



**COLLEGE OF CRIMINOLOGY  
AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

*Research Brought to Life.*

# **Institutionalizing the use of Research in Juvenile Justice Practice: The Case of Florida**

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**Optimizing the Relevance of Prevention Science to  
Systems**



# I – Introduction: Translational Criminology

- Over the past few years there has been growing recognition of the importance of evidence-based criminal and juvenile justice practices from local, state, and federal government as well as within the academic discipline of criminology
- “The growth in applied research, evidence of what works, and increased attention to evidence-based practices is one of the most positive developments in criminal and juvenile justice over the past two decades” (Baumer, 2015)
- Former National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Director John Laub, recognized from such fields as medicine the effective use of translational research and applied this approach to criminology and criminal justice in an effort to better understand the dynamic processes involved in using criminological research to inform criminal justice policy and practice



## **I – Introduction Cont.**

- However, historically juvenile justice policy has been largely influenced by ideology, public opinion, and media coverage of isolated but powerfully stirring incidents of crime. Policy and practice has largely been crisis driven and reactionary and without empirically validated best practices
- Part of the problem is that researchers and practitioners have traditionally operated in separate domains with different values and goals
- There has even been some discussion of whether or not criminologists should be involved in policy and practice because of the field's lack of causal certainty (Blomberg et al., 2013; Tittle, 2004; Wellford, 2009)
- This division produces a gap between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners and results in many of the barriers documented in the literature on research translation



## **I – Introduction Cont.**

- What follows are examples of how Florida State University (FSU) has become involved with employing research in Florida's juvenile justice system over the last 20 years
- The presentation concludes with lessons learned from our research and practice experiences that advance best-practices in translational criminology



## **II – Litigation and Reform in Florida Juvenile Justice**

- During the 1980s and 90s, juvenile justice systems and programs across the country were experiencing litigation and associated court ordered reforms
- Florida's juvenile justice system came under scrutiny from 1983 through 1996 with the class action litigation known as Bobby M.
  - Resulted in 3 consent decrees
  - Inhumane treatment, conditions of confinement, unsanitary conditions
  - Right to counsel and access to the courts
  - Lack of educational services
- This litigation ultimately resulted in an opportunity or policy window where FSU researchers became involved in informing the system



## **III – The Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program: 1998 to 2010**

- In response to the litigation, in 1998, FSU received funding from the state to develop the Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program (JJEED) with the mission to:
  1. Conduct annual reviews of the educational programs in Florida’s juvenile justice facilities
  2. Provide technical assistance to improve the various educational programs
  3. Provide annual recommendations to guide state policy relating to juvenile justice education
  4. Conduct research that identifies and validates best practices

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- Ultimately the program was recognized by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) as a national model and received funding from Congress to assist other states in improving their juvenile justice education systems



## **IV – The FSU & DJJ Researcher-Practitioner Partnership**

- In 2013, we continued our research and policy/practice relationship with DJJ by taking advantage of new leadership in our state juvenile justice agency and approached them with a federal funding opportunity for a researcher-practitioner partnership
- We received NIJ funding to work with DJJ to assess 3 questions currently relevant to the agency and the field
  1. Determine the effectiveness of Civil Citation as an alternative to arrest
  2. Determine the effects of Family Visitation on incarcerated youth
  3. Determine the individual and school level factors that contribute to schools referring youth to the juvenile justice system. The School to Prison Pipeline



## V – Expanding the Partnership

- School-Based delinquency intervention in a large urban school district using a randomized controlled trial
  - Validation of an Evidence-Based Sourcebook for juvenile justice providers
  - Juvenile court referrals and dispositions and the factors that impact them
  - Assessment of the states juvenile justice disproportionate minority contact
  - Risk assessment validation and rescoring
  - Testing the recidivism-prevention effectiveness of all of the state’s juvenile residential facilities
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- Future discussion to assess effective system processing of youth including (1) identification of youth risks and needs, (2) assigning youth to the most appropriate programs based upon their risks and needs, (3) to quality and dosage of treatment, and (4) community reentry





# VI – Barriers & Facilitators

<b>Historical Barriers to Research Translation</b>	<b>Opportunities for Collaboration and Partnerships</b>	<b>Facilitators to Research Translation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research difficult to use</li><li>• Leadership unsupportive</li><li>• Ideology/Politics</li><li>• Trained differently</li><li>• Poor relationships</li><li>• Budget concerns</li><li>• Crisis driven policy/practice</li><li>• Time Constraints</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limited fiscal resources (what works)</li><li>• Government funded research (no cost to the agency)</li><li>• Evidence-based movement (bi-partisan)</li><li>• Practitioner conferences (ACA, CEA, NJCJA)</li><li>• New leadership (finding a champion)</li><li>• Litigation (opportunity for reform and improvement)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Building relationships</li><li>• Reciprocity and exchange</li><li>• Trust, confidence, and empathy</li><li>• Leader/Champion</li><li>• Collaboration<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Cross-training</li><li>- Problem identification</li><li>- Data understanding</li></ul></li></ul>



## **VII – Lessons Learned: Advancing Best Practices**

1. Successful partnerships are built upon relationships, trust, and reciprocity over time
  - Work with leadership to understand their motivations and identify problems relevant to them
  - Recognize windows of opportunities (i.e., the development of new programs and policies, litigation, new leadership, fiscal limitations)
2. Research can serve as a diagnostic function aimed at improving programs and systems
  - Practitioners can use research results (1) as a shield, (2) to support change in practice (3) and/or request needed resources



## VII – Lessons Learned: Advancing Best Practices

3. Building and supporting the internal research capacity of agencies
  - Researchers can assist agencies in building internal research capacity and cultivate relationships with agency data and research departments (i.e., internships, cross training, graduate student employment)
  - Due to ever increasing data reporting and administrative demands agency research departments often do not have the time to conduct complex research studies
  - However, when given the opportunity, agency personnel are often interested in conducting research studies. Partnerships provide opportunities for diagnostics, evaluation, instrument development, joint presentations, and co-authored publications



# Thank you!

## Questions/Discussion – 1:00 Regency A