

A FACULTY ACHIEVEMENT PORTFOLIO

Finding and “Raising” My Voice

by

TARA GRAY



**Submitted in support of my application
for
tenure and promotion to associate professor
in
The Department of Criminal Justice
New Mexico State University**

September 1998

TARA GRAY

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS



NMSU,
1993-Present

RESEARCH

- At NMSU, I have 16 publications, including:
 - eight journal articles (two forthcoming; one more under review)
 - two edited books (one forthcoming)
 - two book chapters (one forthcoming)
 - two reprints of book chapters (one forthcoming)
 - two book reviews
- My key research areas are:
 - Prisons
 - Faculty Development

TEACHING

- At NMSU, I won two teaching awards.
- My teaching responsibilities range from introductory courses to graduate seminars, and include policy, administration, correctional institutions, and race and criminal justice.
- As a teacher, I strive to involve students heavily in classes, and do “whatever it takes” to hold them to high standards.

SERVICE

- In 1998, I received the university-wide service award.
- My key service areas include faculty development and faculty advisor to the criminal justice honor society, !ME, both locally and nationally.

A Faculty Achievement Portfolio

Tara Gray

I am an economist by training and I became a criminologist by choice. Becoming a criminologist is an unusual career move for an economist, but I want to study and teach about prisons in a broader context than the economics of prisons. As a result, I changed disciplines and moved from a small liberal arts school to a large research institution. I found myself teaching a discipline in which I was self-taught and facing classes that were far bigger than before, as well as research expectations that had doubled. To me, the changes were worth it because I wanted to study and teach what I love, and, strange as it may seem, prisons are my passion.

I have also developed a secondary research interest in faculty development, another unusual choice. Like most faculty, I spend most of my time on teaching and research and I have struggled a lot with both. As a new faculty, I worked tirelessly to succeed and I “worked till it hurt,” but without much success. Somewhere along the way, I decided that being a faculty member “shouldn’t hurt this bad.” Instead of bemoaning the unavailability of formal or even on-the-job training for faculty, I asked myself, “If not me, who?” “If not now, when?” I vowed to devote some of my effort as a researcher to try to make it different for others. Therefore, I began researching the process of both teaching and research, which drew me into faculty development as my secondary area of research.

I have also taught and performed service for the last five years in the Department of Criminal Justice at New Mexico State University. Our department has 450 undergraduate majors and 50 masters students. I have taught students ranging from introductory students to graduate students, with topics including policy, administration, correctional institutions, and race and

criminal justice. I have used my research on faculty development to become active as a faculty developer on campus; in that capacity, I have directed three semester-long faculty development programs, with a total of over 100 participants (our campus has 850 faculty). Finally, I have served as the advisor to a very active chapter of the criminal justice honor society. I have long seen that my role as a teacher is to help students “find their voices” so they can raise them effectively. Now I see that I have been trying to teach myself these very same skills; indeed, we teach what we most want to know. In this portfolio, I will discuss my efforts to find my voice as a scholar, teacher, faculty developer, and faculty advisor to a student group.

RESEARCH

Finding My Voice

Prisons Are My Passion

Most of my research is focused on corrections, and especially prisons, my driving research interest. My dissertation and first publications were based on a cost-benefit analysis of prison, jail and probation. Attached, please find the most recent publication from this research, "Using Cost-Benefit Analysis to Measure Rehabilitation and Special Deterrence." Although rehabilitation and special deterrence affect offenders differently, both should reduce the criminal activity of offenders following intervention, which means that one measure can be used to estimate both. The measure should compare the number of crimes committed before and after intervention, as well as the seriousness, or cost, of the crimes. This paper discusses my work with cost-benefit analysis to develop a measure for rehabilitation and special deterrence (Sample #1, *Journal of Criminal Justice* 1994).

"Inmate Needs and Programming in Women's Jails" points out that most women in jail serve time in facilities that also house men; however, there are eighteen American jails that house women only, and this study is based on surveys and interviews administered at five of these jails. This article explores the extent to which women's jails meet the needs of inmates who want to further their education and training, maintain and deepen bonds with their children, and overcome addictions to drugs and alcohol as well as histories of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. The findings suggest that, when it comes to meeting most of these needs, the programming in women's jails fails miserably (Sample #2, *The Prison Journal*, 1995).

"Prison Administration: Inmate Participation Versus the Control Model" compares the administrative models of Tom Murton in Arkansas and George Beto in Texas. It observes that we have tried to manage prisons with more and more controlling models and higher security units, but to no avail. It suggests that it may be time to turn our attention to less controlling and more participatory models of prison administration (Sample #3, *Correctional Contexts: Contemporary and Classical Readings*, edited by James Marquart and Jonathon Sorenson, Roxbury Press, 1996; this chapter will be reprinted twice, as indicated in my resume).

"Expanding Prison Industries Through Privatization" focuses on another problem that correctional administrators face: balancing the principle of lesser eligibility against the potential benefits of prison industries, including reducing prison costs, inmate idleness, and recidivism. This paper suggests that, although both are important, the benefits of prison industries outweigh the costs so prison industries should be expanded. This chapter is part of a book that I edited with G. Larry Mays, which has been well reviewed:

Given the inevitability of the private sector's growing involvement in American corrections, however, it is important. . . to make sure that the relevant issues are clearly presented and the right questions are asked. . . Co-editors G. Larry Mays and Tara Gray. . . succeed quite handily (Dick Kieckbusch, *American Jails*, March/April 1997, 121-122).

None this far have analyzed it [privatization] as fairly and as fully as G. Larry Mays' and Tara Grays' new book, *Privatization and the Provision of Correctional Services*. The book achieves the seemingly impossible combination of brevity and depth (Robert Engvall, *Justice Quarterly*, 14(1), March 1997, 187-191).

(Sample #4, *Privatization and the Provision of Correctional Services*, G. Larry Mays and Tara Gray, editors, Anderson Press, 1996.)

Faculty Development Matters

It is my observation that faculty work in too much isolation, each of us spending far too much time alone. In my view, time spent together could improve our teaching and research more, and more quickly. As a result, I have made a commitment to promoting collaboration in teaching and research.

Research on Teaching. My first effort at faculty development was also my most painful: it began when I decided that no one should have to “go through” what I went through to learn how to teach students to think critically and argue effectively in writing. I wanted to study this issue thoroughly and then make my findings known to others so that they did not have to work so hard on this issue, which consumed me for years. Although there are many wonderful resources for teaching writing, most of them are book-length and aimed at teaching writing in a semester-long course. I wanted to develop a way for teachers outside the English Department to improve writing and critical thinking *in one week*. To this end, I developed a handout for students called,

“About Your Essays,” which helps students write papers that have a persuasive thesis and that are laced with evidence. Students appreciated my efforts to help them write:

After using “About Your Essays” for the past two years in all my classes, I am happy to say it is one of the most informative educational tools I have ever encountered. . . It is very useful to any student regardless of the discipline she or he is studying.

Every incoming freshman should receive a copy of it.

Because students were so appreciative, I decided it was time to make the ideas available to faculty, in a workshop which sixteen instructors attended. Their comments included:

Very beneficial--lots of clear info presented in a quick, concise format.

Good handouts and useful discussion. She raised a number of points which I had not considered before, even though I have used writing assignments for years.

Tara knows her *stuff*.

In the spirit of collaboration, I have made this handout available to faculty on a (computer) disk so that they can modify my handout instead of writing one themselves (Sample #5, *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 1998).

I have also worked for several years with another collaborative teaching approach: peer coaching--teachers helping teachers. I sincerely believe that “trial and error” can make teachers great, but I want to speed up the process by training faculty to collaborate by observing each other’s classes and commenting meaningfully. Therefore, in 1996 and 1997, I raised the necessary funds to direct a peer coaching program here and at Eastern New Mexico University.

Participants wrote about how collaboration helped them feel affirmed as teachers:

I felt companionship and support in the difficulties I face teaching large intro classes. I could see that the problems I faced were not rooted in my personal failings.

My peer coach provided a sanity check for me. . . It was nice to hear someone say I was doing it (teaching) well.

Participants also wrote about how collaboration helped them improve their teaching:

Watching someone else teach allowed me to see my own strengths/weaknesses as a teacher, observing students helped me see my students more clearly.

I received feedback and inspiration to keep striving to humanize the classroom and break down barriers of understanding between myself and my students.

Learning about how another professor deals with similar problems, especially how to make group discussions work, using weekly quizzes, keeping the classroom lively and interested, maintaining a good rapport. It was just good to see how these problems are tackled in ways that I may like to copy in my own teaching.

NMSU President William Conroy wrote that peer coaching is “An excellent initiative,” and I subsequently published the results of the program (Sample #6, *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 1998).

Research on Scholarship. As surely as collaboration improves teaching, it can also improve research. In peer coaching, faculty attend each other’s classes and offer constructive criticism; in “Publish, Don’t Perish: A Program to Help Scholars Flourish,” faculty write daily in short blocks of time and read and respond to each other’s work. Comments from participants were encouraging:

Fast moving. Good pace. Good sense of humor. High energy and enthusiasm--you will inspire. . .

Your openness about your own struggles as a writer and how you solicit and use response is absolutely inspiring. . .

To pay participants in this program, I raised \$7,000 from all seven deans. The program seems to have struck a nerve. The first paper from this project is about the principles of efficient writing (Sample #7, Accepted by *Journal of Staff, Program, and Organization Development*). □

Conclusion on Research

As a scholar, I have found my voice. By changing disciplines and paying more attention to the process of writing, I have published four times as much here as I did before. Next, I will seek the chance to do funded research, both on prisons and in faculty development. No one can predict the future with certainty, but as a scholar, I believe I will flourish.

TEACHING

Empowering Students to Find Their Voices

Just as I work to find my voice as a scholar, I believe that my job as a teacher is to empower students to find their voices. Students will spend much of their lives working, and 75-80 percent of time on the job is spent communicating, both orally and in writing (Stine and Skarzenski 1979:30). As a new teacher, I focused on myself as a standard bearer: I told myself I could set whatever standards I wanted to as long as I was willing to do “whatever it takes” to help students achieve those standards. In recent years, I learned the importance of a related skill: fostering better relations with students so that they will be more involved in class. It is by involving students in class and doing “whatever it takes” to hold them to high standards, that I believe teachers can empower students to find and develop their voices.

Maintaining High Standards

To me, maintaining high standards in class implies more than just regular and difficult testing: it implies accountability and critical thinking. I hold students accountable for assigned reading in one of two ways. In upper division and graduate classes, I require daily “T-Tables” of the reading material, with what the student sees as the thesis of the reading at the top of the page, and main points listed below in one column and the supporting evidence for the points in the other column. In introductory classes, I require daily study questions as the basis for the ten to fifteen “pop” quizzes.. Some students appreciate the way I hold their feet to the fire:

[Daily accountability] kept me up to date on the work. . . and made me come to class prepared.

It’s professors like you that really prepare us for the real world. You make us work, think, and meet deadlines.

I encourage critical thinking, which allows students to evaluate competing arguments and draw their own conclusions. In my senior seminar, which is required for all majors, I teach critical thinking by offering arguments on opposing sides of issues. I find that students who will not otherwise entertain opposing views, will entertain them in these seminars. It seems that once their own views have been heard and validated by articulate, well- known scholars, they can seriously consider other views, often for the first time. To me, entertaining ideas that are sometimes uncomfortable is critical thinking at its best, and it is critical thinking that allows students to find and develop their voices.

Doing “Whatever it Takes” as a Teacher

In criminal justice, it is often difficult for students to think critically because they feel passionately about some of the issues. For example, some criminal justice students prefer to think of prisoners as nothing more than moral degenerates. To better understand the inmate perspective in a class on prisons, each student writes a letter to each of two inmates about our class, telling something about what we learned about prison life, and asking how true it is in the experience of the inmates. One of these inmates is a convicted murderer who is serving life without parole; the other is a drug dealer who is serving 45 years. To the astonishment of students, these convicted criminals answer each of their letters with a one or two page, carefully composed, single-spaced letter. Later in the semester, they talk with both inmates by phone. Students remark that these experiences help them think of prisoners as human beings, as more than the worst thing they ever did, an important discovery for students who intend to devote their lives to working with offenders. As a teacher, I go to great lengths to help students make such discoveries, and some students remark on my efforts:

I've never had a professor invest so much time and energy in teaching a subject.

Even though this class was much work, I really enjoyed it. Dr. Gray is probably the best instructor I've ever had. Her enthusiasm and energy, her open-minded style, and her dedication to 'whatever it takes' really set her apart.

Involving Students in Class

My most important effort to help students find their voices is to rest my own. To this end, I team-teach my undergraduate classes with a graduate assistant. These assistants give me excellent advice on how to better bridge the gap between me and the undergraduates because they share something of the perspective of both students and teachers. Students write:

Having a student teacher helps give us someone we can talk to at our level.

The team-teaching is a good approach, I think because this way we don't feel intimidated by a big professor teaching the class and we get the insight of a student.

As a result of my work with this technique, I have recently co-authored an article with my graduate assistant, "Team Teach With A Student" (forthcoming in *College Teaching*).

I developed a new approach for seminars that draws students together, and helps them discuss issues with each other better than before. In a "star discussion," students are the stars, and every student calls on another student until all have spoken. In my view, students read and listen to experts every day, and listening to yet another one may not make as much difference as trying themselves to "argue like an expert." These discussions seem to take on a life of their own, sometimes making it difficult to end class on time. Students wrote:

I thought the way she got students involved in class discussion was amazing.

Class discussion was probably the best I've had in all **four** years.

I enjoyed this course because it is professor led but has full student participation. We are allowed to discuss topics with each other not just hear the professors talking about what they think or think they know.

A few students remark on how their experience in my class helped them find their voices:

I've never really felt comfortable in a group discussion course, but after this one, I'll never feel inhibited again. Speaking out in this class affect my participation in other classes. . .

The class opened me up. I was quiet at first, now I am a new person.

Conclusion on Teaching

If there is one thing that accounts for my success as a teacher, I think it is this: I have helped students find their voices, and put words to all that they know and feel. In turn, they have raised their voices to tell me what I can do to improve my teaching. Sometimes they praise me to the sky and I work to live up to their praise. Sometimes they are brutally honest with criticism, and I work to address the problems. I often try their ideas because my teaching remains a "work in progress." I continue to believe that it is by fully involving students in class, and by doing "whatever it takes" to hold them to high standards, that I can empower students to find and develop their voices.

SERVICE

Raising Our Voices Together

For university service, I play two key roles as a faculty developer and as a faculty advisor to the criminal justice honor society, !ME. I have already shared the view that a key problem facing faculty is isolation, which we can reduce by working collaboratively to improve our teaching and research. To that end, I have worked as a faculty developer on campus to bring faculty together for collaboration in both teaching and research. In the field of criminal justice, there is also much to be done, both in terms of community service and educating ourselves and others about the justice system, and student organizations can accomplish more than any one

student could alone. For both faculty and students, it is true that we can make a difference if we “raise” our voices together.

Criminal justice is a subject that many people, including some of my students, consider depressing. It is easy to despair and feel that convicted criminals are hopeless and there is nothing we can do. However, organizations exist to make a difference, including the criminal justice honor society, !ME. Before working with this group, my idea of a “faculty advisor” was someone who occasionally attended a meeting or signed a form. In sharp contrast, I have taken an active role in mentoring the next generation of leaders by motivating students for community service and leading them in educational programming.

When I first became the advisor to our chapter of !ME, I found the students to be somewhat unfocused in terms of their community service, which resulted in performing very little service. As a criminal justice honor society, I felt that we needed to focus our efforts more narrowly on the criminal justice system, because it is our area of interest, and because many volunteers are needed, but few are available. Increasingly, it became a tradition for our chapter to provide service to criminal justice agencies, including the halfway house, teen court, and the pre-trial juvenile diversion program. When students volunteer for these agencies, they learn how to work both with offenders and with the criminal justice agencies, which many students have found useful for getting internships and jobs. Last year, our chapter logged 1,500 hours of community service. As a result of our hard work, in both 1996 and 1998, our chapter was recognized nationally as the outstanding !ME chapter of the year for community service. In 1997-1998, I was selected as national advisor and began encouraging other chapters to devote their community

service to criminal justice agencies. As a result, next year for the first time, every chapter across the nation will be required to do a community service project in the criminal justice system.

As a faculty advisor, I recognize the importance of motivating students to provide their own leadership, and indeed, their community service projects require little from me. In contrast, the educational programming we provide on campus requires a lot of leadership from me because of the bureaucracy, contacts and fund-raising involved; however, I believe that the educational impact on campus is great. Therefore, I chaired a committee to bring a criminologist from New Zealand who argued that even though the United States is a world power, we have no corner on the truth, but have much to learn from the criminal justice systems in other countries. I also chaired a committee that brought an attorney from Colombia, who investigated the police murders of about 40 "disposables," and talked about the dangers of a criminal justice system turned criminal. This year, I co-chaired our biggest effort at educational programming: a three-day death penalty symposium featuring Sister Helen Prejean, a 1998 nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize, who believes that the death penalty may not be so much about who the condemned killers are and what they did, as it is about who we as a society are, and what we want to do to teach that murder is wrong. As a result of the impact of the speakers and other activities that I am involved with on campus, I remain committed to facilitating collaboration on campus, which allows us to accomplish more by working together than we ever could alone.

Conclusion

I believe that what keeps faculty from finding our voices in research, teaching and service, is that most of us don't know where to start. I know I didn't. As a new faculty, I didn't know how to be successful myself, never mind helping other people. At that time, my solution to everything was to "work harder," or "work till it hurts." Over the years, though, I learned that it wasn't working harder that would ease the strain on myself and other faculty, but working smarter--by working together. To this end, I have lightened my own load by working with colleagues on collaborative research projects and with student teachers to team teach courses; I have also "raised" my voice, or made myself heard more widely, by working as a faculty developer and as a faculty advisor. Every year at the initiation ceremony of our honor society, we light candles for each new member and I remember the words, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." And it really is, because together we can make a difference if we can find our voices and raise them.