Careers in Criminal Justice

A popular major thanks to TV’s example

Thanks, in part, to the popularity of TV shows like Law & Order, CSI, NCIS, and Cops, criminal justice programs in Massachusetts are enjoying a surge in popularity. For instance, at Bridgewater State College, where criminal justice was first offered as a major only eight years ago, more than 800 students are now enrolled. That’s all very attractive to students today.”

“We’re serving your community. That’s all very attractive to students today.”

“What’s more, Petrosino explains, students are generally familiar with at least some of the jobs that are possible with a criminal justice degree. “Police officers are so visible,” he says. “People see law enforcement officers on the job on a daily basis. It’s a job that you see having an impact on your community.”

Students with criminal justice degrees have opportunities in law enforcement, Petrosino is quick to add. “At Bridgewater State, we want to expand this image to include the courts, corrections, community-based agencies that address the vic- tims of crime, other programs that address criminal offenders, and restorative justice,” she says.

“There is a wide range of opportunities out there for criminal justice graduates.”

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To underscores this premise, Peter C. Haines, professor of anthropology and chair of sociology and criminal justice at Curry College, points out that Curry College in Milton was the first in the nation to offer a Certificate in Homeland Defense. This program prepares traditional, continuing studies undergraduates and law enforcement practitioners to meet the new challenges of homeland security and enables them to respond strategically to real situations emerging on the local, public, and private levels.

In addition, coursework for this certificate includes classes such as “Path and Functions”, “The Psychology of Violence and Terror,” and “Crime Management,” all designed to help put terrorism in historical and cultural contexts.

According to Haines, that type of integrated, holistic approach is the hallmark of Curry College’s criminal justice program. Many students couple their class work with research projects and internships that provide experience in the field.

“Traditionally, training in criminal justice has been about being reactive,” he explains. “Now we need to be proactive. We need to get students to think hard about these problems and to tie in with people in the community that serve. I’m convinced that criminal justice is such a strong major now because it’s not just about training about rules. It’s about asking questions and being involved with the solutions.”

Ted Leach, senior associate dean of the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University, agrees. He sees the master of science in criminal justice leadership that’s offered through the College of Professional Studies as a fresh approach to the needs of criminal justice.

“The program has a dual focus of leadership and practice, while emphasizing the need for cross-functional collaboration and communication. Most students enroll part-time and finish the program in one year, owing to an “executive format” of online classes coupled with a week-long intensive mini- course held at Northeastern in the summer.”

“Our emphasis on leadership has a long-term impact.”

“Traditionally, training in crime- nal justice stretches far beyond law enforcement and the few careers glorified on TV shows, Petrosino continues. “Today’s criminal justice students train to understand the broader concept of criminal behavior in our society, and the involves critical thinking and training skills, as well as an appreciation for cultural diversity, politics, socio-economic factors, theoretical principles, and ethics.”