICURS, Myers will have access to provincial court records going back seven years. With these files, she’ll be able to track individuals through the court system to see why they came back into the courts. She’ll also be able to find out if people commit serious offences when out on bail or if they are committing administrative offences.

The purpose behind this research is to see if imposing conditions of release is actually accomplishing its goal: to keep people from committing any offences on bail and to ensure people return to court.

“We haven’t been able to test the effectiveness of the system. We don’t actually know if all these conditions contribute to the expected results. My sense is that it actually makes no difference. These conditions are not doing what we actually think they are going to do. And instead, they are having what I would say are somewhat unintended consequences,” says Myers.

“In times of declining crime rates we are creating our own crime. Failures to comply contribute to the slowing down of the system because cases now have more charges and are more complex. Everything about it gets more complicated and gets more expensive,” says Myers.

Myers’ research aims not to necessarily change the law but to assess how the law and resources available can be used in a more effective manner. In terms of bail this means making the bail decision sooner after arrest and using restraint in the imposition of bail supervision requirements and conditions of release.
RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

DR. MARTIN BOUCHARD

Associate professor Martin Bouchard joins us to discuss the release of Advances on Illicit Networks (Routledge, 2015). Edited by Bouchard, the book is a compilation of research employing social network concepts and methods to investigate questions of criminological interest.

WHAT KEY QUESTIONS OR IDEAS DO YOU EXPLORE IN THE BOOK?

It is a collective book with each author using social network concepts and methods to examine a criminological question of interest.

All chapters present original empirical studies, often in under-studied areas, like amphetamine production, illicit arms and steroid distribution and trafficking, or the division of labor within terrorist organizations.

It also sheds a new light on older questions in the field like recidivism and co-offending, but taking full advantage of the most recent developments in network theories and methods.
WHY DO YOU FIND THIS TOPIC COMPELLING?

Social network data has had such a great impact in criminology and in other fields because it explicitly recognizes and exploits the power of something we intuitively expect to be influential in human decision-making, including criminal decision-making: our social environment.

Social network analysis provides a framework to systematically analyze the social environment of offenders or would-be offenders, but also of the agents of social control tasked with managing these populations.

The network approach is commonsensical, flexible, powerful. It combines theoretical assumptions and empirical demonstration; it is neither qualitative nor quantitative – it’s both.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF SOME OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS PRESENTED IN THE BOOK?

Variations in network structures play a direct role in the ability of law enforcement agencies to detect offenders, and disrupt their activities. A network approach may make the police more efficient by reducing errors or the number of moves required to make an impact on an illegal activity.

Networks change over time, as we would expect, but the most variability occurs in the specific network participants occupying roles in the network – not in the network structure per se. For control agencies having to intervene on these networks, this requires a shift in thinking about existing cultures and structures, as opposed to specific individuals and their activities at one point in time. A paper drawing from a network built from licit and illicit flow data between countries found that market infrastructure, more than traditional weapon availability indicators, act as the driving force behind changes in small arms trade relations among countries.

An important empirical implication, here and in many other chapters, is the suitability of a network approach to addressing the overlap between the legitimate and the illegal. A key strength of the network approach is to focus on ties and connections without a priori assumptions on how these should be arranged.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO FURTHER DEVELOP THIS RESEARCH?

Years ago I made network theory and social network analysis the main lenses through which I analyze crime. My research brings me to study activities as diverse as terrorism, online child pornography, drug trafficking, as well as illegal entities we refer to as “street gangs” or “criminal organizations”.

Social network analyses are still very much descriptive - there is a lot of work to be done to examine these phenomena using proper criminological theories, and longitudinal data. This is where I am now, and where I go next.

ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING?

Some of the best work in this area is being done by Canadians.

Carlo Morselli’s Inside Criminal Networks (2009) is a great introduction to this topic. Gisela Bichler and Aili Malm are editing the most recent volume of Crime Prevention Studies (2015) on the issue of disrupting illicit networks. John Scott and Peter Carrington’s Sage Handbook of Social Network Analysis (2011) is also a good start, especially for readers interested in more than the criminological aspects of social networks.
UNDERGRADUATE FOCUS

WHY SHOULD I APPLY FOR ADMISSION TO THE HONOURS PROGRAM?

Are you looking for a way to better prepare for graduate school or law school? Or do you want to give yourself a boost in a competitive job market? Then you should consider applying for admission to the School of Criminology’s honours program.

“The honours program gives students the opportunity to gauge their interest in rigorous, independent research before committing to furthering their education in graduate or law school,” says Dr. Sheri Fabian, director, undergraduate programs.

The honours program provides outstanding students the opportunity to develop strong research skills while completing an independent study on a topic of interest to them. The program dovetails with the criminology major and consists of two terms of advanced coursework and supervised research.

This year’s application deadline is February 28, 2015 for admission in September 2015.
An invaluable opportunity

The honours program will help you:

- Demonstrate your ability to successfully prepare and complete a thesis
- Develop strong research skills relevant to both an academic and workplace environment
- Cultivate quality relationships with faculty leading to reference letters
- Explore your research interests with a cohort of like-minded students

Unsure if the honours program is right for you? Speak with a past student to learn about their experience.

REAL LIFE SUCCESS STORIES

Wilson Tam
Current Honours Student

HOW DID YOU PREPARE FOR THE HONOURS PROGRAM?

I first went to the criminology advisor to get a better understanding of what the program involved. I was told to put together a basic proposal via the application form. I was informed that what I developed at that point would be no more than a “skeleton” of my final research project and that the research may take unanticipated twists throughout the actual process. I started asking professors to supervise my thesis in early November 2013. Securing a professor took longer than I expected.

Start planning for admission early

It’s crucial that students begin planning their admission to the honours program early. Preparation should start a few months before the application deadline to accommodate for challenges along the way.

Key steps to prepare:

- Meet with an academic advisor to check program requirements
- Consider your research interests, select a few potential research topics
- Investigate which professors align with your research topics
- Determine research topic, prepare proposal, and secure supervisor
- Complete application form

Unsure if the honours program is right for you? Speak with a past student to learn about their experience.

WHAT CAN PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS EXPECT TO EXPERIENCE?

Prospective students can expect to spend a lot of time searching for literature, reading and writing. They can also expect to deal with some uncertainty regarding the direction of their research. They may even be uncertain about their research topic or research questions. However, this is normal. Supervisors are easily approachable and are meant to help students throughout this process.

HOW IS THE PROGRAM PREPARING YOU TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS?

I am applying to both law school and SFU’s Criminology MA program. For the latter, the honours program helps with gaining some
research experience as well as some insight as to what to expect when conducting a master’s thesis. It may also give you an idea of a research topic to pursue for the master’s thesis. For both options, however, the honours program is helpful in obtaining reference letters.

ANY TIPS FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS?

I would advise getting familiar with citation software, such as Refworks. SFU’s library website has a basic guide on how to use these citation programs. There may be a steep learning curve depending on which software you use. Additionally, I would advise that students start using Write-N-Cite, which is a plugin for Microsoft Word that allows you to conveniently format in-text citations and reference lists.

Shannon Linning
MA Student

WHY DID YOU APPLY FOR THE HONOURS PROGRAM?

I learned that the program afforded me the opportunity to: conduct my own research (and see whether I would like it or not!), receive one-on-one mentorship with a professor (similar to how you would work in graduate school), and add an additional credential to my resume (i.e. Bachelor of Arts with Honours).

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE A THESIS TOPIC AND SUPERVISOR?

After taking and enjoying a course in environmental criminology with Dr. Martin Andresen, I read some articles on similar topics that interested me. Once I had a general sense of the research area that I wanted to explore, I booked a meeting with him to discuss it. He was very friendly and enthusiastic about the idea, agreed to take me on as an honours student and the rest is history.

WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE AS YOU TOOK THE PROGRAM?

I think the freedom and independence of the process is the biggest challenge as well as one of the biggest perks. Because you are conducting your own personal research, you are on your own (and your supervisor’s) timeline. Although there is a deadline at the end of the program for you to complete and present your thesis, much of how you generate that final product is up to you. So time management is key!

DO YOU HAVE A MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE YOU’D LIKE TO SHARE?

One of my favourite experiences was the group presentation that I got to prepare and participate in during Dr. Sheri Fabian’s research methods course. Our job was to present on the distinctions and merits of both quantitative and qualitative research methods and she was open to any kind of creativity that we could bring to the project. To do this, we ended up spoofing various newscasts, trivia shows and game shows. Needless to say, it was a lot more fun than giving a typical presentation!
Aynsley Pescitelli  
PHD Student

WHAT WAS YOUR NEXT STEP AFTER COMPLETING THE HONOURS PROGRAM?

The honours program helped me to decide to continue graduate research and to develop my research interests in cyberbullying and the media. I started my master’s right after completing the program. I was able to work with the same supervisor for my master’s to continue to develop the thesis I wrote for the honours program. I am now furthering that research as a PhD student.

WHAT CAN PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS EXPECT TO EXPERIENCE?

The honours program is structured differently from the typical coursework you expect from undergraduate courses. The program provides the opportunity to work on something that is interesting to you and that you feel passionate about. Additionally, you are with the same cohort of students for the entire program. The cohort becomes very supportive of each other because you are doing the same things together. My cohort still stays in touch and meets up for lunch, which is nice.

DO YOU HAVE A MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE YOU’D LIKE TO SHARE?

I had my first positive experience working in a group at the beginning of the honours program. Being detail-oriented and very driven, I was used to having to do all the work in a group situation. It was nice to work with a group that wanted to participate. I enjoyed working with students who were highly motivated, interested and wanted to do a good job.

ANY TIPS FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS?

Be aware of how you work. You have to adjust your working style and be mindful of setting deadlines. Professors will not check up on you, so you need to be on top of your own work. Outline time at the beginning when you look at the syllabus. Do not underestimate the work that is required in the second semester of independent study, especially what is required of you for the thesis.

“I feel privileged to witness each student grow, both academically and personally, over the course of the program. It is rewarding to see the students accomplish their goals.”

Dr. Sheri Fabian  
Director, Undergraduate Programs
IN THE NEWS

Two criminologists in top 100 for scholarly productivity

A new analysis of scholarly productivity by criminologists was published in *Scientometrics* (Walter, 2014), taking into account the quality and quantity of articles published for the years 2009 to 2013.

The top 100 rankings only include three Canadians, including two from the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University: Dr. Eric Beauregard and Dr. Martin Bouchard.

The other Canadian in the top 100, Patrick Lussier, now at Université Laval, was at SFU for the period covered by the analysis.

*Contributed by David MacAlister, J.D., LL.M.*

ICURS Director Patricia Brantingham wins prestigious award

The American Society of Criminology awarded Dr. Patricia Brantingham the 2014 Freda Adler Distinguished Scholar Award at its annual conference in November 2014. The award goes to one scholar each year whose contributions to international criminology have had an impact on “international criminal justice, comparative, cross-border, and transnational crime or justice research”.

Brantingham is the second scholar from a Canadian university to win the award and joins the ranks of a diverse group of international scholars such as Dr. Tamar Pitch, University of Camerino, Italy (1999), Dr. Maria Los, University of Ottawa (2002), Dr. Lorraine Mazerolle, University of Queensland (2010), and David P. Farrington, Cambridge University (2013).

Brantingham’s research contributions are numerous. But it is her work as a pioneer in Environmental Criminology, with her husband Dr. Paul Brantingham, and the co-founding of SFU’s secure data laboratory at the Institute for Canadian Urban Research Studies (ICURS), that has garnered Brantingham international recognition.

*Contributed by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.*

We want to hear your feedback.

Send your comments, questions and ideas to the editor, Christine Palka at crimcomm@sfu.ca.