Dear Alumni, Students, and Friends,

I hope you are well. Welcome to this edition of our Rap Sheet! The Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock is driven by four main values: student success, departmental citizenship, scholarly creativity, and justice. In light of these values, let me share some highlights from our academic year.

First, student success is our number 1 priority. This year, we nominated Matthew Head for the prestigious Whitebeck Memorial Award to honor his academic abilities and integrity. In research, our doctoral students are making their mark. For example, Rocio Roles and Hyounjong Kwak, won 1st place in their presentation at the CSSC Research Symposium; Kristen Sobba and Brenda Brenham won 1st place for their poster. Most graduate students also traveled to present their work at the meetings of the American Society of Criminology (ASC) and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS). More importantly, we are getting our students to graduation. This year, over 100 undergraduate students are graduating with a degree. At the doctoral level, Dr. Brittani McNeil and Dr. Rick Dierenfeldt defended their dissertation successfully. Both also earned tenure-track Assistant Professor positions at strong universities. We are simply proud of our students and their success.

Second, we value departmental citizenship. We had three retreats to come together as a group and to create a positive culture in the department. In August, we met at the Arkansas Chamber of Commerce to think of our future and to identify our core values and mission. In February, we stayed off campus for two days to work on our governance documents and to bond. In April, we met at the Center for Arkansas History and Culture to continue our work. We also hired two new tenure-track Assistant Professors who will join the Department in Fall 2016: Dr. Robert Lytle from Eastern Carolina University and Mary Smith from Sam Houston State University. We are excited to grow as a department.

Third, we want to push the boundaries of research and scholarly creativity. Dr. Timothy Brown, for example, conducted interviews with gang members to understand the nature of their experiences. Similarly, Dr. Tusty ten Bensel was awarded $50,000 from UALR to explore the effects of neighborhood characteristics on parole outcome. We also have a team of interdisciplinary scholars from Criminal Justice and Speech Communication, partnered with the Little Rock Police Department, to reduce police officers' use of force.

The Department of Criminal Justice at UALR is the place to be to conduct innovative research. As Interim Chair of the Department, this past year has been a wonderful adventure. I am incredibly grateful for my colleagues in the department and for the many students who work hard every day to earn a meaningful degree. As the academic year comes to end, the Department will transition to a new Interim Chair. I am excited to let you know that Dr. Mary Parker will lead the department again starting on July 1st 2016. With her leadership, the Department will only get stronger and better. On my side, I'll look forward to serving as Interim Associate Dean for the College of Social Sciences and Communication. In the meantime, I wish you a wonderful summer. I hope you will make contact with us and help us to create a great department that strives on student success, citizenship, creativity, and justice.

Warmest Regards.

Dr. Julien Mirivel
The environment in which people live can impact them in significant, long-lasting ways, from mental state to criminal behavior, and one team of UALR researchers is seeking a deeper understanding of these effects. For the next two years, Dr. Tusty ten Bensel, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, and Dr. Michael Craw, Assistant Professor of Public Administration, will pursue their project “The Impact of Neighborhood Context on Recidivism among Offenders in Arkansas,” supported by one of ORSP’s fall 2015 Research Cluster Seed Grants.

The researchers will be investigating the role environmental factors play in recidivism—repeat offending—in Pulaski County. The $50,000 grant will enable them to analyze data about both the former inmates and the communities that house them. The project will examine a myriad of statistical factors for the neighborhoods, as well as the basic demographics, prison behavior, and past charges, of released offenders. This information will be gathered from preexisting data, obtained by the Arkansas Department of Corrections and the 2008-14 American Community Survey, on individuals released over the last ten years in Pulaski County.

While the connection between environmental factors and initial offending has been established by research, as has the likelihood for offenders to offend again, little research has been done to draw a direct line between environmental factors and recidivism. Dr. ten Bensel and Dr. Craw’s work aims to fill this knowledge gap. After analyzing the data, they will develop theories on any connections between recidivism and living environments.

The researchers explained the potential negative impact of a neighborhood on its residents in their grant proposal: “socially isolated and economically impoverished neighborhoods have high rates of crime and disorder, unemployment, poor healthcare access among residents, heightened levels of mortality, sporadic to non-existent access to social services, [and] high rates of drug addiction and incarceration.” Perhaps most importantly, these disadvantaged neighborhoods often lack social capital—the positive, productive relationship and support networks that bind and grow communities.

Not only do these environments tend to produce offenders, but many ex-offenders return there upon release, giving them ample opportunities to offend again. The reasons for returning are multifold: according to Dr. ten Bensel, “for these individuals, it is a matter of being close to family and friends, finding employment, housing, and simply living affordability.”

Unfortunately, the researchers assert, returning to toxic neighborhoods “limits educational, vocational, and social support services” for released offenders. Additionally, Dr. ten Bensel explains that “when individuals return to the same environment in which they initially committed their crimes, it is likely they will be confronted with similar criminal opportunities and peer networks.” It’s not surprising, then, that around half of all released Arkansas inmates will eventually end up back in prison.

In the face of these statistics, Dr. ten Bensel is optimistic about the potential of the project. “If we find that neighborhood characteristics and lack of resources are one of the reasons why individuals return to prison in Pulaski County, then I hope this project can begin conversations about investing resources and revitalizing our disadvantaged communities.”

The results will produce both academic and practical benefits for the criminal justice field. Dr. ten Bensel and Dr. Craw hope to publish concrete recommendations for building communities that foster offender rehabilitation rather than perpetuate criminality. Promoting growth in disadvantaged neighborhoods would be transformative for both released offenders and non-criminals alike, Dr. ten Bensel asserts. “This may not only increase public safety and reduce recidivism rates and disorder, but also reduce fear of crime in those neighborhoods, which can lead to informal social control and social capital.”
Dr. Timothy C. Brown is a research consultant on a grant-funded project that is examining gangs in a rural setting in Mississippi. The research is funded by a Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Planning Grant and addresses the escalating gang violence and crime in neighborhood hotspots within an impoverished, rural city along the Mississippi Delta. While there has been an extensive history of research into gangs and gang culture in the United States, this literature primarily focuses on gangs within urban environments. The current research helps to fill the gap on rural gang life through in-depth interviews focusing on the life histories of gang members in a rural Southern community that not only has had extensive gang activity, but also suffers from various socio-economic conditions conducive to criminal activity. This provides Dr. Brown and his colleagues the unique opportunity to examine not only the contrasts between rural and urban gangs but also rural crime in general, another frequently under researched topic within the criminological cannon.

Dr. Brown is the primary qualitative interviewer on the project. He co-ordinates and administers face-to-face interviews with offenders incarcerated in county jails who have gang experience. These interviews concentrate on several different aspects of gang involvement including the experiences, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes related to life as a resident in the community and as a gang member, as well as on the gang itself, both as an organizational structure and the role of social capital within that structure. Furthermore, the entirety of the life course of gang members is examined from initiation to exiting the gang. Currently, 21 gang members have been interviewed for the project. While data analysis is currently on going, the researchers on the project are excited about several themes that are emerging from the interviews spanning from the unique role of community structure on rural gang formation to the role of status frustration and organizational disillusionment to gang exit.

Along with face-to-face interviews with gang members, the research project has several other facets. Since October 2014, more than 150 community surveys have been administered to community members along with extensive interviews with community and political stakeholders. The research seeks to add to the criminological cannon in its examination of rural gangs, an understudied population and topic, and the qualitative and exploratory nature of the study gives an advantage in theoretical construction of a relatively emergent area of research. From an applied standpoint, this research hopes to aid practitioners and community leaders with their creation of programs and policy implications targeting the determined causes and correlates of rural gangs and crime through focusing on both macro- and micro-level factors and occurrences of 1) gang membership (both entry and exit) 2) gang emergence, spread, and continued existence 3) individual and community (e.g., residents, legal actors) effects of gangs.

Dr. Brown plans to present and has already presented preliminary findings from this research at the American Society of Criminology, the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, and the Southern Criminal Justice Association. In addition, he anticipates the research will lead to the production of several manuscripts for submission to peer-reviewed journals as well as aid in a currently in-progress book manuscript that Dr. Brown is co-authoring on the emergence and evolution of rural gangs. On May 1st Dr. Brown was awarded the College of Social Sciences and Communication Research and Creative Activity Award, an internal competitive research grant to aid in the continuation of his current research on rural gangs.
Dr. Rick Dierenfeldt recently defended his dissertation entitled, “Disentangling the Effects of Violent Subculture and Structure: A Multilevel Analysis of Race-Specific Violence in Urban US Counties.” His Committee consisted of Dr. Jim Golden, Dr. Shaun Thomas, Dr. Tim Brown, and Dr. Jeff Walker. We sat down to talk to him about his accomplishments, UALR, and his future.

Why UALR?

I was your typical first generation college student then subsequent college drop out. I did great through high school, it’s not that I performed or under performed in my first go round in higher education. A lot of that came down to not knowing what I wanted to do. My father was a police officer my entire life. By the time I got around to my second year in undergraduate, I didn’t have a clear purpose, so I decided to drop out and become a police officer and remain in the field for more than ten years. As I started to have that experience in the field, I started to notice a lot the problem and difficulties that my father had discussed with me as I was growing up. I felt it best for me to go back to school after I had been in the field for about six years. I went back to finish an associate degrees to get a little more educational experience and go with the practitioner side of things. It was during my first year of my associate program that I met some very influential professors who have become lifelong mentors.

I was filling out my doctoral program applications, I had never heard of UALR and was not aware that they had a doctoral program. It was actually one of my undergraduate professors that made me aware of it. So I went ahead and applied. It was geographically close to where I resided in Missouri, which was ideal for my family situation. I was fortunate enough to be accepted into several programs with funded offers. Actually some of them offered more in their financial package than UALR, but it was during my campus visit here, having the opportunity to meet the faculty and the students that made it a no contest.

How did you feel when you were offered a tenure-track position?

A whole range of emotions. I think I actually dropped down to my knees and thought finally the ride is over. Coming back as a non-traditional student, I understand a lot of the difficulties that students experience. You are caught between going to school, still working two or three jobs, and trying to provide for the people who depend on you. Those obligations don’t stop while you are in the program and no matter how much you’ve prepared yourself, no matter how hard you’ve worked, when the job market comes, you are almost paralyzed by fear that you’ve done all of this for nothing. All of this sacrifice. All of this time. So when I got the phone call from the Director of Academic affairs at Penn State Wilkes-Barre… I just started laughing. I mean this huge weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I had this immediate sense of relief, but quickly thereafter you say hey I’ve done what it took to get through a doctoral program, now I have to do what it takes to be a successful faculty member to get tenure.

Originally from Kansas City, so it’ll be a big change. The area is something I always wanted though. Especially, the surrounding area of the campus, Pocono Mountains, and the pines that are 50 ft. tall. You have streams, waterfalls, and it’s two hours from NYC, two hours from Philadelphia. So you get all that exposure,
culture, and history and some pretty awesome cave systems. I’m a closet caver. I’m a nerd. The kinds of things that I wanted to be able to do frequently that I never had time to do. So, I’m fresh out of excuses for not being able to do those things.

How did your experience at UALR prepare you to go after the professor position?

The unique thing about a doctoral program is it’s not like an undergraduate, and to some degree, it’s not like a master’s program, where you do you coursework and everybody gets the same thing. A doctoral program is very much what you make it. You get out of it what you put in, so expect to get out if what you put in to it. You’ll get the foundational knowledge that what you need. I had some terrific opportunities especially my first two years here. Not just to take away valuable information from coursework, but to work with professors who improved my writing ability and my ability to publish. Faculty who were willing to work with me and teach me things that I didn’t necessarily get out my coursework. Obviously, that’s a greater investment in time, but you do that with the knowledge that you’ll be able to draw from that investment at the end of this. So those extra experiences above and beyond the coursework helped me prepare for and meet my goals coming out of the program. The goal of this is not to earn a Ph.D. because everybody from every program across this country is going to have the same degree. The goal of this is to have a marketable Ph.D. and to secure a tenure track position whenever you leave. It was those extra experiences outside of class that made the difference for me.

Where do you see yourself in 15 years?

In 15 years, I expect to be pushing 50. It’s terrible to say that out loud. Academically or career wise at that point a tenure full professor. I think as you start to hit that stage of your life in your career, you’re able to reflect on what you’ve been able to do with the tools and opportunities you had. How much positive meaningful change were you able to effect? Not just in term of research and policy, but with the students you interact on a daily basis. How many lives where you able to change for the better? Where are you students at now? Did they come out and successfully find employment? That is what this should be about. That is an awesome thing to look back and see that your students were able to go above and beyond what you were able to do and that you had some influence in pushing them in that direction. That is how our field continues to be progressive. That is how we avoid stagnation. That is how remain relevant to social policy. That is how remain relevant to higher education. That is how we improve the state of things in the field whether it’s policing, corrections, probation, parole, or juvenile justice.

Anything else you’d like to share?

It’s not too late. It’s never too late. Particularly this stage of the game. The barriers before you are ones you’ve allowed to remain there or you’ve put there yourself. With the doctorate program, you’re going to get out of it what you put in. If you’re sacrificing time and putting away things that you much rather be doing, for the sake of your education, that is an investment in the future, and it’s a short-term investment for long term gain. It’s not about more money, it’s about having time because you can kill yourself in the field working long hours for low pay. You can do something for yourself, and for many nontraditional students, your children. To make sure they have opportunities that you didn’t have. So they won’t struggle the way you did. They get choices. Those choices are much less confined. The opportunities are greater. I’m an example of that. My kids will be able to go to any Penn State campus for 25% of the cost. They’ll have exposure to things that I never dreamed of growing up.
What is your academic background and what attracted you to UALR?

Originally, I came from Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. I have a bachelor’s and masters’ in criminal justice. What really attracted me to UALR’s program was the previous chair in the department. I actually didn’t want to do a PhD program. I wanted to pursue my career in track. Once I got hurt I just was like ok, I’m going to get a regular job. My professor at Bowling Green said I had really good writing skills and she thought I should think about getting a PhD. I didn’t know where to go and it was the end of the season to actually apply for fall semester. I talked to someone down here and I felt like Arkansas was ok. I’ve never been there. Why not? So that’s how I ended in this program.

Where are you originally from?

I’m originally from Chicago. I left Chicago on a full ride for track and I went to Bowling Green to run track there. Once I got hurt, of course, I got into my academic career and I ended up in Arkansas. So I’ve been kind all over the place trying to, not so much find my way, but to get the opportunity to travel.

How did you feel about receiving a faculty position?

Ahh, it was so funny because I applied for this position in Georgia and year before that I bought a house in west Georgia. So it just so happened that the University of West Georgia was hiring, so I applied for the position. I was nervous out my mind because it was my very first interview. I went there and got the position. I was shocked! I was happy at the same time because you rarely hear people apply for a job and get the job they want in a place they already live. So it kind of worked out to where I’m still in shock. I probably won’t feel it until I go to Georgia, but it’s awesome to know I have a job before I graduate.

How did your experiences at UALR prepare you to go after this position?

My experience here has been awesome. Awesome in a sense that a lot of individuals don’t think you actually get that real world experience going into a program that focuses on teaching and research. So teaming up with Dr. Parker, I’ve been able to work in the Department of Corrections as a research analyst. I’ve also been able to put on trainings for victim advocates across the state of Arkansas. I’ve been able to do program evaluations for juvenile programs in five different counties in the state of Arkansas. So having that background and having those connections have allowed me to go to interviews and say hey, this is what I can bring to the table. I can make connections outside the department. I can also have a connection with the Department of Corrections in Georgia, which I don’t know how plausible that will be to get my foot in the door there will be, but having my foot in the door in Arkansas might actually help because the systems are kind of similar in the south. I just want to be...
able to bring the same kind of thing I actually got here and bring it to students back in Georgia.

**Where do you see yourself in 15 years?**

Whew! 15 years, I’ll be super old by then. So with a bunch of grays. (smiles) I’ll most likely be in the same place. I really like the department that I’m going to. I want to be able to grow there, and mature, and help other students to mature and go off to different places. I see myself as a really successful researcher, along with being a successful professor, but I want to focus on keeping my balance. Because what I do now, a lot of people can’t say they actually have the time to do stuff outside of research and teaching. I want to be able to keep my active lifestyle because I love to work out still. And I love teaching. I love doing all the papers. I want to be able to put myself up in the margin to where I’m both mentally, and physically healthy, but also I’m successful doing research and being a professor.

**How do you think your time at UALR will prepare you to meet those goals?**

Believe it or not these last four years have flew by so fast I feel like it’s kind of a blur, but my time here has prepared me in a way that I can handle the stress of doing research, teaching, preparing students for the next level in class. It’s kind of interesting to just look back and see that my time here has flown by, but I’ve also grown as a person in a way that I never knew I could actually grow. All the professors here have helped me to develop some sort of sense to me that you can do it. They are always here to motivate me. Even when I’m walking down the hall and I’m like I can’t do this. Why am I doing this? Being here at UALR was a great experience and it’s only going to continue to help me as a move off in to my future endeavors.

**Any other advice you’d like to give PhD students or students in general?**

The advice I would give to anybody is just to stick with it. No matter how you are feeling. If you have that determination. If you have that drive. If you’re willing to work hard. If you are willing to put in the hours. Stick with it. It’ll get you to places you never thought. I never thought I’d be able to get a job. I never thought I’d be this young with a PhD. Just having that motivation and constantly telling yourself, I can do it. I’m going to do this, and stick with it. I think anybody, well, almost anybody can get a PhD.
Kristen Sobba & Brenda Branham
Criminal Justice Ph.D. Candidates

Title: Maternal Incarceration Penalty: An Examination of the Effect of Maternal Conviction and Incarceration on Childhood Delinquency

Abstract: Research suggests that incarceration has adverse consequences, not only for individuals, but also for the development of their children. While literature addresses the influence of parental incarceration on juveniles’ delinquent tendencies, less is known about differences in behavioral outcomes for children whose mothers were incarcerated compared to those who were convicted but not incarcerated. This study examines variation in delinquent outcomes of children whose mothers were convicted and incarcerated, convicted but not incarcerated, and never convicted. Specifically, we address how childhood personality traits, maternal conviction/incarceration, and demographic characteristics influence delinquency using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study.

Kristen’s Part: My co-author and I were asked to discuss our study by judges. We did a summary of our study and asked the judges if they had any questions. All of the judges were receptive to our research and seemed to take a real interest in our study. We were proud of our work and placed second in the Professional Studies category. Overall, this was a successful research expo.
Erin Pavioni, Criminal Justice Ph.D. Candidate

**Title**: Identity Crisis: An Analysis of Conflict Management Among Prison Inmates Using Face Negotiation Theory

**Abstract**: On a daily basis, prisoners face many challenging and conflicting situations caused by the anxiety and fear of inmate-on-inmate brutality. This research examines the extent to which a small, racially diverse group of inmates would attempt to communicatively save face with each other during difficult situations. Prisoners were asked a series of vignettes designed to illicit their idea of ethical or unethical behavior through means of conflict management, with the findings thematically analyzed using face negotiation theory. How each inmate answered each scenario also determined which of two cultures he represented himself to be: collectivistic or individualistic. To date, no other study has utilized face negotiation theory to study conflict management among inmates. The aim of this study was to understand which style of face negotiation theory inmates prefer when presented with a potential dilemma: avoidance, obligation, compromisation, domination, or integration.

**Erin’s part**: I engaged with students, faculty, and judges in discussing my research, findings, and limitations. Each person I spoke with asked many interesting questions and offered a lot of helpful feedback. Overall, the experience was very rewarding in the presenting of qualitative research and acquiring growth as a student engaging in scholarly learning.
Rocio Roles, Criminal Justice Ph.D. Candidate

**Title:** The Relationship Between Low Self-control, Risky Lifestyles, and Victimization: An Analysis of South Korean Youth

**Authors:** Rocio Roles, Criminal Justice and Hyounggon Kwak, Criminal Justice

**Mentor(s):** Tussey ten Bensel

**Abstract:** Although a great deal research has been conducted on risk of victimization, most studies have focused on situational frameworks, often overlooking the influence of individual traits. Relying on the “Study on Child Delinquency” which was conducted by the Korean Institute of Criminology (KIC) in 2009, the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between low self-control, risky behaviors, and victimization. Specifically, this study explores whether risky lifestyles have a mediating effect on low self-control and crime victimization. By providing a better understanding of the individual and situational settings associated with victimization, it is intended that findings of this study will provide useful implications for policy and practice.

**Rocio’s Thoughts:** It was a pleasure to get the opportunity to talk to a number of people, professors and students alike, about the research that my peer Kwak and I are conducting. We received positive feedback and we placed 1st in our category - Professional Studies.
PUBLICATIONS


Dierenfeldt, Rick, Timothy Brown, and Rocio Roles. 2015 “Re-considering the structural covariates of gun crime: An examination of direct and moderated effects.” Deviant Behavior.


PRESENTATIONS

Baldwin, Julie, Timothy Brown, and Marc Glidden. “Experiences in gang research.” Roundtable at the Annual meeting of the Southern Criminal Justice Association, Charleston, SC; September 2015


Gass, W. NASW Arkansas; Southern Region Fall Conference. “Recognizing Stalking among the ‘Me’ Generation.”


Sobba, Kristen N. Fear of School Victimization: An assessment of demographic characteristics, prior victimization, and school involvement. Poster Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology. Washington D.C.

