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Concordia Criminal Justice Highlights

Faculty & staff committed to a higher education.

BY SCOTT HARR, CONCORDIA CRIMINAL JUSTICE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

A common misconception about Concordia University St. Paul's bachelor's and master's criminal justice degree programs is what sets them apart from others is they are online. True, these fully accredited degrees from a 115 year old school *are* completed totally online, but we consider the technology no different than any other equipment used to convey information during classes; really, the use of the Internet isn't much different than one using an overhead projector or showing a movie.

What really makes Concordia's criminal justice programs such a rich learning environment are the students and faculty. Students start their degree program with a small group (called a cohort) that takes the entire series of accelerated classes, one at a time, together. Not only do students develop an immediate support system, but friendships that will last a lifetime.

It's not just the people; it's where these faculty and students are from and what they do. Any program can let criminal justice practitioners sit around with others from their immediate area discussing what they already know. But think of the opportunities that emerge in a class with faculty and students who share their own wealth of experience from across the criminal justice system and United States, Canada and wherever they may be deployed in the military (including war zones), as if you were sitting across from them.

This is no ordinary program with ordinary students or faculty.

We consider our faculty and students family, and take great pride introducing them. In this edition we would like to introduce Concordia

Criminal Justice Instructor Joe Arvidson. Like the majority of our faculty, Professor Arvidson knows what he teaches about because his expertise comes from doing it for a living. By design our faculty all have work experience in the subject matter they teach.



Joe Arvidson

Please introduce yourself: I am employed by the Ramsey County Community Corrections Department as a probation officer, a career I began in 1988 with the Florida Department of Corrections, so coming up on 20 years now.

We take great pride in what our faculty brings to the program. Can you explain why your job is unique even among probation officers? When the Minnesota Legislature first funded the statewide Minnesota Gang Strike Force, my department thought it only made sense to create a position in our agency to make sure we were all on the same page. I have always had an interest in gangs so volunteered to literally build the position from the ground up. I work directly with police on a daily basis, which includes sharing intelligence, working gang details and executing war-

rants involving gang members.

Why do you like teaching? There is that old saying that those who can ... do. And that those who can't ... *teach*. I am fortunate enough to be able to experience both. I really get satisfaction seeing when a student learns to understand a concept they previously had not, or to better understand a philosophy they were ideologically opposed to simply because they were not fully informed about the topic.

Because online learning is far more personal than people who haven't experienced it realize, I also enjoy getting to know the students as well as I do, and them me. Concordia's program is unique in that the students are already working in criminal justice, so it's great networking for them and me for our "day jobs" after they graduate. And of course, it's always fun to read about a former student making the news for a job well done.

What experience did you have with online learning prior to Concordia? Absolutely none; it's so simple to learn that the fact it's "different" should not be a barrier to anyone considering it.

Has your perspective about online learning changed? I think if I had any prejudice at the beginning it was along the line of wondering whether online learning equated to legitimate education. The fact is, online simply provides another means of learning. There are good and bad face-to-face and online schools. Concordia's online program is tremendous and fully accredited so has to maintain the very same standards as the face-to-face programs.

What advice would you give

someone considering returning to school? I would say look at all of your options and measure those against your time commitments both professionally and personally. If you are looking for a quality education with top notch faculty who has experience working in the criminal justice system and teaching non-traditional students also working in the field, consider Concordia University. This program was specifically designed for students wondering if they can return to earn their degree but maintain a balance of self, family, work and school; the answer is yes, you can, and very effectively.

What do you see as the benefit of getting a college degree for people already working in the criminal justice field? It is impossible to put a price tag on furthering ones education, but the research is there; people with higher degrees make more money and have more options, both for promotion and other career moves. For those who aspire to leadership positions in their agencies, in my opinion, having the edge of an education is a must. And even if somebody does not necessarily want to be the next chief of police or head of their agency, securing ones degree simply makes for a more professional criminal justice practitioner.

I am a huge proponent of inter-agency collaboration. I can attest to the fact that nobody comes out of

one of my courses without understanding how essential that concept is. That is merely one example of the ideals which are gained through higher education. The benefits can also be more personal in nature. A number of my students have always wanted to get a degree but then family, work and life in general got in the way, but it's remained a dream. Others want to be a good role model for their own children, while others well set in their careers simply want to challenge themselves. I can honestly say that Concordia's commitment to their students is to provide a program that recognizes the challenges of returning adult students.

What are the positives you see to online learning? Many CJ practitioners don't have the luxury of working a traditional 9 to 5 shift. Even those who do have lives packed with other commitments. What online learning offers is the flexibility to continue working and meet family and other commitments without the pursuit of their education making them choose one or the other. It really is a win-win situation. Don't get me wrong, this is the real deal, college — it's not easy. But the approach, scheduling and support are there for students who make the commitment to be successful. Even the first class is to help returning students make the transition and develop a strategy to succeed.

And believe it or not, there is an

intimate setting fostered with online learning that cannot be duplicated in a traditional classroom. The students share their life's learning experiences with the class in a way that truly enhances the courses. It's immensely gratifying for the students, and me as an instructor. Just because a person's never experienced online learning is not a sufficient reason for dismissing it as not as good. The fact is, for many students it's even better.

Thanks Professor Arvidson.

We consider faculty like Joe Arvidson, and our students from around the world, the real essence of our program. While it's not the fact the program is online that makes it such an exceptional option for adults trying to balance busy lives, it is the fact the online methodology allows so many people with unique perspectives to be involved that makes this such a rewarding way to earn a degree. The accessibility of it being online adds to why so many criminal justice personnel are finding it's the best fit for them.

Further information can be obtained by contacting Criminal Justice Department Chair Scott Harr at harr@csp.edu or 651-603-6277 or department recruiter Mike Conner at conner@csp.edu or 651-641-8249 and by visiting www.csp.edu/cj. ■

Concordia University Offers Info Sessions To Law Enforcement Agencies, And Accepting Applications For 2008-2009

INFORMATION SESSIONS

Professor Mike Conner, Concordia Criminal Justice Department Recruiter (and graduate of the master's program himself), is available to schedule information sessions about Concordia's online programs: the BA degree in Criminal Justice; the BA degree in Public Safety & Security; and the MA degree in Criminal Justice Leadership. Mike is glad to present to any number of officers, as well as meet with anyone individually, at any agency.



Concordia University Criminal Justice Department Recruiter, Professor Mike Conner 651-641-8249 conner@csp.edu

ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS

Applications are being accepted for Concordia degree program starts the remainder of this school year that runs through June, as well as for the next academic year. Any questions regarding admissions criteria and the process, schedules or anything else can be directed to Mike Conner at conner@csp.edu or 651-641-8249, Criminal Justice Department Chair Scott Harr at harr@csp.edu or 651-603-6277 and by visiting www.csp.edu/cj. ■