Academic Program Review

Executive Summary

On March 26 and 27, 2018, the external review team comprised of Drs. James Frank (Chair), Eric Baumer and Rod Brunson, visited the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology (CJC) in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies (AYSPS). Our review is based on information from the Department’s Academic Program Review Self-Study Report, in-depth discussions with the Georgia State University Provost, Vice Provost, Associate Provosts, and AYSPS Dean, and a series of systematic interviews with CJC faculty, graduate and undergraduate students.

CJC is comprised of talented and well regarded scholars. Faculty members are engaged in a wide range of high-quality teaching, scholarship, and service activities. The Chair and faculty have been especially enterprising in efforts to increase the stature of the Department by competing for university professorships and to enhance revenues by pursuing innovative funding opportunities. The modest sized faculty (compared to the majority of doctoral granting Criminal Justice Programs) has been successful despite their limited financial resources (e.g., travel and research support) and demanding instructional responsibilities. Yet, we were struck by the considerable growth in the instructional demands placed on the faculty over the past five years during a time in which there was a net loss of several tenure-track lines (by our counting, after the newest tenure-track hire begins in fall 2018, the Department will remain three faculty members short of its total five years ago, when the instructional demands were less extensive). CJC is a productive, lean operation, but its insufficient human resources at present appear to be limiting the dividends that could be reaped from its talented faculty and unique location in a major urban city and very good policy school.

In our judgment, an infusion of additional institutional investments in the form of new faculty and strategic support staff positions will be critical for ensuring success for the Department’s relatively young Ph.D. program, maximizing the profitability of the recently launched online Master’s program, and raising the academic unit’s stature and visibility. If coupled with strategic actions by the Department in its hiring decisions, program marketing, and graduate student mentoring and professional socialization, these additional resources should pay tangible dividends in the form of significant increases in external funding, a greater volume of top-tier publications, a deeper and more talented pool of graduate students who can be placed at highly-ranked institutions, and ultimately, a department that is perceived by others as “the place” for cutting-edge policy research on crime and justice.

We have organized our broad observations, conclusions, and recommendations around 6 key goals, challenges, and concerns consistently identified by the groups with whom we met. They are: (1) Increasing external funding, (2) Developing a more visible and coherent department profile within the field of Criminology and Criminal Justice, (3) Attracting, retaining, training, and placing high-quality graduate students, (4) Enhancing connections to undergraduate majors
and examining and curtailing undergraduate student attrition between the first and second years of study, (5) Increasing gender and racial diversity among CJC faculty, and (6) Strengthening the on-line MA program.

**Increasing External Funding**

There is a need to increase external funding in order to support graduate assistantships and faculty travel to professional conferences. In addition, opportunities to work alongside faculty on externally funded projects provide students with invaluable knowledge about proposal writing and grant management, facilitating students’ professional development concerning the research enterprise. Externally funded projects also frequently provide quality data for dissertations and collaborative publications involving students and faculty. All of these activities have been shown to increase the attractiveness and career placement of PhD. job candidates that departments produce.

To significantly increase external funding the Department will likely need to recruit additional senior faculty with established track records of success in this area and arrange for greater grant support for current senior faculty members. Junior faculty are often aptly counseled to develop solid research agendas and publication records before they are expected to shoulder the weighty responsibility of securing external grants and financially supporting graduate students. Thus, it could be counterproductive for the Department to place significant grant writing expectations on its junior faculty. The recent hiring of Dr. Sabol is a good step toward enhancing the Department’s external funding prospects, as his past experience indicates that he has substantial expertise and knowledge regarding the grant process and should be positioned to help mentor mid-career faculty seeking external funding. However, the Department (and, by extension, the University) would be well served by hiring additional faculty members at the Associate and Full Professor level who have an established track-record of grant writing and management if the goal is to boost significantly the external funding it attracts.

Given that the Department is situated within a well-regarded policy school and that much of the funding available for crime and justice has a strong policy emphasis, it seems sensible for the Department to target scholars working in high-funding potential policy areas (Dr. Sabol and colleagues should be great resources for determining priorities). Identifying fundable research projects should not be arduous given that several CJC faculty members have longstanding relationships with local and state agencies, but in our judgement the department needs at least 2 additional faculty members who have the expertise, experience, and capacity to successfully compete for significant external funding and provide leadership in this area for the talented junior faculty the Department has assembled. It may be the case that new faculty lines are scarce at GSU, but we urge the university to consider the potentially big payoff that could accrue by supporting new hires of scholars undertaking cutting-edge crime and justice policy research—this is an area of research for which there has been a steady supply of available
external funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, and with the right investments GSU could emerge as uniquely positioned to compete for it.

Some discussions with faculty centered on the limited support in the Department, School, and University for the administrative tasks associated with developing grant proposals and the pre- and post-award management needed to help faculty manage grants successfully. Enhancing support for these functions could increase the degree to which the current faculty can develop and compete for external funding. Additionally, effective grant support may be an important pre-requisite for the Department’s capacity to attract new faculty who have the capacity to compete for and manage large grants (and who may be accustomed to such levels of support at other institutions). Some faculty raised the possibility of adding a new staff person within CJC who would serve as a grants manager and who would help faculty with application processes, navigating the sponsored research office within the University, and managing budgets. This could emerge as a necessary staff position in the Department, especially if the faculty capacity for grant proposal development increases notably, but in the interim we recommend that CJC capitalize on the recently added staff person in the AYSPS for this purpose. We learned of this new position relatively late during our visit and are not aware of the specific job responsibilities associated with it. Nonetheless, we were encouraged by the Dean’s reference to the position and see it as a valuable resource that the department could use, and we encourage CJC to be proactive in doing so.

Developing a Unique Identity for the GSU CJC Department and Ph.D. Programs

In many respects, we saw in the GSU CJC department and Ph.D. program what we see in most of its 40 or so competitors: an emphasis on being or becoming a strong generalist CJC program known for competency in many areas without clearly standing above others in a given or unique area. This tendency toward a “generalist” program is very common in our field because sufficient breadth is a basic prerequisite for an attractive and successful Ph.D. program. Further, it is inherently difficult for departments with relatively small faculties to achieve both the breadth needed to yield the desired broad expertise in CJC while also developing a unique or novel identity. With all of that as a backdrop, the time is ripe for GSU CJC to forge an identity that sets the Department and Ph.D. program apart from the pack. At the inception of the Ph.D. program roughly ten years ago, or at least in the several years leading up to that point, it may have made sense to emulate existing programs. However, since then many other universities and departments have made far more substantial investments in building their units and graduate programs; the landscape has become increasingly crowded and the competition among “generalist” programs increasingly steep. Trying to emulate existing programs does not seem to be the best way forward for GSU CJC.

The department must consider the following pivotal question: why would a top student or faculty scholar choose GSU over other, perhaps more highly ranked or regarded departments? There could be several answers, including the Department’s intended movement in very
forward-thinking directions that capitalize on the changing world of technology and crime (e.g., cybersecurity policy in financial and health markets), which offer the potential for a game-changing long-term impact. However, the one most obvious and more immediate answer in our judgment is that the Department’s location in a highly-regarded policy school makes it inherently unique. It should be known as the best place in the world to study crime and justice policy in all the forms that may take, or as the department wishes to emphasize (e.g., policy evaluation, policy analysis, policy development). This potentially lucrative niche seemed underappreciated, or at least undersold, by the faculty with whom we met. A perusal of the Department’s website, which serves as a key market tool for attracting top Ph.D. students, suggests as well that this emphasis is not strongly emphasized. In fact, we did not meet a Ph.D. student who described their primary interest in terms of policy assessment or evaluation, and it does not appear that the department is engaged in strategic recruitment of potential Ph.D. students with such an interest. All of this was consistent with our own perceptions of the department: despite its location in the AYSPS, none of us currently thinks of the Department as a unit with a strong policy focus or presence.

In our view, the doctoral program would be bolstered if the Department developed a clearer and more unique identity. When faculty were asked about their program’s emphasis, responses were not consistent. Some faculty members mentioned urban crime, violence, and qualitative or mixed-methods research. A few mentioned policy analysis and evaluation. All of these seem appropriate given the expertise represented amongst the faculty, and the Department could market itself more aggressively by simply more clearly referencing several of these areas. However, since the Department is housed within the AYSPS, further building, emphasizing, and advertising to a much greater extent its connections to and strengths in public policy, and its linkages to other programs within the School and with local public agencies strikes us as being a smart move. Further, faculty research interests align well with this emphasis, and given the research and reputations of the faculty, there are several substantive policy areas that could be effectively promoted. The study of urban crime policy, race and crime policies, violence reduction strategies, and policy evaluation generally would be intellectual areas worthy of exploration and emphasis. Few, if any, other departments or Ph.D. granting programs would be able to make similar claims (especially if GSU CJC made some additional hires in the policy area, and became more centrally integrated in the AYSPS), and this should not only enhance the Department’s capacity to compete for the top prospective CJC Ph.D. students interested in policy analysis, but also the talented pool of prospective public policy Ph.D. students who have an interest in crime and justice policy. This would likely increase substantially the potential pool of qualified applicants the department attracts for its Ph.D. program. This is likely to be the case not only from the potential applicants that may be drawn from public policy undergraduate or master’s programs, but also because this emphasis would be more attractive to students in public administration, political science, and emerging social data analytics programs, all of which tend to be composed of a larger pool of outstanding students than is the case in CJC programs. By embracing much more fully its natural policy focus, GSU CJC would be in a unique position to compete for interested students.
The benefits of this more strategic branding and future hiring would extend beyond the Ph.D. program. There has been a growing emphasis in the field involving the study of crime and violence as public health problems. This can be evidenced by recent funding solicitations involving the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), as well as recent Public Health/Public Safety collaborations to fight crime. A policy emphasis would seem ideal for interdisciplinary partnerships between the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology and Health programs within the AYSPS, especially with the CDC nearby. In addition, the Urban Studies Institute within AYSPS would also be an ideal partner for research proposals involving urban crime and violence.

There would likely be an additional advantage to this public policy emphasis and branding that ties into our comments above about increasing external funding. Put simply, a substantial portion of available crime and justice funding opportunities nationally focus on applied or translational research with an emphasis on policy. Further building and capitalizing on a public policy emphasis should increase the department’s desire to substantially increase grant support, especially if CJC strategically leverages the reputation and tangible expertise that resides in other AYSPS units.

**Attracting, Retaining, Training, and Placing High-Qualified Graduate Students**

The GSU CJC Department offers a residential Master’s and Ph.D. (in addition to an online Master’s degree, which we discuss below). There are many positives associated with these graduate programs. Graduate students expressed a favorable view of the CJC faculty, and while mentoring was described as uneven, we learned that several faculty members were highly invested in training and professionally socializing students. Most of the meetings we had on campus focused on the Ph.D. program, which we emphasize in the remainder of this section. It is a relatively young program, having been launched in 2010. Some of the early cohorts experienced considerable attrition, but this appears to have been remedied. Current cohorts average about 5 Ph.D. students, and the time-to-completion of the degree is on par with most other programs (if anything, the data included in the report suggest a shorter than typical time-to-completion). The department has not yet placed a Ph.D. student in a top 20 program, but has had reasonably good success in placing students for a relatively new program.

The Ph.D. students with whom we met indicated that they were on the whole satisfied with their educational experiences. They describe the faculty as engaged and open to working with them; students are actively encouraged to publish and to present their research at regional and national conferences. We recommend that the Department continue to encourage these activities, while also strongly encouraging (and expecting) every faculty member to devote time to working with one or more PhD students on publications to better prepare them for the increasingly competitive job market. This will be very useful in enhancing their experience and successful placement on the job market. Placement is a key feature of PhD. program
reputations, and we were surprised to not hear more during our visit about the importance of placement and the Department’s strategies for maximizing success in this area.

Placement success often is inversely correlated with time-to-degree, at least up to a point. The average time to degree for the 10 PhD students who have graduated from the GSU CJC department is 4.8 years. This represents a considerably shorter time to completion compared to most programs. However, there is some reason to suspect that time to degree is likely to rise in the near future. Specifically, Exhibit 12 (Appendix 1.b.4.3) indicates that there are 9 students who are still enrolled in the program that are in at least their 5th year of doctoral study, with 4 additional students who are this year completing their 4th year in the doctoral program. The fact that time to degree is likely to rise is not cause for concern, as students in most doctoral programs take 5 or 6 years to complete their degrees. There are clear advantages to students remaining in residence longer, providing that they are spending that time productively. Additional time can allow students an opportunity to acquire the necessary professional development skills that facilitate successful academic careers in ways that course work does not (i.e., through research and publication opportunities). We encourage the Department and university to balance these considerations against worries about time-to-degree completion, and to ensure that the 5 or 6 years students spend in the program are used wisely and oriented toward rigorous training that yields high-quality publications.

The Ph.D. students considered the teaching course required by the Department (or soon to be required again) to be a positive program feature. Graduate students described this class as quite useful as it allows students to actively practice instructional delivery and become knowledgeable about university policies that they will rely on once they enter the classroom. Several current students remarked favorably on this class and the Department’s intention to make this part of the required coursework. Graduate student work in the classroom is peer-reviewed on a regular basis, and all PhD students are able to gain experience as instructors with full-course responsibility prior to graduation.

While the graduate students had a favorable impression of the Ph.D. program overall, they also expressed some concerns. Several graduate students expressed unease about poor communication regarding Department policies and the pathway to graduation. To a large extent, their concerns revolved around the informal nature of communication and that students were getting varying messages, if any, from faculty mentors. While it is not unusual for relatively new programs to experience these challenges, there are several suggestions for ways to improve the communication between doctoral students and faculty. First, each fall a graduate student orientation should be held for entering students where curriculum issues are addressed. At most programs, this is developed and organized by the Director of Graduate Studies. Second, the Department should consider a formal status hearing at the end of the second year of study to review each student’s academic progress, plan for future course work, areas of interest, and timelines for completing comprehensive papers and dissertations. This should then be followed by a formal written review of the issues covered. This would be a
means to formally communicate with each student and provide consistent programmatic and curriculum advice, while at the same time monitoring academic progress more closely to ensure that students are meeting expectations and taking the steps needed to meet their goals. This, too, is normally a function executed by the Director of Graduate Studies.

In addition to the above concern, graduate student survey responses indicated that there were some problems with the student climate in the Department. Scores on survey items asking about faculty acting in a fair and unbiased manner, faculty respecting students, and the department promoting “an environment of inclusiveness” were all lower than the University averages. The Department’s newly remodeled office space providing students with access to workspace and computers in a central location may help alleviate some of the students’ expressed concerns. At the same time, if these concerns are not addressed in other ways, the close proximity of students to each other may exacerbate existing problems. In that spirit, we were surprised that the Department as a whole interacted socially on a very infrequent basis. This is unusual within the field—in many programs, informal social interactions are quite common, and often the basis for useful professional socialization and community building.

Moving forward, we encourage the Department to consider some more fundamental challenges associated with building a stronger Ph.D. program. During the three year period from 2014 to 2016, an average of 26 people per year applied for admission to the doctoral program. This figure is far below the yearly average number of applications received by the doctoral programs GSU considers peer or aspirational programs. It is not clear that the department is doing much to attract or recruit prospective Ph.D. students. While programs that have been in existence for decades may have the luxury of waiting for students to come to them, newer programs would be well served to take a more proactive role in generating a larger pool of high-qualified applicants and, once accomplished, to be aggressive in recruiting from that pool. Developing a more coherent and unique departmental identity is an important dimension of student recruitment (see our discussion above), as is being more strategic in marketing the Ph.D. program. With respect to the latter, the Department should scrutinize its website, which is the main portal through which prospective Ph.D. students learn about and evaluate programs. From our perusal, much more could be done to market the unique strengths of GSU CJC to prospective Ph.D. students. The Department also could consider sending marketing materials (e.g., a letter from the graduate director) to regional undergraduate and master’s CJC “feeder” programs, and recruiting directly from public policy schools or professional meetings at which representatives and students of such schools congregate (e.g., APPAM).

Beyond these measures, we encourage the faculty to take a more proactive role in the recruitment of prospective doctoral students, especially those who are attracted to GSU to conduct research in areas that overlap with the faculty. If each faculty recruited one new student it would likely increase the pool of candidates. This year 28 people applied for admission to the program and they have extended a very limited number of offers (the Director
of Graduate Studies indicated that about 5-6 offers were or will be made). The enrollment rate of accepted doctoral students at GSU (49%, Appendix 1.b1) and the enrollment rates at most comparable institutions, suggests the need to extend more offers if they want to meet their target admission numbers. Indeed, the small number of graduating Ph.D. students was mentioned by upper-level administrators as a concern.

The Department should strive not merely to increase the number of applicants to its Ph.D. program, but instead should aim for larger high-quality applicant pools and admitted students. Assessing the quality of admitted doctoral students is difficult. While GRE scores are an important indicator, they should not be the sole admissions criteria, but rather one of several that are factored into the equation. Undergraduate performance, personal statements and faculty recommendations should also be considered. The only student admission data provided (see 1.b.1 Exhibit 3) in the self-study report indicates that the average GRE quantitative scores are considerably lower than one would expect for doctoral program applicants at a strong program. In order to attract better qualified doctoral students, we believe that stipends will need to be increased so that GSU offers are more competitive with other doctoral programs.

While an effort has been undertaken recently to increase the stipend package by making them 12 month stipends (versus the more traditional 9 or 10 month stipends) the amount offered remains below the stipends offered at other institutions. Beyond the financials, forging a clearer identity that separates GSU CJC from other programs and looking beyond the typical breeding grounds for CJC doctoral applicants that make sense for GSU—Public Policy Programs—should help to increase the depth and quality of the applicant pool and those ultimately admitted and enrolled in the Ph.D. program.

Our visit also revealed the need for the department to enhance its retention and training of students who join the Ph.D. program. One concern is that students are only required to complete a single semester of doctoral statistics. This is unusual, as most CJC Ph.D. programs require two or more statistics courses. We recognize that students seeking additional statistics courses are encouraged to pursue opportunities within other academic units and disciplines, but this does not make-up for the deficiency of having a comparatively meager required statistical sequence within the Ph.D. program, and over time this could mean that the modal GSU Ph.D. graduate is at a disadvantage compared to students trained elsewhere. It is notable that the GSU CJC program is uniquely suited to provide other types of methodological training to CJC Ph.D. students, and most notably excellent training in qualitative methods, but the department should consider whether methodological breadth inadvertently comes at the expense of requiring less than the typical statistics training.

Enhancing Connections to Undergraduate Majors and Addressing Attrition Concerns

We met with three undergraduate students, the Director of Undergraduate Studies, and several faculty who commented on the nature and quality of the undergraduate program. The undergraduate students were impressive and complementary of the department and its
faculty. They described dedicated teachers who were knowledgeable, engaged, and accessible. The faculty comments about the undergraduate program affirmed a strong commitment to students and the success of the program. Against this backdrop, three areas of improvement were noted by the persons with whom we met: (1) reducing student attrition in the major after the first year, (2) forging stronger connections and enhancing communication channels between the department and students, and (3) refining the undergraduate statistics course to better match the abilities and needs of the majors.

While overall retention rates for undergraduates seem reasonable, Vice Provost Renick shared data indicating that CJC students exit the university after the first year at much higher rates than is observed for other units. The department’s Undergraduate Director advised us that he was unaware of this issue prior to our mentioning it to him. Further, we were unable to determine the cause of the attrition, and why it would afflict first year CJC students uniquely. Our hunch is that this may reflect a tendency for a larger share of entering students to identify CJC as their major in a “soft” fashion, before taking any (or many) classes, and so the department is bearing a larger share of the overall university-wide first year attrition. In any case, if declared CJC majors are leaving the university after their first year at the high rates implied by the data we reviewed (this should be shared with the department on a routine basis), this represents an identified opportunity for intervention and an issue that should be given serious attention. Several strategies could be used to address this concern, and the cost of attempting them would be reasonable and have other benefits beyond the potential reduction of early attrition rates. First, the Department should consider participating again in the first year experience course. This should increase the likelihood that majors will interact with other majors, and possibly build supportive relationships, which can increase student retention. Second, the Department should facilitate the development of a separate CJC undergraduate organization that meets regularly several times each term. Such organizations can help solidify the major as an identity for new students and connect them to others with shared experiences, which can yield much needed comradery and social support. Third, and related, the Department, School, and University should consider making modifications to its advising approach to ensure that CJC is being well represented. This was the chief complaint made by the undergraduate students with whom we met. Specifically, they mentioned significant turnover in the central advising office and major challenges in finding advisors knowledgeable about the intricacies of the CJC program. Designating people with training as to the requirements of this undergraduate program might help. Again, whether these strategies will be successful in reducing attrition rates is unknown, though they may alleviate student concerns as they navigate Departmental and University curriculum requirements.

We also encourage the Department to develop strategies for forging stronger connections to its undergraduate major population. Undergraduate students expressed a desire to meet outside of class with their fellow majors to make connections and access social support from those embarking on similar experiences. They also noted that the Department could do a much better job communicating with them about key matters related to the curriculum, career
guidance, and potential employment opportunities. The aforementioned student organization would be a natural conduit to facilitate these things, especially if one or more faculty members were actively involved in its activities. The Department also could consider holding occasional informal gatherings in its new space, perhaps organized around faculty brown bags or thematic presentations by the Director of Undergraduate Studies or others that cover key elements of the curriculum and other important topics. Organizing such meetings for new majors might be especially effective at dispelling misunderstanding and also reducing attrition (or at least learning more about the challenges first year students are facing that might be behind the noted attrition).

A final area of concern mentioned by students and faculty was the undergraduate statistics requirement. Our review of the undergraduate curriculum in CJC reveals that it is comparable to most other programs with which we are familiar. Namely, students are required to take a criminology course, a criminal justice class, one methods class, a statistics course, a capstone ethics class, and to complete an internship providing them with some experiential training. The undergraduate statistics course was mentioned by faculty and students as a problematic hurdle for a sizable portion of the Department’s majors. The inclusion of a statistics course in the curriculum is consistent with most other CJ programs, and we readily acknowledge that this course presents challenges at many other universities as well. As currently designed, the GSU CJC class is apparently so challenging for some students that there have been ongoing faculty discussions about changing its status as a required course and revising the course material covered. Present policy allows students to fail this course three times before being terminated from the program. We do not have clear advice for the Department other than to encourage them to continue thinking about ways to better align the statistics course with the abilities of their undergraduate majors and to consider several options for ensuring that students are able to achieve the objectives the course is meant to accomplish. Two modifications that often are consequential for other departments struggling with this issue are (a) reducing the typical class size for the statistics course, and (b) beginning the course with a few weeks of basic math to ease students into concepts that many have not been exposed to previously, or at least for several years, even if this means covering less “statistical” material in the course. Due to the high undergraduate enrollment (600+ majors), instructional resources are strained, so we suspect adding additional sections to limit class sizes may be challenging (this is yet another compelling reason to increase CJC faculty size), but this is often critical to providing the needed attention to students with anxiety about math and statistics. Of course, the assignment of faculty to this course should be done with caution, as this is a difficult class to teach and can be very time consuming. While several faculty members may possess the requisite knowledge to teach this course, not all are likely to be equally adept at delivering the material in a manner that increases the likelihood that students will be successful. Beyond class size reductions, those who teach the course could consider adding or expanding the introductory material covered (we did not inspect syllabi for this course, but based on the discussion we had with undergraduates, this is likely a modification that is needed and could be impactful).
Faculty Diversity and other Faculty Issues

It is important that state-supported universities, particularly those in diverse U.S. urban centers, have a diverse faculty. GSU has a very diverse student body, heavily comprised of African Americans. This is also the case regarding enrolled undergraduate CJC students. Student data provided in the report indicate a very racially diverse undergraduate student body. Around 58.2% of students in the years examined are identified as Black or African American (23.5% are identified as White). This is a much larger proportion of students than in most undergraduate programs in criminal justice and criminology, and yet there is not a single African American tenure-track faculty member in the Department and just one non-tenure line African American faculty member in the Department. The CJC graduate student population is less diverse than its undergraduate population, but with slightly over 25% of the enrolled graduate students self-identifying as African American, this far exceeds most graduate programs. While there is admittedly a relatively small pool of African American scholars within the field of Criminology and Criminal Justice that would fit the profile of the existing student body, Atlanta is likely an especially attractive location for African American scholars and other faculty of color. The lack of faculty diversity was a recurring issue of concern mentioned by CJC graduate and undergraduate students desperately seeking professional role models. The CJC faculty expressed a commitment to increasing faculty diversity, and it would be useful for them to ensure that current students are aware of this commitment. Given that the vast majority (four of five) of GSU’s strategic plan goals call for greater inclusion and diversity, it is recommended that the University provide a pool of funds with an eye toward attracting talented African American faculty. These positions should remain “open” until cohorts of new faculty hires are achieved. Without the necessary financial commitment to support hiring efforts to increase diversity, the stated University goals will not be met. Beyond this truth, the CJC program’s location in Atlanta provides a unique opportunity to build a more racially and ethnically diverse faculty, and making investments to do so would offer another way to distinguish the department nationally.

In addition to not having sufficient racial and ethnic diversity among the faculty ranks, the demographic make-up of the CJC faculty also suffers from a glaring lack of gender diversity. One of the female faculty members has indicated that she will retire at the end of this academic year. This will leave one tenured and one untenured female faculty member. While an additional untenured female scholar will join the faculty in fall of 2018, this leaves the faculty at less than 25% female in a discipline in which 70% of incoming graduate students nationwide are female. About three-fourths of graduate students in the CJC program are female. In light of this, every effort should be made to hire one or more highly-regarded female faculty members over the next few years. Additionally, when such hires are made at the Assistant Professor level, the Department should ensure that necessary support and mentoring is available for career development.

Online Master’s in CJA
The CJC Department has recently collaborated with the Department of Public Management and Policy to launch an Online Master’s Degree in Criminal Justice Administration. The move appears to be driven by the lure of increasing revenues, though we could not discern from our meetings whether or how revenues generated from the program will be shared with the Department. It would be beneficial to the Department if the AYSPS Dean clarifies this matter. Additionally, we came away with two concerns about the current plans and implementation of the Online Master’s program: (1) the limited resources currently being devoted to program management, and (2) the potential strain it could place on existing programs within the Department, and especially the Ph.D. program, given the size of the faculty relative to its other instructional demands.

The resources currently devoted to managing the new Online Master’s program strike us as highly insufficient to ensure its success. The market for online Master’s degrees has become quite crowded over the past 5 to 10 years. As such, attracting students has become more difficult. Many of the more successful degree programs (in terms of enrollment) have relied on marketers outside of the immediate faculty who have the necessary skills to recruit students and manage an online program. Presently, the Department’s Graduate Director shoulders most of this heavy responsibility along with managing the on-campus Master’s and Doctoral degree programs. This arrangement is not sustainable and is unlikely to provide the Graduate Director sufficient time to devote to growing the online Master’s program, not to mention his own research agenda. Several strategies are suggested. First, the current administrative configuration with one person responsible for all graduate programs is not realistic. There is probably a need to separate responsibility for management of the online program from the on-campus programs. Second, there is a need to consider transferring responsibility for a majority of the recruitment activities to a School and/or University marketing staff member. These tasks are extremely time consuming, especially during the initial stages of the program, and are likely to be more successfully performed by someone with specific training in this area, rather than relying solely on faculty members who typically have very little relevant experience. Third, the program must determine the focus of this degree and the pool of potential applicants. As a combined criminal justice and public administration degree, initial recruitment efforts might focus on agency personnel in the city of Atlanta and throughout Georgia who are looking to secure a M.S. for career enhancement purposes. These people may already be familiar with GSU faculty from prior undergraduate work or from being invited to collaborate as research partners. Once there is a track record of connecting to this group through the Online Master’s program, it may be easier to expand recruitment efforts. Finally, there may be a need to incentivize participation of Department faculty by explicitly stating the benefits the Department and/or participating faculty members would receive if they are successful in growing the program. These benefits might include extra compensation, increased travel funds, reduced course loads, and the like.
Building on some of the themes just mentioned, we caution the Department to avoid reallocating too many of its currently scarce human resources to the Online Master’s Program. Even if greater clarity is provided about the specific dividends this will bring the department, and those dividends are attractive, the Department would be wise to tread carefully. Typically, departments are offered a share of the tuition revenue from online programs, but this does not appear to be the case for the new Online Master’s Program. It was also not clear that other tangible “rewards” (e.g., new faculty lines) would accrue from the Department’s significant investments in the program. Departments should consider new ventures for reasons other than tangible rewards (e.g., broadening its reach and enhancing its reputation), but given that the CJC faculty already is stretched quite thin with other instructional demands associated with a relatively large number of undergraduate majors (both in absolute terms and relative to the number of personnel available to teach them), a residential Master’s program, and a relatively young and aspiring Ph.D. program, we came away worried that the resources currently being allocated to the new Online program could diminish quality and progress in the existing programs, especially if additional faculty are not added. The Ph.D. program, in particular, will need more resources and attention for it to continue to grow and improve, as we outlined above. Yet, over the last year the Director of Graduate Studies and selected faculty have reallocated notable portions of their time to the Online program. This strikes us as a misplaced, or at least high-risk investment, with uncertain yields that also may place the Department’s other programs in jeopardy. To reinforce our recommendation above, the CJC Department Chair and AYSPS Dean should consider an alternative strategy for managing the new Online Master’s Program, or take steps to provide the CJC Department with the additional human resources it needs to ensure that its other programs are not unintentionally weakened by this endeavor.