

**From Studies in Justice and Law Enforcement to the  
Department of Criminal Justice:  
A Reflection from the University of Winnipeg**  
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**Abstract**

The Criminal Justice Department at the University of Winnipeg commenced in 2006, but this recent start date belies a history of justice instruction dating back to the late 1970's. The Studies in Justice and Law Enforcement program evolved from a distributed major of courses loosely associated with justice to a more contemporary core of courses covering justice theory, methods and police, courts and corrections. There was internal struggle at the University of Winnipeg over the establishment of a separate Department of Criminal Justice, with some viewing such courses as best housed in Sociology. With support from administration and high student interest, Criminal Justice was established over the objections of other Departments. Arguments are made for a core curriculum of courses centred around the notion of "justice", and the author presents his model curriculum of undergraduate and Honours level courses.

**Introduction**

The Department of Criminal Justice (CJ) at the University of Winnipeg (UW) has seen an evolution correlated somewhat with the rise of criminal justice or "justice focused" departments across North America generally and in Can-

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ada particularly. The program began as a multidisciplinary, distributed major with an eclectic mix of humanities and social science courses, most only loosely connected with the notion of justice. Over time, it became strongly affiliated with the University of Winnipeg's Sociology department, but this affiliation has been largely lost since Criminal Justice became a department. Today, UW's Criminal Justice department provides a cohesive, contemporary curriculum, exposing students to a solid core of theoretical, legal and social science based course offerings. Doubtless we have benefited from a trend of student interest in academic departments that seem to have some employment potential (as have other UW departments such as Business and Economics, Kinesiology, Psychology): we have high enrolments and one of the largest groups of majors on campus.

While we can be categorized as one of an aggregate of criminal justice programs arising in the distant past and more recently in Canada, our department has its own unique story, and it is a tale worth telling. While some may assume that UW's CJ program was simply put in place because of high enrolments, this was not the case; there was struggle and conflict and concerted efforts had to be made to help the Department become a reality. Our department's academic evolution is also noteworthy: scholars who make up departments shape them, pushing their own academic and program agendas while trying to remain true to their view of what is critical in the discipline. It has been no different at the University of Winnipeg and the contribution of various members, past and present, will be acknowledged here.

In writing this reflection, I draw on a review of past University documentation on program and curricular development, interviews with various University of Winnipeg faculty and staff and my own lived experience in helping to shape our Criminal Justice department.

### **Studies in Justice and Law Enforcement**

In 1979 the University put forth a distributed major for

students interested in careers in the criminal justice system such as policing, counseling or correctional officer work. The title “Studies in Justice and Law Enforcement” certainly suggested a strong affiliation with policing. The program was originally coordinated by a faculty member from the Psychology department. At the University of Winnipeg, a Coordinator of a program has similar responsibilities and similar powers to a department Chair, but typically might run programs with ten to 20 majors. This was not the case with the Justice and Law program, which immediately became popular and enjoyed large course enrolments, particularly in sociology, and averaged 150 to 200 majors. The Coordinator’s position was always one of the busiest on campus. To complete their major, students needed to take 36 credits (out of 90 hours total for UW’s three year bachelor of arts) from three substantive areas of justice: Law, Administration, and Interpersonal Behaviour. Courses originally came from six departments: Anthropology, History, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology. In the 1980’s new courses were offered to the three groups from areas as diverse as Administrative Studies, Classics, Conflict Resolution, Developmental Studies, Physical Activity and Sports Studies and Religious Studies. While there was considerable variety in course offerings, the downside was students often required one-on-one counseling from a faculty member to sort through an overly complex major.

In 1985 the Coordinator position passed on to a Sociology faculty member, William Morrison, beginning a department affiliation so strong in people’s minds that Justice and Law is still thought of as having been a sub-program in Sociology by most University of Winnipeg faculty. In 1991 the Coordinator position passed on to another Sociology faculty member, Douglas Skoog, who invested considerable energy in developing the Justice and Law (J&L) major, along with Colin Goff, another Sociology faculty member. Goff developed a flagship first year course, “introduction to criminal justice” in 1994. Concerned that the loose requirements of the J&L major was making it attractive to uncommitted students, Skoog attempted to make the program more rigorous by requiring ma-

jors to take methodology courses in sociology or psychology, or a new course, research methods in criminal justice(1995). Facing large enrolments and a sparse pool of stipendiary (part-time) instructors, Skoog pushed to hire more permanent Justice and Law faculty. In 1997, the Sociology department hired me as a criminologist/methodologist, and Skoog managed to wrest a 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of my position for Justice and Law, to teach methods. Skoog also hired Jane Murray, a sociologist, as a sessional instructor (later permanent) to teach the burgeoning sections of the introduction to CJ course.

### **Transitional Phase: From Justice and Law Enforcement to Criminal Justice Studies**

Upon my arrival at UW, my assessment of the Justice and Law program was shaped by a background in sociology (PhD, University of Alberta), American criminal justice (MA, Washington State) and British Columbia's Canadian criminology (BA Simon Fraser University, SFU). I had also worked in the criminal justice field in institutional and community corrections for fourteen years. Thus, I had a relatively unique perspective on criminal justice education, but SFU provided my first overview of criminology/criminal justice and its interdisciplinary potential, and that likely was my largest influence. Their four year program had a plethora of criminology offerings, and a large interdisciplinary list of crime related offerings from other departments. My time at Washington State had twigged me to the downsides of criminal justice programs and the criticisms associated with a vocational approach to education. Washington State and other American programs had transitioned from being titled police science to criminal justice, and along the way had discarded truly practitioner based training such as physical restraint and firearm use, leaving this to one or two year college based programs. I had become well acquainted with the "sociological criminology", prominent at the University of Alberta when I was there. I was also cognizant of the shift in Canadian sociology during the 1990's; for deviance and crime related studies, this meant a move away from a liberal, empirical-testing of socio-

logical criminology theories to more critical, post-modern forms of inquiry. Indeed, Alberta was in the midst of hiring a number of more critically oriented scholars by the time I graduated in 1997.

When I came to the University of Winnipeg my view of the curriculum was that there were too few criminal justice offerings and not enough required courses. There were only two mandated offerings, introduction to criminal justice and research methods, hardly enough to guarantee students a solid grounding in the field. At the request of Skoog, in January 2000 I took on the Coordinator position. In short order (and with Skoog's support) Jane Murray and I introduced courses on crime victims, professional ethics, crime careers and criminal law. We ended up heavily dependent on part-time instructors but continued to maintain high student enrolments and collected data to help build a case for more faculty.

The year 2004 was pivotal for our department; we hired Steven Kohm (PhD Criminology), our first non-sociology faculty member and we had an external program review conducted. Dr. Kohm set about expanding our offerings outside of the traditional (but essential) police/courts/corrections triumvirate into broader thematic areas of media, comparative criminal justice, and an abstract, more urban theory based notion of crime prevention. Robert Gordon (SFU) and Anthony Doob (University of Toronto) conducted a crucial external review of our program and their recommendations supported our ambitions to become a department and add faculty. Their curriculum recommendations were generally consistent with the direction we had charted for ourselves, and their review has proved useful over the years in successfully lobbying for more hires, an honours program, and field placement course.

In 2004, we achieved an important name change; Studies in Justice and Law Enforcement became Criminal Justice Studies, presaging our designation as a Department of Criminal Justice.<sup>2</sup> We felt, of course, that the new title better reflected

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2 We were actually called Criminal Justice Studies for a period of time, but

the discipline and course work that the students were undertaking. This move was endorsed by current and former students. We had actually considered the names “justice studies” and “criminology and criminal justice”. We concluded that criminal justice best communicated our aims as a department. While desirable, criminology in our title was not possible because the tradition at the University of Winnipeg was for Sociology to use that term to describe some of their courses. Similar feelings still exist at UW and in the Sociology department at the University of Manitoba. University of Manitoba provides a “criminology” undergraduate degree, which essentially is a sociology degree with some extra criminology courses.

I had first observed the proprietary “ownership” of the term criminology at the University of Alberta, and have observed this at the University of Manitoba as well. Trained as a sociologist myself, there is no denying the contribution to criminology by this discipline; however it is also indisputable that criminology has always been interdisciplinary and is not a “sub-discipline” of sociology despite rather blatant and (to me) self-serving efforts by some to present it that way. While criminal justice/criminology departments across North America hire many sociologists, the trend now is to hire more scholars from criminal justice/criminology doctoral programs, and disciplines such as law and psychology. Many departments world-wide now hire scholars with doctoral training in philosophy, economics, history and even biology.

Yet there is undoubtedly a certain cache in the term “criminology”; it allows some sociologists to distinguish themselves as exciting specialists (deviance scholar does not have the same ring to it) and, importantly, it attracts students to classes and guarantees Sociology departments high enrolments. Not surprisingly, in their survey on justice related names, Wortley and Wimshurst (2000) found “criminology” the most popular name for a department, rather than “criminal

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managed to shift this to “Department of” once our status became clear. This was important internally, because at UW the appellation “Studies” usually denotes a distributed major or program, not an academic department.



justice,” “justice studies” or “administration of justice”. Sociology’s “ownership” of criminology is unfounded but given its advantages those departments laying claim are unlikely to give it up anytime soon (Crank 2003).

To create a University entity as substantive as an academic department, criminal justice needed a supporter in the management ranks. Pivotal to the successful creation of the Criminal Justice department was the Social Sciences Dean, the late political scientist Claudia Wright. I always felt that her support might have had much to do with Political Science’s own interdisciplinary nature, multiple theoretical perspectives and internal debates over the alleged vocational nature of sub-areas such as public administration research. She funded the External Program Review and supported new faculty hires for our department. Her only restriction on the implementation of a Criminal Justice department was that our creation not impact the Sociology department significantly. Despite some initial planning and effort around collaboration, this was not destined to occur.

### **A Department is Born, Curriculum Developed and Criminal Justice Theory Engaged**

In 2006, we formally were approved as a department and hired our first full-time legal scholar and another sociologist. Our curriculum had shifted from the amorphous three justice areas to a more traditional criminal justice curriculum: in addition to the introductory CJ course, we initially required second year courses in policing, criminal law, institutional corrections, “criminological” theory (taught initially by Sociology) and research methods. The only other required course was professional ethics, taught in third year. Students also had to take introductory sociology, guaranteeing the Sociology department, in my opinion, a continued guarantee of many double majors with the new CJ department.

The movement of my 2/3<sup>rd</sup> position from Sociology to Criminal Justice full-time, unfortunately, was acrimonious and coincided with new, recently hired faculty there taking a

greater interest in critical criminology. They attempted to portray us as “administrative criminologists” engaging in more vocational types of training.<sup>3</sup> The Sociology department was assertive in their resistance to the new Criminal Justice department. For example, courses previously cross-listed like crime victims were de-cross-listed (not critical enough) despite lost enrolments for Sociology. New courses proposed by our department were actively resisted at the University curriculum committee level for overlapping with Sociology crime offerings. When we proposed an Honours program, it was resisted by a formal memorandum from Sociology advising the University Curriculum Committee that most of our faculty were too junior to operate a credible program.

As a thick skinned former Sociology department member, I ignored these moves and tried to stay on task by pushing our curriculum and program changes through various committees (which we did quite successfully), mentoring my new faculty (easy when you have a talented ensemble) and implementing our new curriculum. In a surprise move when I was out of the country on sabbatical, our bold young faculty, led by Acting Chair Steven Kohm, had had enough of trying to collaborate. After further rancorous meetings with Sociology over curriculum, CJ faculty eliminated the requirements for introductory sociology and the second year sociological criminology course, in its stead developing a new criminal justice theory course. These moves were unopposed by Sociology, and informally severed the last of the curricular linkages built up between the programs over the previous twenty years.

The development of our second year criminal justice course was a pivotal point in our evolution as an academic department; one that was committed to the notion of criminal justice

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<sup>3</sup> I would never object to some my work being described as a liberal or even administrative criminology, as I do policy and program evaluation, which I think of as a different type of critical work. I was somewhat bemused when I heard that some new Sociology department members referred to me as an “agent of the state”. Their depictions of our “vocational approach”, however, did not match our courses, which were theory based and empirically grounded. Nor were their allegations accurate with respect to the critical scholarship of our young faculty, as anyone perusing articles by Kohm, Gorkoff or Jochelson would find.



as an interdisciplinary field with a theoretical base. For indeed, how could we profess to be a separate department of academic study without a theoretical basis? If not one theory, then what theories or perspectives were important? Justice came up again and again as an important unifying concept for theoretical study, not surprising given the concept's centrality in scholarly analysis of criminal justice (Crank 2003; Frauley 2005; Kohm, Jochelson & Weinrath 2013; Kraska 2006). Kraska argued that the discipline of criminal justice required a "theoretical infrastructure" to establish academic legitimacy. Criminal justice/crime control would comprise a broad range of objects of inquiry, from social structure and crime rates to practitioner behaviour. For Kraska, research in these realms might include social control, socio-legal and feminist perspectives, as well as more conservative organizational, economic and systems theory. Within a social science framework (and with much discussion of the Canadian situation), Frauley cautioned CJ departments against assuming a "protective services orientation", or solely teaching about ameliorating the "crime problem" or how to improve the performance of the criminal justice system and its agents. He argued not only for more theory, but wisely observed that there needed to be less debate about which theory or theories of criminal justice to teach students, and more emphasis on instructing students on how to "theorize". For theory to be central in criminal justice education, students needed to be pushed to think abstractly, and consider the justice system and its problems against broader concepts such as racism, gender bias, and classism. A further discussion of how we incorporated theory into our program is outlined in a recent article by Kohm, Jochelson and Weinrath (2013).

From justice roots, we believed that we could grow other courses with strong theoretical foundations. The second year theory course examines a variety of philosophical and theoretical perspectives set around justice, broadly defined, including: philosophy, political science and critical theory. The course content was linked to the fourth year honours capstone course, ensuring a logical progression by students to advanced study.

## **The Mission of a Criminal Justice Department and Its Model Curriculum**

I believe that the mission of a criminal justice department involves the scholarly study of justice in its many forms. This ranges from critical studies of human rights violations, law breaking by the state, why we define certain behaviors as criminal, gender, racial or class bias, or the legitimacy of police, court and correctional structures. More incremental critiques of policy and program efficacy, use of discretion in the justice system and the impact of the criminal law are also worthy areas of inquiry. Such scholarship should be theory-based, informed by the literature, and should mostly have an empirical base. In an ideal world, criminal justice departments would produce top level research, at least until questions about the atheoretical nature of our work stopped. After twenty two years of working as an academic it is obvious to me that quality scholarship is the quickest way to get and keep respect in the academic community.

To carry out this mission, however, criminal justice department members must be tolerant of their colleagues and the different ways that they have of looking at the world. Our department has always benefited from collegiality, mutual respect and support of each other. I wish I could take credit for this, but in truth we hired well and have had good fortune in selecting new faculty. Most members of our department have also benefited from having had significant input into the curriculum and group culture from the beginning.

A department also has a mission to educate students and develop the scholars of tomorrow. This is where practical questions about a University education, definitions of what is important in criminal justice and pedagogy all collide. Thus far I have given a view of our department likely shared by my colleagues, but my perspective on ideal curriculum in criminal justice is doubtless biased by my 14 years in corrections and supervision of many University graduates in the workplace. My methodologist orientation and training are influences, as is my exposure to three quite different University

programs at Simon Fraser, Washington State and Alberta. My thirteen years' experience as Coordinator and Chair of Criminal Justice have further shaped (and hardened) those opinions.

First and foremost, University level programs in social science need to provide courses that give an overview of the field and grounding in theory and methods. Beyond that, courses need to require critical thinking and to develop students as writers, preferably by assigning at least some research term papers. I view criminal justice as a social science, thus theory and methodology are both vital to a rigorous program. In criminal justice I favour the interdisciplinary approach we have taken at the University of Winnipeg. Students need to be pushed to think abstractly. Such courses help students think about the "big questions" and are great intellectual development. Methods should include some statistics, another "mental muscle" students do not use enough. Criminal justice BA graduates should be able to read and understand fairly complex material, and be able to critique tables of figures or simple graphs. I am pleased at the University of Winnipeg that we introduce some theory in our first year over-view Intro CJ course and then require theory and methods in second year, when it will be of benefit. In methods, we provide SPSS training at UW, a bonus for students that helps develop their computer literacy and is important for those who go on to advanced study.

Secondly, Criminal Justice departments have to recognize that the majority of their graduates are interested in working in the criminal justice system. Having supervised people in the criminal justice system in corrections and having worked with individuals from the police and courts, it seems to me that students need a fundamental literacy about the strengths, weaknesses and enduring problems in the criminal justice system. To become a police officer with a criminal justice BA and not know research findings on use of force, the effectiveness of police patrol or fundamentals of patterns of corruption means to me that the degree was a waste of

time. To become a correctional officer or parole agent and not know what criminogenic needs are, or the limitations of related treatment is to be ignorant about critical parts of the correctional enterprise. It is vital that all our students should have a grasp of fundamental issues around powers of arrest, the Charter and the importance of case law. To me, there are important research findings impacting performance within a criminal justice occupation, and our students should be aware of them.

Thirdly, all courses in the curriculum need to concern themselves with the big questions about criminal justice. What is the role of police in society? Why are police never convicted when charged by civilians? Why do we use an ineffective, inefficient adversarial court system? Why are Indigenous people over-represented in our jails, and what is the government doing about it? Instructors need to challenge their students and themselves on these issues, and the fundamental concerns that they raise over justice. This can take them down many paths, some more radical than others, but it is important that students be exposed to different ways of looking at the world.

Thus, the flagship introductory course on the criminal justice system is important here at UW, as are specialty courses in criminal law, policing and corrections. Also imperative is our course on professional ethics. Over and over we see problems in the justice system with individuals who have abused their authority or been seduced by the promise of a momentary advantage. We owe it to our students, their future employers and the public to ensure that they understand the importance of ethics and how one might be compromised in the criminal justice work place.

In a criminal justice curriculum, there are not that many courses that logically progress from second to third year, although obviously it is preferable that theory and methods be completed in second year. Other courses offered to undergraduates may vary according to the competencies and research interests of staff. To me, it is not crucial that all

students take victimology, crime prevention, comparative criminal justice, criminal intelligence, media, or policy, so long as instructors are current in the research in these areas and remember to ask those big questions. In a three year program of ours with 90 credits, it seems a range of 24-36 hours in criminal justice courses is adequate, so long as the core of theory, methods, and the justice system are required.

### **Advanced Study**

In Canada currently there are not that many traditional Honours programs, and many that exist in four year programs simply require an additional six or twelve credits and a thesis. I also appreciate that “Honours” courses in Ontario may have over 40 students registered. In England, Australia and New Zealand three year degrees are still the norm, and Honours programs are essentially pre-Masters, or in some cases pre-Doctoral programs. They have small seminar classes (8-10) where students present on readings and lead discussions. In some programs a major research project is required.

Our Honours classes are closer to many of the overseas model, with small classes and a major paper “mini-thesis” required (but not data collection). In first building our program, I considered my previous experience in Sociology and realized that half or more of our Honours students would never go on to graduate school. The challenge, it seemed, was for us to provide a program that prepared our future graduate students but also allowed our other fourth years to grow in ways that would benefit them in their future professional lives.

For criminal justice, theory, methods and law appeared to be an appropriate trinity to require at the Honours level. At a practical level, a greater grasp of law would be of use in any job in the justice system, hence its priority. Besides, obliging students to take policing and corrections in addition to law was not feasible in our small program.

The capstone course developed by Steven Kohm is a year-long and gives students an overview of the field and develops

their abstract thinking. They are exposed to a variety of justice perspectives and are expected to provide analyses and lead discussions. They view faculty presentations during the course of the year on their areas of research (e.g., drug court, multi-dimensional decision-making), a form of mentoring towards the graduate experience. A major piece of writing, a mini-thesis is required, developed over the year with a second reader selected from faculty.<sup>4</sup>

For graduate students, methodological training is important. We provide a policy and program evaluation course that instructs students in traditional methods within the context of policy and program evaluation. It requires students to run SPSS analysis and write up univariate and bivariate analysis and prepare an evaluation proposal. Students who go on to the field gain a greater understanding of program operation and evidence based practice.

Students have then applied these skills to a 200 hour research field placement where they will typically collect data and write it up. Some of these students have gone on to publish their findings with faculty. This certainly is a “leg up” on doing research for our students who go on to Masters programs. But even for those who do not, the problem solving and development of independent thinking in the placement is of benefit. Also, to my surprise Honours students interested in working in the justice system made a number of valuable employment contacts through their placement and emerged with a better “sense” of what a field like policing or corrections might entail.

Our advanced criminal law course builds on two undergraduate offerings and requires students to contend with materials similar to a first year criminal law class. The course ends up with a moot appeal by pairs of opposing students, assessed by members of the local judiciary and legal commun-

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<sup>4</sup> Critical Criminal Justice Theory, developed by Kelly Gorkoff and Youth and the Justice System by Jane Murray are optional courses that also require seminar participation and major papers.



ity that is the highlight of the course. Advanced knowledge of the criminal law is again a positive for students who work in the field. Students who have gone on to law school also saw taking it as an advantage.

Thus, so long as a criminal justice fourth year Honours program includes components of theory, methods and law, to my mind all students will benefit. Small seminars are key. One of the strongest personal development features of our Honours program were the seminar skills. The growth in the students' ability to read, critique and present is likely one of the most gratifying things about teaching in the Honours program. Whether they go on to graduate school or not, the students have obviously had an intellectual experience and challenge far beyond what they experienced in the three year Bachelor of Arts. Not surprisingly, we have had positive feedback from our graduates who have gone on to PhD's, Master's, law school or work in the field. Our graduate students have felt well prepared, and program heads from other Universities have given us positive reports on the performance of our grads.

### **The Future of Criminal Justice Programs**

Criminal justice is popular and has grown not just in Canada, but all over the world, as I have seen on my recent travels.<sup>5</sup> Criminal justice departments are here to stay and I expect a new group of emerging scholars at the mid-career Associate level to be heard from. I am unsure that in Canada sufficient reflection has taken place at the department level on what criminal justice (or criminology) represents and what our programs are trying to accomplish. Criminal justice is most often defined by individual faculty as what their doctoral alma mater taught them, or tied up in their own research agenda (e.g., critical or applied), rather than in any shared departmental ethos. Getting individuals from different

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<sup>5</sup> The program at Griffith University in Brisbane, Queensland has grown from 11 or so scholars five years ago to close to 40. Similar 10-30 growth has been observed at the new criminology program at Utrecht University, Netherlands.

disciplines together to define parameters of a departmental orientation (of what I think is an interdisciplinary field) is difficult and challenging. Nonetheless, I think reflection on the criminal justice enterprise at the University of Winnipeg has served our department well. We now count a psychologist, legal scholar, criminologist and political economist with our sociologists and have accommodated a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives and all got along, so we must be doing something right.

For departments to more carefully develop this notion of criminology or criminal justice, more national level research collaboration between criminal justice and criminology departments would benefit. Although I cringe to recommend it, periodic departmental exercises concerning vision and mission (that might involve some actual reading of the literature around criminal justice definitions) would benefit new programs, programs that have undergone changes and programs that see a need to renew themselves and their purpose, perhaps after hiring new faculty. As others have suggested, a national criminology/criminal justice conference or more local efforts like ours at the University of Winnipeg would do much to create a useful dialogue around defining the fields of criminal justice in Canada.

People will likely see the University of Winnipeg's Criminal Justice Department in the thick of most future discussions on the evolution of criminal justice in Canada. Steven Kohm and Richard Jochelson have already been lead authors on an important piece, and many important publications will arise from Kelly Gorkoff's recent dissertation on criminal justice programs and higher education. To which I will add my last reflection on the development of the program at the University of Winnipeg: chairs are usually at their smartest when they listen to faculty. Our Department is clearly a product of its *entire* faculty, and the fact that we have become an effective unit is a testimony to the commitment, hard work and engagement by all our members in making it so. With the energy, enthusiasm and talent of our recent hires Michelle

Bertrand and Kevin Walby, I have no doubt that UW's criminal justice profile in Canada will continue to grow.

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