

SIUE will offer master's in criminal justice



Greg Budzban.

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This week on Segue, College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) Dean Greg Budzban, PhD, hosts Kevin Cannon, PhD, chair of the SIUE Department of Criminal Justice Studies.

An Iowa native, Cannon received his undergraduate degree from the University of Central Missouri in political science. He obtained a master's from his alma mater in criminal justice studies. Cannon earned a PhD in criminal justice studies from the University of Nebraska at

Omaha in 2001.

Cannon's career began as a professor at Salem State College in 1999. He worked at the College for three years before desiring to return to the Midwest. After searching for attractive universities, Cannon placed one job application – at SIUE. He joined the SIUE faculty in 2002 and has fallen in love with the School and the Department of Criminal Justice Studies, sharing that he hopes to one day retire from the institution.

With the master's in criminal justice studies going through the approval process, the scholars focus conversation on the program that is projected to be offered at SIUE in fall 2017. Providing easy access to working professionals, the master's in criminal justice studies will be offered through an online format. The curriculum is structured for completion in two years, with many courses being offered in eight-week intervals.

A master's in criminal justice studies offers students a unique educational opportunity. It provides a broad understanding of criminal justice studies as a whole. It also allows students to tailor the degree to their specific interests through elective courses in the areas of policing and criminal investigation, the court system, theory and the corrections system – including prisons, probation and parole.

Conversation also included discussion of opportunities for experiential learning in the St. Louis metropolitan area, growth of the department since its establishment in 2002, and the importance of training and educational opportunities in policing.

Cannon references the prospects available to SIUE students in the Department of Criminal Justice Studies, both in and out of the classroom. "We are graduating almost 100 students per year now," he says. "One fundamental part of the program is the internship experience that all students must complete as a senior assignment.

"Students may either seek internships with agencies that already contract with SIUE or actively seek their own, but right now, we have agreements with approximately 180 agencies. These are not just law enforcement agencies, either. Typically, people think, 'Criminal justice degree – you're going to become a police officer.' We have students who go into many different fields, and we have followed that with our internship opportunities. We have numerous law firms, police departments, probation offices, parole departments, the Madison County Coroner's Office and many more."

He further cites the network of agency partners and alumni that have contributed to the internship and employment efforts of future SIUE graduates. He explains that through the various fields of criminal justice, both SIUE and criminal justice professionals have the opportunity to positively affect the lives of others.

Budzban begins a conversation on policing and argues that society has begun to demand a higher degree of professionalism among officers and police departments. Cannon emphasizes the importance of further education and communication skills in order to fulfill this need in communities.

“Every study has shown that the more education you have, the better you will be as a police officer,” he explains. “A college education opens students’ eyes to so many different people and lifestyles. As a police officer, you’re forced to interact with everyone from all different backgrounds. So, keeping an open mind and not having that narrow focus of ‘everyone should behave exactly how I did when I was growing up’ is very important for a police officer to have. A college education is good for that.

“If you come from a poor, urban area, your interaction with police is very different than if you’re coming from a poor, rural area or any other social class. You have different backgrounds, and there’s a longstanding history of predominantly white policing in minority communities. So, one of the greatest skills in criminal justice these days is being able to communicate with a diverse group of people.”

Cannon further explains the career opportunities for women and minority students in the field of law enforcement, as these demographics are in high demand in an effort to bring more diversity into police departments.

The gentlemen discuss the anticipated approval of the master’s in criminal justice studies, citing the program’s dedication to faculty-student mentorship and continuance of a high-quality education through an online platform.

“One of the best things about my graduate experience was the relationship developed with faculty,” Cannon shared. “The faculties truly become your mentors in your academic development, and we don’t want the online students to miss out on that. A big part of growth in graduate programs is connections with faculty and learning from them inside and outside of the classroom through personal relationships.”

He added, “Ever since I started here, I’ve had students saying ‘When are you going to start a master’s program?’ – Because a lot of people want to further their education beyond a bachelor’s degree to make themselves distinct in a competitive field.

“Once people know the SIUE faculty, they feel comfortable with them and know that we are going to give them a good education. Our intention with the online master’s is to make sure we give a high quality education – just like we do with our undergraduate programs. Students who complete that program will have a set of skills that will help them as critical thinkers in the workplace. We’re hoping to be able to give people working in the field the opportunity to complete a quality master’s degree in a timely fashion.”

Budzban shares in Cannon’s excitement by concentrating on the program’s potential for immediate impact. He further explains that because of the program’s online nature, it creates academic value for working professionals seeking access to additional education from across the country.

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By Logan Cameron, SIUE Marketing & Communications