

Personal Reflections on Justice Education at Mount Royal University

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Abstract

Justice education at Mount Royal University started over 45 years ago with the launch of two community college two-year diplomas. Designed to be career preparation, the curriculum in the diplomas struck an importance balance of Criminal Justice and Criminology curriculum, skills development and experiential learning. This mix was maintained and expanded in the launch of the Bachelor of Applied Justice Studies degree in 1999. The Bachelor of Art in Criminal Justice was approved in 2008 in anticipation of Mount Royal College's imminent transition to university status. However, some of the changes associated with gaining university status in 2009 are informing a current reevaluation of the curriculum within the degree. Emerging trends suggest that a new balance between Criminal Justice, Criminology and skills development may be on the horizon.

A Brief History of Mount Royal College

When Mount Royal College was granted university status from the Government of Alberta on September 3, 2009, it adopted the moniker of "Canada's oldest *new* university". This was to affirm that Mount Royal's presence on the post-

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secondary stage in Canada actually began in 1910 when its first charter was granted by the province (Nolais, 2009, para. 10). Under the leadership of its first Principal Dr. George Kerby, Mount Royal's roots were as a private Methodist institution. Originally located in what is now downtown Calgary, Mount Royal's curriculum focused on subjects such as stenographic work, music, fine arts and "household arts" (Mount Royal University, n.d., para. 6).

In 1931, Mount Royal's mandate shifted as it became a junior college officially affiliated with the University of Alberta while still operating as a private institution (Mount Royal University, n.d., para. 11). As an affiliated college, Mount Royal College curriculum focused on first year university-transfer courses in the Arts and Sciences, Engineering and Business Administration. When the University of Alberta established a physical presence in Calgary in 1945, the debate began on Mount Royal College's future role – was it destined to become the "University of Calgary"? This debate was resolved in 1966 when the provincial government approved an act making Mount Royal College a public institution (Mount Royal University, n.d., para. 22). At the same time, the Government passed legislation to establish a separate University of Calgary.

Career-Focused Education at Mount Royal College

The curricular focus at Mount Royal College in the mid-1960's to late 1990's was marked by continuity in offering first and second year university-transfer courses in many of the traditional Arts and Sciences. However, it was also during this time that new career-focused diplomas and certificates were launched. Employment readiness was the theme of diplomas in areas such as Nursing, Early Childhood Education, Journalism, Social Services, Business, Interior Design and Leisure Education (Baker, 2011, p. 114). Perhaps as important as the curriculum was the faculty hired to teach in the career diplomas. The emphasis was on finding instructors who had earned post-secondary credentials but had extensive and related work experience.

Justice Education at Mount Royal College

Two justice-related diplomas were among the first career programs launched at Mount Royal in the 1960s. The Correctional Careers program was established in 1968 (Baker, 2011, p.117). Curriculum in the program included required courses in Corrections in Canada, Aberrant Behavior, Interviewing Skills, Interpersonal Relationship Skills, Criminology, and Criminal Justice. In 1970, Mount Royal began the Police Studies program with an intake cohort of forty students (Baker, 2011, p.117). Offered in affiliation with the Calgary Police Department (now Service), courses such as Police Sciences, Interviewing Skills and Aberrant Behavior were blended with more traditional university-transfer courses in disciplines such as Psychology, Sociology and English. According to Baker's 2011 history of Mount Royal College, the Police Studies program focused "on the 'whys' of police work, leaving the 'hows' to police departments" (p. 117). The collaboration with the Calgary Police was so strong at this time that the training of new recruits was done primarily on Mount Royal's campus.

A third justice-related diploma program was added in 1986 with the establishment of the Criminology-University Transfer diploma (Baker, 2011, p. 117). The curriculum in this third diploma was intended to mirror the first two years of study in Simon Fraser University's Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminology. Similar programs at Grant McEwen College in Edmonton and Medicine Hat College were also the primary sources of justice-related education in Alberta.

Justice-Related Degrees at Mount Royal College

Post-secondary education in Alberta began a rollercoaster ride in 1992 with the election of Premier Ralph Klein. Klein won both the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta and the premiership by articulating a populist agenda intent on reigning in the accelerating provincial deficits and growing debt. One of his campaign promises was to eliminate the provincial year-to-year deficit within

four years of his election (Martin, 2012, para. 4). Further, the provincial debt would be eliminated within 10 years.

In the face of considerable organized opposition, the newly elected Klein government introduced massive funding cuts to social services, health care and education. At the post-secondary level, universities and colleges found themselves with five to ten percent reductions in their operating grants within a single budget year cycle (Baker, 2011, p. 221).

The fiscal conservatism of the Klein government was matched by its conservative social engineering stance towards aspects of the provincial post-secondary sector. Using the rhetoric of “human capital development”, “employability skills” and “learning outcomes”, the provincial ministry of Advanced Education and Skills developed a system of additional and new envelope funding for community colleges and technical institutes (Sargsyan, 2008, para. 22). In the face of ongoing and projected cuts to their operating grants, colleges and technical institutions could apply for new funding to develop targeted employment-related education programs in areas that the Government determined there was a need.

The Bachelor of Applied Justice Studies Degree

A centerpiece of the Government’s social engineering of post-secondary education in Alberta was the creation of a new academic credential – the “applied degree”. According to government legislation, applied degrees could only be offered through Alberta’s colleges and technical institutes. As described by Sargsyan (2008, para. 24), to secure provincial funding, colleges and institutions first had to demonstrate that Alberta jobs awaited graduates in the targeted industry. Second, the curriculum in the proposed applied degree had to incorporate employment skills suitable for the targeted industry. Third, and perhaps their most distinctive feature, all applied degrees were required to incorporate an applied work component that amounted to 25% of the total 120 credits in the degree. Basically, students in an applied degree were

required to complete two full semesters of paid work experience – known as Directed Field Studies.

The Bachelor of Applied Justice Studies (BAJS) at Mount Royal College was launched in 1999 and attracted a cohort of 50 students – all graduates of one of the three justice-related diplomas at the College (Corrections, Law Enforcement and Criminology-University Transfer) (Baker, 2011, p. 210). Instead of providing additional envelope funding for the new BAJS, the provincial government gave Mount Royal a choice – offer the new applied degree or the 3 diplomas but not both. Justice-related diplomas at Mount Royal College were phased out by 2001.

As documented in the proposal to government, the stated purpose of the Bachelor of Applied Justice Studies degree was to “provide an interdisciplinary applied four-year degree in Justice Studies to offer our students a competitive advantage in existing and future employment and educational opportunities” (Mount Royal College, 1999, p. 2). The adoption of the name “Justice Studies” as opposed to “Criminal Justice” or “Criminology” signaled that students would be employable outside the traditional positions within law enforcement and corrections.

Learning Outcomes in the Applied Degree

Five stated learning outcomes informed the curriculum in Mount Royal’s Bachelor of Applied Justice Studies degree. These outcomes were expressed as follows (Mount Royal College, 1999, p. 5):

- **Foundations in Justice Studies:** Students must acquire basic substantive knowledge about the study of criminology and the practices of the Canadian Criminal Justice System. Basic academic skills such as composition and computer literacy will facilitate future learning.
- **Human Relationship Skills:** To become an effective justice practitioner, the refinement of a set of complex human relation skills is mandatory. The capacity to accurately convey and solicit information and to resolve crises and conflict are essential across the justice system.

- **Human Justice:** Justice practitioners must establish a respect for diversity and recognition of the central role that human rights plays within the development and enforcement of criminal law. Ethical practice is the cornerstone of justice.
- **Criminological Literacy:** The Bachelor of Arts in Justice Studies is anchored by the social science of criminology. Students must become conversant with the criminological enterprise (theories and methods).
- **Experiential Learning:** One defining feature of a Justice Studies degree is the integration of classroom learning and practical experience.

The weaknesses of the provincial government's applied degree initiative became evident almost immediately in the Bachelor of Applied Justice Studies degree. Securing quality paid work experiences in justice-related agencies was particularly challenging. While unpaid practica were supported, most publically funded agencies did not have the budget to pay students. To ensure students would graduate, less desirable learning opportunities such as private security paid work terms were commonly used. Also, the applied degree credential in Alberta was considered "terminal degrees" by Alberta's universities (Baker, 2011, 219). For example, students with Bachelor of Applied Justice Studies degrees were not eligible for admission into law schools at the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary. This resulted in many graduates of the applied degree securing admission into law schools and justice-related graduate schools outside of Alberta.

Canada's Oldest "New" University

Mount Royal College's push to secure university status intensified at the turn of the new millennium. With university status as the ultimate goal, Mount Royal elected to first secure membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) (Marshall, 2004, p.13). Although not an official accreditation body, the process to gain mem-

bership in AUCC requires a rigorous external review and assessment of curricular programming, academic governance, learning support (e.g., library, learning skills, etc.) and employment credentials for faculty.

To secure AUCC membership, Mount Royal sought provincial approval to develop and deliver foundational undergraduate degrees (i.e., Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science) without university status. After a two-year proposal process, several applied degrees, (including the Bachelor of Applied Justice Studies) received the go-ahead in 2007 to transition to Bachelor of Arts degrees following a two-year period (Campus Alberta Quality Council, 2007, p. 2).

By 2008, Mount Royal College had secured membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). A year of discussions resulted in the Alberta Government changing the Post-Secondary Education Act to include a distinction between undergraduate teaching universities and research universities. Mount Royal University was declared on September 3, 2009 (Mount Royal University, n.d., para. 51).

The Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice

The design of the Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice relies heavily on the course content of the former applied degree. However, gone is the one full year of paid work experience. This was replaced with additional Arts and Science (or what is now called ‘General Education’ requirements). As well, the Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice has a practicum stream and an Honours stream. A student must complete one of the two streams in order to graduate. Most students elect to follow the practicum stream as a way to prepare for a career within a justice-related agency. About 10 – 15% of the 4th year cohort of 90 students are admitted into the Honours stream and complete an independent Honours project under the supervision of a fulltime faculty member. To enter into the Honours stream the student must have a minimum cumula-

tive GPA of 3.3 overall and a minimum GPA of 3.7 in CRJS courses to gain admission.

Emerging Debates and Discussion

It is only recently that faculty within the Department of Justice Studies are debating issues about the curricular mix in the Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice. This debate has several dimensions:

- What academic credentials are needed to teach in the degree?
- What should be the learning outcomes of the degree?
- What is the appropriate balance between Criminal Justice, Criminology and Skills Development in the degree's required courses?

Faculty Credentials, Academic Rank and Tenure

The introduction of academic rank among faculty at Mount Royal University was formalized within a year of university status. It was coupled with an extensive revision of the institution's tenure and promotion process that recognizes two different "work patterns" for full-time faculty (Mount Royal University, 2012, pp. 32-33). The "Teaching-Service" (TS) work pattern essentially means that the faculty member teaches eight classes per academic year and participates in institutional/departmental service. The "Teaching-Scholarship-Service" (TSS) work pattern reduces a faculty member's teaching load to engage in scholarship.

As the push for university status was underway, the Department of Justice Studies began to advertise and fill full-time faculty positions with candidates with PhDs or soon to be completed PhDs (in Criminology or a cognate discipline such as Sociology). This trend was mirrored throughout the institution as it was assumed that it would remove one obstacle for membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and university status. When university status was

achieved, each academic department at Mount Royal was required to declare their minimum academic credential for all future fulltime academic positions. The Department of Justice Studies elected to go with a minimum credential of a doctorate in Criminology or cognate discipline.

The unintended consequence of a minimum credential of a doctorate to hold a tenured position within the Department of Justice Studies is a changing mix of faculty experiences. What was once a Faculty populated by an excess of direct practical work experience within justice agencies has become a majority of full-time faculty with a richer experience in academic disciplines such as Criminology, Sociology and Political Science (but with significantly reduced justice-related work experience). This shifting balance is neither positive nor negative – it just is. It does however inform discussions on the appropriate learning outcomes for the Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice, the balance of Criminology and Criminal Justice in the curriculum, the mix of skill development required courses and the necessity of an experiential learning component.

Changing Learning Outcomes in the Degree

A recent change in learning outcomes in the Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice is evidence of an emerging shift in the focus of the degree. The table below lists the new learning outcomes in the Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice degree with the former Bachelor of Applied Justice Studies degree.

Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice <i>Learning Outcomes</i>	Bachelor of Applied Justice Studies <i>Learning Outcomes</i>
Criminal Justice and Criminology Literacy Interpersonal and Organizational Dynamics Social Justice Research and Methods Literacy	in Justice Studies Human Relationship Skills Human Justice Criminological Literacy Experiential Learning

Curriculum Renewal and a Changing Balance

Recently, the Department of Justice Studies has embarked on a curriculum evaluation review to link the current required courses within the Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice degree with the newly articulated learning outcomes. While it is much too early to know what the end result of the curriculum review process will be, some early trends seem to be emerging. First, there is concern among some that there are too many required skill development courses in the degree. The current array of skill development courses include: Interviewing, Intervention Strategies, Human Relationship Skills, and Professional Ethics. Can some of these courses become optional courses rather than required? Can some of these courses be collapsed and/or revised to be more academically rigorous?

A second emerging trend in the curriculum review process is the number and nature of the required research methods courses. Currently, all students must complete 3 research methods courses – Introduction to Research Methods, Qualitative Research Methods, and Quantitative Research Methods. As a result, some of the discussions are about increasing the number of research methods offerings – especially for students interested in the Honours stream.

A third trend being debated is the mix of Social Justice offerings within the Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice. Currently, Diversity Issues in Justice and Human Rights and Civil Liberties are the two required courses to satisfy this learning outcome. Should some existing option courses such as Women and Crime, Indigenous Peoples and Justice, and/or Organized and White Collar Crime become required courses in the degree? What other courses related to Social Justice should be developed?

Authors' Reflections

To this point in our article, we have tried to refrain from adding any personal assessment of what is the changing nature of the Criminal Justice degree at Mount Royal Univer-

sity (MRU). However, we do think that a shift away from an experiential learning component in the degree could erode its very core. The experiential learning component is especially embedded in a 6-credit practica (required of all students except those in the Honours stream) and a suite of 3-credit required offerings including courses in Interpersonal Relations, Interviewing Skills, Conflict Resolution and Professional Ethics. Allow us to briefly present the logic of our concerns.

All too often, academic, practitioners and administrators advance a false dichotomy between “academic” versus “professional” degrees and/or “academic” versus “applied” curriculum. These false distinctions are sometimes deployed to devalue the contribution a course or suite of courses have on what a student learns or the focus of an academic credential.

However, it is our assertion that the central difference between a Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice and one in Criminology is the necessary role of praxis in the former. Praxis is a concept that has many different philosophical and political connotations. For us, it embodies the important and oftentimes deeper awareness that a student gains by applying theories with “doing”. Within the context of the study of criminal justice, praxis has the potential of encouraging students to develop a richer and more critical understanding of the criminal justice system. Take, for example, the recurring theoretical debate about the role of severe punishment in deterring crime. One walk through any remand facility in Canada quickly dispels the theoretical assertion that most people get in trouble with the law because of some rational informed calculation they made.

The vast majority (about 75% to 80% each year) of graduates of the Bachelor of Arts – Criminal Justice degree move directly into career positions within the justice system (probation, parole, policing, courts, youth-at-risk agencies, etc.). It is our contention that the integration of praxis in the form of experiential learning not only enhances students’ employability but establishes within them the potential to act as agents of change throughout their careers. It is one thing to call for

needed reforms in our justice system from outside the system; it is entirely more effective to advocate for those changes from within the system.

Conclusions

There may be a few take-way points about the evolving nature of justice-related education at Mount Royal University. For one thing, it has, and probably will continue to be shaped and influenced by the “unique” nature of Alberta provincial politics. The Alberta Government has had a long history of conservative social engineering when it comes to post-secondary education. It is anyone’s guess how the Government may react to drastically lower crime rates, increasing incarceration rates, an aging workforce within mainstream criminal justice agencies, and the public clamor to lower taxes.

Also, our justice-related education has always tried to find a balance between Criminal Justice, Criminology, skill development and experiential learning suitable for careers within a broader justice community. But this might be shifting as the composition, credentials and experience of faculty within the Department of Justice Studies changes. The greatest risk associated with this shift is that it is done without a true understanding of the “whys” informing the changes. It must also include consultation with the partners that have been involved from the very beginning – justice agencies and students.

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