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Preliminary Market Assessment for Online Master's Program in Justice Studies

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Summary

San José State University has on-campus programs leading to a B.S. in Justice Studies and a M.S. in Justice Studies. SJSU is considering offering a new online master's program in this field. SJSU International & Extended Studies (IES) retained Keen Independent Research (KIR) to conduct a preliminary market assessment of this online master's degree. This research included:

- Review of criminal justice careers, including entrance, pay, training, promotion and incentives/disincentives to pursue advanced education;
- Study of whether online programs are attractive to potential students;
- Investigation of other online master's programs and competing training programs; and
- Other research into reasons to pursue a master's degree in this field.

In sum, International & Extended Studies (IES) sought an independent assessment of whether there was demand for such a master's program at SJSU and the extent of competition for the program. In the next two pages, Keen Independent Research briefly provides some background on the potential online program, explains the reasons a program might be successful and outlines key challenges in achieving a successful program. This brief summary is followed by detailed research results.

Background. A master's degree in justice studies might support a number of careers in law enforcement, corrections and the courts, as well as not-for-profit organizations focusing on areas such as victims, crime prevention, parolees and youth. Some students may seek a master's degree as a step toward a Ph.D. and a potential academic career. Because the current SJSU on-campus master's program draws students with backgrounds across a number of fields, a new online program would probably do so as well. However, the largest segment of potential students appears to be those in law enforcement and corrections, and our research focused on these areas. Study components included:

- Interviews with students, applicants and professionals, and other background research;
- Assessment of competing programs;
- Research on career ladder, incentives and rewards for justice professionals; and
- In-depth discussions with SJSU Justice Studies and International & Extended Studies leadership.

Reasons to conclude there is potential in a SJSU online master's in justice studies. KIR's initial evaluation of an online master's program in justice studies suggests opportunity for success.

- The number of professionals in the justice industry is large.
- Professionals seeking advancement within the justice field face increased competition and require new job skills for promotion to higher ranks.
- Although those in the senior ranks of law enforcement typically do not have a master's degree, perhaps one-quarter to one-third do (based on a small sample of California agencies).

- An online master’s program might be more attractive to potential students than a traditional on-campus program:
 - A master’s degree appears to be more often obtained by professionals already employed in the field while they continue to work — an online program fits the needs of the target market.
 - Employers in this field typically do not provide paid leave to an employee pursuing a graduate degree.
 - A flexible online program fits the unique work schedules in this field (odd hours, changing shifts).
 - Many professionals do not live or work near on-campus graduate programs in justice studies.
 - Online master’s degrees appear to be widely accepted in the field, especially from reputable public or not-for-profit universities.
 - Leading justice studies graduate programs throughout the country (as well as other respected justice studies programs) are creating online master’s programs. A number appear to be successful.

- Much of the demand for a SJSU program would come from Northern California. Although some students might enroll from anywhere in the country (or outside the U.S.), SJSU has a network of graduates from the bachelor’s program and a strong reputation within the region. There is considerable competition from other online programs across the country, but there is currently limited competition for an online program from a California public university within this region. (A SJSU program might draw a number of students from Southern California as well given the limited options for online master’s programs in that region.)

- Because of SJSU’s leadership in justice studies education within the region, Northern California justice agencies may be interested in helping the University design an online program that meets the needs of working professionals and agencies in the region.

In this field, online programs may become bigger than on-campus master’s programs. To remain relevant, an institution with a strong on-campus program may also need to develop an online program. Although this alone does not justify a SJSU online master’s program in justice studies, it may be an important consideration for the University.

Reasons why a program must be targeted, well-designed and effectively marketed to be successful. Even with the favorable market conditions for a SJSU online master’s program in justice studies, it would only be successful if it carefully matched needs of Northern California professionals and agencies. In other words, it will be difficult to develop a generic, nationally-marketed online master’s program in justice studies at SJSU given the number and strength of the universities that have already launched such programs.

Furthermore, there does not appear to be much pressure for working professionals to obtain a master’s degree in order to advance. And, those in the field who currently hold master’s degrees tend to have degrees in areas other than justice studies.

These factors are explored in the Detailed Research Results presented below. Keen Independent Research concludes that it will be difficult for SJSU to develop a program that attracts a meaningful number of students. There is potential for success, however, if SJSU designs the program to meet needs within Northern California and effectively markets it within the region. Ingredients for success are explained at the close of this Summary Report.

KIR presented these results at a May 25, 2011 working session with Justice Studies and IES leadership (our PowerPoint presentation from this meeting is included at Attachment A).

This summary report provides additional documentation of research results.

Detailed Research Results

KIR provides at least the start of some answers to the following questions, based on our preliminary research:

- a. What is the “justice studies” field? What are program applicants’ backgrounds and what types of careers will they have with the degree?
- b. Are there many people working in this field?
- c. Does a master’s degree help an individual start a justice career?
- d. Are requirements for entry-level jobs changing for justice careers?
- e. What types of training are generally required to advance in a justice career?
- f. Is a master’s degree required to reach certain levels within a law enforcement or other justice career?
- g. Does a master’s degree help an individual compete for advanced positions?
- h. Does a master’s degree count toward any years of experience requirements?
- i. Would a master’s degree lead to a pay increase?
- j. Are there other reasons for an individual to obtain a master’s degree?
- k. Is there an advantage for employers for their professionals to obtain a graduate degree?
- l. Are employers providing time and/or tuition reimbursement for such programs?
- m. What percentage of high-ranking law enforcement officers have a master’s degree?
- n. Are most individuals seeking graduate degrees doing so while continuing to work?
- o. Are online programs attractive to potential students?
- p. Would an online degree be seen negatively compared with an on-campus master’s degree?
- q. Do many other universities have an online master’s in justice studies program?
- r. How have other universities named this degree?
- s. Have other universities created specializations within their master’s in justice studies programs?
- t. What is the general format and length of time for other master’s in justice studies programs?
- u. What does it cost to obtain this degree from other universities?

- v. Based on enrollment, have other universities been successful in launching online master's in justice studies programs?
- w. Do other master's degrees compete with a master's in justice studies?
- x. What regions would primarily feed a SJSU online master's program in justice studies?
- y. What might distinguish the SJSU online master's program from the competition?
- z. Are there opportunities to consult with Northern California justice agencies when designing the program?

a. What is the “justice studies” field? What are program applicants’ backgrounds and what types of careers will they have with the degree?

A master's degree in justice studies might support a number of careers in law enforcement, corrections and the courts, as well as not-for-profit organizations focusing on areas such as victims, crime prevention, parolees and youth. Some students may seek a master's degree as a step toward a Ph.D. and a potential academic career. Many have an end goal of management and leadership positions in those and related fields.

Because the current SJSU on-campus master's program draws students with backgrounds across a number of fields, a new online program would probably do so as well. However, the largest segment of potential students appears to be those in law enforcement and corrections, and our research focused on these areas.

b. Are there many people working in this field?

Yes, the justice field is a very large employer.

Just including patrol officers, detectives and criminal investigators, correctional officers, and the immediate supervisors of these staff, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics counts 1.4 million jobs as of May, 2010.¹ There were about 140,000 jobs in these occupations in California.²

Higher-ranking staff in law enforcement as well as professionals working in the courts and related not-for-profit organizations add to these figures.

c. Does a master's degree help an individual start a justice career?

It is rare that a master's degree is a requirement for an entry-level position within a justice career. In fact, most agencies do not require entry-level law enforcement officers to have a bachelor's degree.³

¹ http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#33-0000

² http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_ca.htm#33-0000

³ Only 1 percent of police departments nationally required a bachelor's degree in 2003 in the research conducted by M.J. Hickman and B.A. Reaves for the U.S. Department of Justice (see M.J. Hickman and B.A. Reaves, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Local Police Departments*, 2003 (NCJ 210118), May 2006.

Educational requirements at least at the level of a four-year degree include the following:

- Certain police departments such as Arvada, Colorado require all police officers to have a bachelor's degree. (Most do not have this requirement.)
- Only candidates with bachelor's degrees are considered for recruitment to the FBI as a special agent. Unless the recruit with a bachelor's degree has specialized skills (e.g., certain language skills, is a CPA), he or she must also have three years of work experience. If the candidate has a master's degree, that applicant need only have two years of work experience.

Maximum opportunities for selection as a special agent are for those with critical skills gained through education or training in accounting, finance, computer science, engineering or architecture, foreign language, or physical sciences/mathematics (including forensics). Candidates with work experience in intelligence, law enforcement, or the military are also deemed to have "critical skills." It does not appear that a Master's in Justice Studies fulfills the critical skills requirement.⁴

- At the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), candidates for entry-level youth counselor positions must have a bachelor's degree or a two-year degree and related experience.
- Entry-level correctional officers hired by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) must have a four-year college degree or three years of specific types of work experience.

A few justice careers require master's degrees, especially in corrections. For example, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's casework specialist position requires a master's degree in social work. KIR did not identify any careers for which a master's in justice studies would fulfill an entry-level job requirement.

d. Are requirements for entry-level jobs changing for justice careers?

Yes, but the change to date has been slow.

Traditionally, the typical applicant for an entry-level police officer position would have graduated from high school and served a few years in the military or obtained a community college degree in criminal justice (and be at least 20 years old). No additional academic training was required to be hired by a police department. Most training was conducted within a police department, starting with its own or a shared police academy. Requirements for new correctional officers were much the same except for counseling positions, which sometimes required more education.

⁴ <http://www.fbijobs.gov/1112.asp>

Since the 1960s, law enforcement leaders have called for more formal education of police officers. However, few police departments today require college degrees for entry into the police force. Some researchers conclude that just 1 percent of law enforcement agencies require four-year degrees for police officers. A possible factor is the role of police unions in shaping criteria for entrance and promotion within a police force in many communities.

With a growing emphasis on community policing, and greater outside scrutiny of police officer ethics and their ability to work with diverse populations, calls for a college-educated police force continue today. As important, limited job opportunities for new college graduates are allowing some police departments to only select college graduates for their new classes of police cadets.

e. What types of training are generally required to advance in a justice career?

Training beyond the academy is an important part of a law enforcement officer's career. Although an extreme example, one Los Angeles Police Department Captain reported in his departmental bio that he had attended 134 departmental, federal, state and county-sponsored schools and training seminars in his career. Prestigious advanced training includes West Point Leadership Program, executive programs at Harvard University, and FBI leadership and executive development programs.

The State of California's Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) provides training programs for all levels of law enforcement professionals, including executive training through its Sherman Block Supervisory Leadership Institute (for sergeants or higher), the Command College (for lieutenants or higher) and other leadership programs. Command College is an 18-month program.⁵ Participants in POST programs do not pay tuition if they work for an eligible agency. It appears that many law enforcement officers in California have received POST training.

f. Is a master's degree required to reach certain levels within a law enforcement or other justice career?

No, KIR's review of a broad range of justice agencies did not find that a master's degree was a requirement to reach certain positions within those agencies.

Within a typical large police department, advancement to the levels of Sergeant or Detective, and then to Lieutenant and Captain, usually depends on years of service, performance on the job and test scores. A college degree, let alone a master's degree, is usually not a requirement for advancement for most departments.

g. Does a master's degree help an individual compete for advanced positions?

Factors other than undergraduate or graduate degrees obtained drive advancement within most law enforcement agencies. However, our interviews indicated there is tough competition for senior positions and that advanced education can be helpful. There is also much more emphasis on effective written and verbal communications skills when competing for higher-level positions, and that a master's degree can be helpful in honing these skills.

⁵ <http://post.ca.gov/command-college.aspx>

h. Does a master's degree count toward any years of experience requirements?

KIR identified only a few agencies that counted a master's degree toward years of experience requirements for an entry-level position. In instances where years of education can be used to offset experience requirements for career advancement, that education credit appears to max out with a bachelor's degree (according to KIR interviews with law enforcement officials).

i. Would a master's degree lead to a pay increase?

Of the approximately 20 law enforcement agencies KIR examined with Northern California locations, four paid law enforcement officers more if they had a graduate degree. In contrast, all but one of the Northern California law enforcement agencies that KIR examined offered pay increases if the officer had completed a certain level of POST training. Fourteen agencies gave pay increases if the officer had a bachelor's degree.

Among agencies giving a pay increase for a master's degree, increases were relatively modest.

- An Oakland Police Department Captain could earn \$8,000 per year more;
- A Pittsburg, California Police Department officer earns 5 percent more;
- Nine semester hours of graduate study in criminal justice or a related field moves a federal correctional officer from GS-05 to GS-06 (at step 1, pay is \$4,300 per year higher); and
- The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation pays certain correctional counselors about \$1,600 per year more with master's degree.

The size of the pay differential with a master's degree for Northern California agencies was typical of what KIR found across law enforcement agencies in other areas. For example, KIR identified that a master's degree is only worth about \$1,000 per year for a Phoenix police officer.

j. Are there other reasons for an individual to obtain a master's degree?

Interviews with people in the justice field identified other reasons why someone might obtain a master's degree. Many law enforcement officers will have a second career after retirement (perhaps after only 20 years) or because they want the option to move out of law enforcement before retirement.

- A master's degree opens teaching opportunities, an advantage for second-career professionals and those staying in law enforcement.
- A master's degree may be an important part of an "exit strategy" (a term used by one of the police officers we interviewed). Especially if the degree is in teaching, management or another non-law enforcement field, the master's degree may open career opportunities not available to a typical law enforcement officer.

k. Is there an advantage for employers for their professionals to obtain a graduate degree?

Law enforcement agencies are under pressure to accomplish more with less money, and there is growing emphasis on community policing and new ways to work with juvenile offenders. Some organizations such as the State of California corrections system face fundamental changes in the way they do business (court-mandated reduction in prison overcrowding). Organizations such as the City of Los Angeles are under consent decree requirements to better train their officers. Law enforcement agencies need leadership and staff that have the vision, skills and training to meet these new challenges. If designed appropriately, a master's degree in justice studies could be one way to obtain this training.

Support for advanced education may vary between agencies based on the education, background and objectives of the head of each agency. The Oakland Chief of Police, for example, holds a Ph.D. in Public Administration and an MBA. The San José Chief of Police has an MPA and a law degree. Agency heads with different backgrounds may be less supportive of advanced education within their departments.

l. Are employers providing time and/or tuition reimbursement for such programs?

In general, individuals within the justice field would take master's program classes on their own time, mostly using their own funds.

Some law enforcement agencies provide tuition reimbursement; however, the amount of tuition reimbursement is small relative to total tuition. For example, Oakland police officers can receive \$400 in reimbursement per class for up to two classes a semester.

For most people working in the justice field, all or most of the tuition will come out of the student's own funds. The highest tuition reimbursement KIR identified was 50 percent (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation), and most agencies appeared to offer much less or nothing at all.

Law enforcement agencies typically provide time for officers to complete in-house training or outside training through agencies such as POST. They do not specifically offer extra paid leave to obtain a college degree or master's degree.

m. What percentage of high-ranking law enforcement officers have a master's degree?

Based on preliminary research, perhaps one-quarter to one-third of police officers in California with the rank of Captain or above have a master's degree.

KIR studied two larger police departments that supplied officer bios indicating their education — the City of Los Angeles Police Department and the San José Police Department.

Los Angeles PD. One-quarter of LAPD Captains and one-third of higher-ranking staff have a master's degree. Many in the manager ranks are Police Administrators (non-officers), of which 60 percent have a master's degree.

San José PD. Based upon the bios of senior-ranking staff posted by the San José Police Department, one-third of officers with the rank of Captain and above have a master's degree.

n. Are most individuals seeking graduate degrees doing so while continuing to work?

Yes, except for students who have yet to obtain their first job in the justice field. Working professionals are the primary target market for a master's in justice studies. Many master's degree programs KIR researched require students to have three to five years of related work experience.

o. Are online programs attractive to potential students?

Compared with on-campus master's degrees, online master's programs better meet the needs of many potential students.

- Potential master's students are working (as noted above, they typically do not get paid leave to pursue a master's degree).
- Many in the justice field work non-traditional hours, with frequent changes in their work shifts. Because they often do not have evenings or weekends free and their schedules change, they may not be able to attend a full semester of fixed-time on-campus classes.
- A substantial number of law enforcement employees work and live in communities distant from a university offering relevant master's degrees. Some professionals may be in rural areas and others in cities with limited choices for advanced education.

p. Would an online degree be seen negatively compared with an on-campus master's degree?

KIR identified no stigma to attaining a master's degree in justice studies through an online program, especially if it is obtained from a reputable public or not-for-profit institution.

However, KIR's research of master's degrees obtained by high-ranking officers of the Los Angeles Police Department and San José Police Department found that few reported master's degrees from online for-profit universities.

q. Do many other universities have an online master's in justice studies program?

KIR identified 54 regionally-accredited universities offering an online master's degree in justice studies or a closely-related field. Programs are offered by public, not-for-profit and for-profit universities throughout the country. A complete inventory of online master's degrees was outside KIR's scope of this preliminary research, and there are likely to be additional programs we did not identify. Attachment B is an Excel spreadsheet providing information about these 54 programs.

Many institutions with a strong reputation for their graduate programs now offer online master's degrees, including schools within the University of California (e.g., UC Irvine) and California State University systems (e.g., CSU San Bernardino). California-based universities offering online justice studies-related master's degrees appear to be in Southern California. Sacramento State offers an on-campus Masters of Criminal Justice, with classes held during the evenings. CSU Fresno offers an M.S. in Criminology, also through an on-campus program.

Figure 1 provides a listing of universities offering an online master’s in justice studies or related field (non-exhaustive list).

Figure 1. Universities offering an online master’s degree related to justice studies, June 2011

| Alliant International University | Regis University |
|--|---|
| American Military University | Saint Cloud State University |
| Anna Maria College | Saint Joseph's University |
| Arizona State University | Saint Leo University |
| Bellevue University | Saint Peter's College |
| Boston University Metropolitan College | Sam Houston University |
| Bowling Green State University | South University |
| California State University San Bernardino | Southern New Hampshire University |
| California University of Pennsylvania | The Chicago School of Professional Psychology |
| Capella University | Tiffin University |
| Columbia College | Trident University International |
| Eastern Kentucky University | Troy University |
| Florida State University | TUI University |
| Grand Canyon University | University of Massachusetts Lowell |
| Hodges University | University of Alaska Fairbanks |
| Indiana State University | University of California Irvine |
| John Jay College of Criminal Justice | University of Central Missouri |
| Jones International University | University of Cincinnati |
| Kaplan University | University of Colorado, Denver |
| Loyola University New Orleans | University of Louisiana at Monroe |
| Lynn University | University of Louisville |
| Michigan State University | University of Maryland |
| New Mexico State University | University of Northern Colorado |
| North Central University | University of Phoenix |
| NOVA Southeastern University | University of the Rockies |
| Northeastern University | Utica College |
| Penn State World Campus | Walden University |

Source: Keen Independent Research LLC.

Universities throughout the country also offer certificate programs in fields ranging from victim services to homeland security.

r. How have other universities named this degree?

Many universities' online master's degree programs have the same names as their on-campus programs. Some use "justice studies" and some use "criminal justice" as the name of the master's degree. Examples of other names include:

- Administration of Justice and Security (e.g., University of Phoenix);
- Adult, Juvenile and Community Corrections (e.g., Eastern Kentucky University);
- Correctional and Juvenile Justice Studies (e.g., Eastern Kentucky University);
- Criminal Justice Administration (e.g., Loyola University New Orleans);
- Criminal Justice Studies (e.g., Florida State University);
- Criminology, Law and Society (UC Irvine)
- IT Management — Information Security/Assurance and Digital Forensics (e.g., Trident University);
- International Security and Intelligence Studies (e.g., Bellevue University, Nebraska);
- Justice Administration and Crime Management (e.g., Bellevue University, Nebraska);
- Law Enforcement Administrative Development (e.g., Alliant International University's Center for Forensic Studies); and
- Public Safety (e.g., Capella University).

There are also MBA, MPA and related degrees with a specialization in criminal justice:

- MBA Justice Studies (e.g., Southern New Hampshire University).
- MPA Criminal Justice (e.g., Walden University).
- MPA/MS in Public Safety (e.g., Capella University).
- Psychology — Criminology and Justice Studies (e.g., University of the Rockies).

s. Have other universities created specializations within their master's in justice studies programs?

A number of universities offer areas of specializations within their justice-related master's degree programs. Specializations range from administration and emergency planning to behavior analysis, forensic science and homeland security.

Most specializations add nine or more credits to core curricula. For more detail see Attachment B.

t. What is the general format and length of time for other master's in justice studies programs?

Most online master's degrees identified by KIR are completely online with no on-campus components. A few require up to a week in residence (designed to connect students with faculty, other students and the university), or offer blended programs.

Many universities have flexible admissions with more than one start date for entry. Required completion ranges from one to five years with the typical range being within 15 to 24 months. A few universities offer a “cohort” format where students enter and progress through a set series of classes as part of a team of students.

A number of universities require capstone projects or comprehensive testing before satisfactory completion of the program.

u. What does it cost to obtain this degree from other universities?

Tuition to complete a master’s degree related to justice studies ranges from about \$10,000 to \$25,000, with some universities’ tuition reaching upwards of \$35,000 (e.g., University of Northern Colorado and Florida State University’s non-resident tuition).

One university advertises “in-state tuition for all applicants regardless of residency.”

v. Based on enrollment, have other universities been successful in launching online master’s in justice studies programs?

For those institutions reporting enrollment size for their online master’s programs, justice studies enrollment ranged from a low of six to ten students (newly launched program at University of Colorado, Denver) to a high of about 400 students (University of Cincinnati).

w. Do other master’s degrees compete with a master’s in justice studies?

Yes, especially management degrees.

Again based on preliminary research regarding police departments for the City of Los Angeles and the City of San José, most who have a master’s degree obtained a:

- Master’s in Public Administration (MPA);
- Master’s in Business Administration (MBA); or
- Related master’s degree in a field such as Leadership or Management.

Beyond these fields, advanced degrees ranged from Social Work to Education. Our interviews indicated that a master’s degree from another field might be equally respected for a working criminal justice professional.

x. What region would primarily feed a SJSU online master’s program in justice studies?

Depending upon the program, most of SJSU’s online master’s students would come from Northern California. Some might also come from neighboring regions, including Southern California. Students from across the United States and from other countries would probably comprise the smallest segment.

Evidence for this conclusion is based on:

- The history, number of graduates and reputation of SJSU bachelor's program in criminal justice within the Bay Area;
- KIR's data on where high-ranking officers within the LAPD and San José Police Department received their master's degrees (80 percent from within their local metro areas, although many of these might have been obtained before online programs were available);
- Interviews with universities offering online master's in justice studies (although some students come from throughout the country or the world, most enroll from the immediate region);
- The current lack of other public university online master's programs in justice studies in Northern California and limited number on the West Coast.

y. What might distinguish the SJSU online master's program from the competition?

If SJSU sought to compete with online master's degrees from leading justice studies programs such as Boston University, UC Irvine, University of Maryland and Arizona State University, plus the many strong regional programs throughout the country, it might not be successful. A SJSU online master's program that predominately draws working professionals from California (especially Northern California) would have greater chances for success.

- The history, number of graduates and reputation of SJSU bachelor's program in criminal justice program within the Bay Area;
- Perceived quality of this public institution within the region (taking advantage of negative developments concerning for-profit institutions);
- An accelerated program;
- Reasonable cost;
- Acceptance standards that included quality of work experience; and
- Connections with Bay Area law enforcement agencies, not-for-profit organizations and other institutions.

SJSU would need to invest in marketing the online master's program. One marketing advantage in Northern California market is that many justice professionals will already know SJSU and be familiar with its tradition in justice studies.

The University might expect awareness of SJSU and its justice studies program to be much lower outside of California. The University would need to market SJSU as an institution as well as the new program if it chose to strongly compete for students across the country. Such an effort could be very expensive with limited returns, at least when first starting the program.

z. Are there opportunities to consult with Northern California justice agencies when designing the program?

Success of a SJSU online master's program in justice studies might depend on primary research with target audiences and further exploration of the specific needs for advanced education for professionals within Northern California justice agencies. This research was not a part of KIR's preliminary assessment.

Keen Independent Research strongly recommends that any future SJSU steps toward program development include wide discussions with leadership across many types of Northern California justice organizations, including large and small police departments, corrections agencies, courts, not-for-profit organizations and other agencies. The success of a SJSU online master's degree will only come if it meets the needs of professionals seeking further career opportunities within this marketplace.

Ingredients for Program Success

Keen Independent Research identified many institutions throughout the country offering an online master's degree in the justice studies field. And, the number of programs appears to be growing. From our initial review of current programs, it is likely that some will not meet enrollment goals and must be re-launched or discontinued.

How could a potential SJSU program stand out as a success?

1. SJSU must know its potential students, and work with that market and their employers to develop a program that is meaningful for Northern California.

The SJSU program should not rely on any one police department or other agency for its students, but it should collaborate with Northern California law enforcement, corrections, courts and not-for-profit agencies so that it meets the unique needs of local professionals and agencies. Issues and effective responses may differ in Northern California from other parts of the nation. An online program that does not connect with the needs of these working professionals will not be successful.

Competition from Master's in Public Administration and MBA programs (often online) is a factor affecting the potential success of an online SJSU master's degree in justice studies. SJSU would need to develop a master's in justice studies program that better meets the needs of current and future justice professionals than MPA or MBA programs. SJSU would then need to articulate this difference to the market.

2. Do not focus on head-to-head competition with top-tier programs.

The SJSU master's program will include students who may wish to continue with a Ph.D. and eventually have an academic career. Most students, however, will be seeking to start or advance their careers within California justice agencies. SJSU should not ignore the students with aspirations for academia, but recognize that these students will not comprise its core market. Developing a master's program that focuses on these types of students would place SJSU in direct competition with leading national programs that also offer Ph.D. degrees in this field. SJSU might have limited success, and miss the real opportunity to serve students who will be working in justice agencies.

3. Provide as much flexibility in the program for potential students as possible, while maintaining the quality of the education.

For the very reasons that an online program better fits the needs of justice professionals than an on-campus master's program, a successful online program must retain flexibility to accommodate the lives of its students. SJSU should anticipate that many of its master's program students may not be able to complete required coursework in the same sequence, with the same cohort, from start to finish.

4. Tuition must be competitive.

Few master's program students will receive employer reimbursement for a significant portion of their tuition. Cost will be a factor in choosing a program. Tuition for competing online master's degrees is typically in the range of \$10,000 to \$25,000.

5. Invest in marketing the program, with most of the resources going to the local market.

The program will only be successful if SJSU develops an effective marketing plan and allocates financial and other resources necessary to implement that plan.

Competition is particularly aggressive from universities with well-funded online or distance learning programs, especially for-profit universities. A well-designed website for the online program will necessary, but alone it will not be enough to effectively market an SJSU program.⁶

6. Anticipate that the program will need to adapt to over time.

If the launch of the online master's program is successful, enrollment may grow to the point where SJSU can offer more electives within the program, and perhaps degree specializations. In this field, topics for specializations are continually evolving (homeland security may have peaked; interest in areas such as victim assistance and juvenile offenders may be growing). SJSU might plan for specialization within the program if it reaches a critical size.

Conclusions

Preliminary evaluation of a SJSU online master's program in justice studies indicates potential for success. However, a number of factors unique to the justice field limit demand for an advanced degree. There are also many universities with similar online master's degree programs.

To be successful, SJSU must closely match its proposed program with the needs of working professionals and institutions within the region. SJSU will also need to devote considerable marketing resources to launch the program.

⁶ Northeastern University provides an example of an effective website for an online master's program in justice studies. http://cps.neu.edu/degree-programs/graduate/masters-degrees/masters-criminal-justice-leadership.php/?/cj_leadership