The Sociology of Criminology and Criminal Justice is a signature theme in the Department of Sociology that engages in teaching, research and outreach activities. The area incorporates a balance of practical and basic research in achieving the goal of helping stakeholders understand and manage the crime problem across the life span from youth to prisoners serving life sentences. The theme is grounded on the sociological traditions in criminology, but incorporates knowledge from many perspectives, heavily emphasizing interdisciplinary research and collaboration. The program draws on scholarship in the study of crime from departments across Iowa State’s campus including but not limited to psychology, political science, and sociology. The program also is strengthened by lecturers who have extensive experience in various criminal justice fields including the local police department, department of corrections, and other law enforcement agencies. Sociology faculty interests range from biosocial predictors of offending, to social psychological aspects of criminal decision-making and recidivism, to community influences on recidivism and crime, to evaluation of both large and small treatment and prevention efforts for offenders, mental health patients and others at risk of crime. Coursework in sociology offers students insights into criminal justice including sociology of disparity, social problems, family, social psychology and social control.

Teaching Programs

The Sociology of Criminology and Criminal Justice signature theme offers students an interdisciplinary approach to the study of crime preparing students for diverse careers in academia and public and private organizations. The theme’s mix of policy and practice centered classes and basic education on crime related topics offers a foundation for continued education or practice. Many students pursue careers in law enforcement, corrections, or law. The department also has a strong history of placing students in graduate schools and setting students on a course to begin careers as scholars of criminology. Successful students will achieve the following learning objectives 1) understand linkages between crime and criminal justice and societal structures and practices, 2) learn to analyze relationships between propensities, decision-making, and criminal offending, 3) understand social, demographic and economic predictors of crime and the response to it, 4) the basic application of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to the study of crime, 5) learning to evaluate analyses of crime, crime prevention programs and studies of related topics as informed and critical consumers.
Undergraduate education

The Sociology of Criminology and Criminal Justice signature theme reflects the ongoing cross-disciplinary integration in the study of crime and criminal justice in the scholarly field. Unlike many academic units that have capitalized on student interest in the topic by creating specialized programs, with sole interest in crime and its social causes or purely practitioner oriented programs, our signature theme reflects the fact that the study of crime spans interests and disciplinary boundaries. In addition to basic education requirements that include credits from at least two social science disciplines, students’ programs of study currently include advanced and introductory classes from psychology, political science, human development and family studies, as well as classes on policing, corrections, criminology theory, and special topics in crime such as violent offenders, drugs, or white-collar crime. The program serves approximately 400 students declaring the interdisciplinary studies degree as a major. Our program is patterned around the liberal arts tradition of providing students understanding of crime, its causes and consequences, so that they are prepared for multiple careers. Some of our students elect to continue into police academies where they learn policing procedures and protocols, while others seek to continue graduate studies in criminology. In keeping with preparing well-rounded students, many of our graduates seek careers in human service agencies where they are engaged in prevention or treatment programs to keep young people out of the criminal justice system.

Graduate education

The graduate program is focused on providing students with strong research skills and preparing them for the study of crime including evaluation of policies and programs. Master’s and Ph.D. programs are offered in Sociology and students must incorporate criminology and/or criminal justice studies into their own program of study. The department attracts only a small number of students with a specialized interest in crime although many sociology students are involved in research on crime as part of their graduate education. The small number of students allow faculty in the signature theme area to provide individualized instruction and the area has a strong history of publishing with those students and in placing them at academic institutions to pursue a Ph.D. or begin work as faculty. Students are able to design their own programs of study with faculty who offer courses in crime studies, but more often offering independent study to students. Core courses include sociological theory, quantitative and qualitative methods, criminology theory, community, and other general sociology or elective courses. Teaching opportunities are available to graduate students and there are some opportunities for employment as research assistants. Faculty in the thematic area mentor graduate students through participating in research projects and presenting at professional meetings, and have demonstrated especial interest in co-authoring academic papers with students.
Research Programs

Consistent with the signature theme’s openness to incorporation of diverse social science, crime and criminal justice research faculty approach the subject of crime and criminal justice from diverse paradigms. These include law, socio-biology, mental health, desistance, risk assessment, decision-making, and corrections research traditions. Research agenda of faculty all include a mix of methodologies, subject matter, and basic and policy centered study. Faculty have established national and international prominence in journals, funding agencies, book publications, and professional societies, and policy-making institutions. Frequent appearances in top criminology journals and high citation of faculty members reflect their scholarly impact. In addition, faculty members collaborate with top scholars in criminology at universities around the nation and abroad.

Primary Faculty

Matt DeLisi (LAS), Ph.D. University of Colorado
- Habitual criminal offending, career criminals, genetics and crime, psychopathy, self-control theory.

Andy Hochstetler (LAS), Ph.D. University of Tennessee
- Criminology, qualitative research, white-collar crime

Monic Behnken (LAS), Ph.D. Pacific Graduate School of Psychology and J.D. Golden Gate University School of Law
- Deviance, mental health, criminology, criminal justice

Associated Faculty

For more information

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