

17 May 2025

Proposed Merger of Criminal Justice and Sociology: A Response by Michael Welch, Professor

In consultation with my colleagues and staff, I have received multiple complaints over the (forced) merger involving Criminal Justice and Sociology. This brief report sets out to document many of the unresolved issues – as well as problems that lay ahead.

By way of introduction, I was recruited by Rutgers in 1993 to serve as an Associate Professor for the Administration of Justice (AOJ) in the School of Social Work. AOJ was later transferred to the Faculty of Arts & Sciences (FAS) and rebranded as Criminal Justice.

My previous post was in the Sociology Department at St. John's University (New York City) where I was (an early) tenured Associate Professor (between 1987 to 1993). Compared to other members of the CJ Program, I hold graduate degrees in Sociology (Ph.D.), Criminal Justice Sciences (M.S.), and Counseling Psychology (M.A.). I maintain an active research and publishing agenda, mostly overseas at the London School of Economics and the University of Sydney. I identify as a Sociologist as well as a Criminologist and tend to view academics through both lenses, thus my perspective on a merger between Criminal Justice and Sociology is uniquely informed (see attached Vita).

Throughout discussions over a merger, there persists a glaring omission. It fails to recognize that Criminal Justice is a discipline distinct from Sociology. Students can earn a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice (such as the one in place at Rutgers, NB) as well as a Master's and Ph.D. (e.g., Rutgers, Newark). When I was hired, it was my responsibility to keep AOJ/CJ separate from Social Work and later Sociology. A merger injects conflict and confusion, which is why CJ always had a core faculty separate from members of the CJ Program. Initially, the core faculty -- free-standing, not members of an academic department -- consisted of three full-time (tenured) Professors that decreased to two members in 2008 (with the death of Professor Albert Roberts) and down to one member in 2016 (with the retirement of Professor Lennox Hinds).

To date, I serve as the only core faculty in a major that has more than 600 students. By design, my responsibility has always been within the core and only peripherally to the CJ Program, consisting of faculty who are not primarily criminologists but teach CJ on a part-time basis. This imbalance marks a serious departure from a commitment to CJ education by which students are deprived regular contact from full-time faculty whose primary specialization is CJ. To correct this deficit, I have on several occasions recommended that Drs. Christopher Chukwuedo and Sheryl Van Horne be promoted from NTT status to a TT line as Assistant Professors. Together, the three of us would comprise a core faculty comparable to the level prior to 2008, thereby offering students greater involvement with faculty who are primarily criminologists. Moreover, their TT status would also promote much needed diversity.

The proposed merger, from its onset, was planned in bad faith and without proper transparency. In fact, much of the recent maneuvering has been conducted while I was on sabbatical at the University of Sydney. The main actors are not criminologists, and even the so-called "Deputy

Director of Strategic Planning” (Alec Walen) is neither a Social or Behavioral Scientist (and is based in the Law School at Rutgers, Camden).

The proposed merger suffers from the absence of a proper assessment and evaluation of CJ. The strengths of CJ are conveniently overlooked. Again, CJ has more than 600 majors. It has one core faculty member. And, more importantly, the administrative responsibilities are absorbed by two staff members, namely Sarah Laboy-Almodovar and Meagan Guss who greatly over-perform their duties, and do so with professionalism and grace. Yet, their input into a merger has been consistently dismissed as irrelevant.

Debate over a merger often includes references to a “dysfunction” within the CJ Program and its difficulty in retaining membership. True, the following TT faculty members have vacated the CJ Program, or plan to do so:

- 1) Profesor Anne Piehl (Economics)
- 2) Professor Lisa Miller (Political Science)
- 3) Dr. Amanda Agan (Economics)
- 4) Dr. Hannah Walker (Political Science)
- 5) Dr. Brittany Friedman (Sociology)
- 6) Dr. Nina Siulc (Anthropology)

By my count, they are all women (including a woman of color). My Union Representative and I have brought this matter to the attention of Old Queens. And in doing so, we have idenfied a persistent “dysfunction” – bullying. Alec Walen is central to the problem of bullying, and several PTL faculty also have shared their demeaning experiences with me. I, too, have been bullied by Walen since 2017 (e.g., cancelling my courses, violating my privacy for a medical accommodation, and falsifying my post-tenure review). The CJ faculty meeting (3 March 2025) exhibits the latest round of bullying by Walen as he insisted that NTT’s were (somehow) ineligible to vote. I suggest you review the thread of email circulated among CJ Program members to gain further insight into that particular episode of aggression.

As a remedy, I respectfully recommend the following steps of constructive action. First, place the proposed merger on hold for one academic year (Fall 2025, Spring 2026). Second, honor the election of Dr. Sebastian Leon as Director of the CJ Program. Third, keep CJ faculty and staff housed in their current location in Lucy Stone Hall (Livingston Campus), so that we can continue to serve students without interruption. A two-semester “cooling off” period should provide full-time CJ faculty (and staff) an opportunity to administer our own planning and evaluation, especially since the initial proposal was conducted without sufficient transparency.

Thank you for taking time to consider these thoughts.

