

Educating Justice Up Close and From a Distance: Reflections on the first 10 years of the BA Justice Studies Program at Royal Roads University

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Abstract

The BA Justice Studies Program (BAJS) was one of the first bachelor's programs offered at Royal Roads University (RRU). Given the mandate of RRU to provide education for mid-career professionals through a blended learning model, the program was designed to attract professionals working in justice service sectors. Since its inception, the program has lived up to this expectation but has also grown to become a choice for younger students looking to complete a bachelor's degree. This essay examines the development of the BAJS program within the context of the RRU delivery model. This includes a history of RRU and a discussion of the program within the context of the pedagogy underpinning the RRU Learning and Teaching Model. The design and structure of the BAJS program are identified and the curriculum discussed. This essay concludes with observations on challenges and reflections on future directions for program development.

In the beginning

Royal Roads University (RRU) came into being in 1995 following the closure of Royal Roads Military College. The Royal Roads University Act stipulates that the purposes of the university are to provide programming at the undergraduate and graduate level in applied and professional fields, meet community needs in regards to continuing education, and maintain teaching and research excellence that supports

programming and contributes to the labour market needs of BC (Royal Roads University Act, 1996, 2). As such, RRU is designated a special purpose university primarily intended to attract mid-career professionals. But in the case of undergraduate programs, the university also attracts younger students looking to complete a bachelor's degree.

In earlier days, the blended learning model unique to RRU was, and remains, a cornerstone of the university's approach to education. The blended model integrates short term and intensive residencies wherein students attend classes on campus for a short period of time at the beginning, middle and sometimes end of their studies. Depending on the program, the lengths of residencies vary from one to three weeks. In between residencies, students take distance education courses using an online delivery platform adapted to the RRU context. The BAJS program utilizes residencies at the beginning and middle of the degree. Similar to other bachelor's degrees at RRU, the BAJS was designed as a completion degree, offering 60 credits in third and fourth year programming (Royal Roads University, 2002).

Given the unique approach to postsecondary education inherent in the design of RRU, the founding members of the university embraced a "scholar practitioner" model. Professionals with academic expertise working in careers or domains germane to programming at the university were targeted as the main educators in the model. Thus core faculty at RRU were to comprise a minority of the faculty contingent. In theory, the model captures the best of both worlds in terms of academic rigor and real life, applied learning (Royal Roads University, 2014a).

The learning and teaching model (LTM)

RRU has evolved into a well-respected academic institution that makes a significant contribution to its fields of expertise. According to Maclean's Magazine, RRU ranks high in comparison to other universities in terms of student engagement and academic challenge (National Survey of Student

Engagement, 2012). As well, the university remains financially sustainable and produces graduates who contribute to both their academic and professional communities. Success, however measured, is partially the result of ongoing development in the university overall, such as program development and expansion, but a major strength of RRU rests on its pedagogical foundations. In 2011, the university undertook a major review of its pedagogy and released a document outlining a revised approach to higher education. Inspired by social constructivism, learning at RRU is construed as an active social process wherein knowledge acquisition and skills development occurs in learning communities. Learning and teaching are thus reciprocal which enhances student engagement and ultimately success (Royal Roads University, 2014a).

Of the many concepts driving the learning and teaching model, the first is a belief in learning outcomes as foundational to learning. While not new to the university, this approach to the LTM drives the development of program curriculum. Outcomes are determined through consultation between programs and expert advisory boards. Ostensibly, this learning outcome model allows for clarity of program focus, structure for student evaluation, and for students and potential employers to identify and clarify the connections between the program and career setting (Royal Roads University, 2014a).

A new player in the field

Based on the university's mandate to provide applied, career focused training, the BAJS program was developed to be distinct from criminology and criminal justice programs while still offering students the opportunity to be involved in those areas. Accordingly, the BAJS program was developed to serve a wider range of professional areas. In 2002, market analysis of justice-related education and training in BC identified a need for a program that trains justice service professionals. Many professions in the public service require a solid knowledge of Canadian legal principles, effective human services

skills, social policy, and liberal citizenship virtues. Thus the blend of academic rigor and application constituted a new direction in justice-related programing, expanding more traditional criminal justice programs available in other institutions.

Following approval from the Degree Program Review Committee of the Ministry of Advanced Education in 2002 (Young & Schellhamer, 2014) the BAJS program was launched in 2003. Dr's. Erich Shellhammer and Jim Bayer were key architects of the program, which took over two years of development. An external curriculum review committee comprised of stakeholders and academics from the field also contributed to program development. Based on design, the BAJS was placed in the Peace and Conflict Studies Division, which has been recently renamed to the School of Humanitarian Studies.

A different approach

Although originally designed to attract working professionals, many students transfer from colleges offering two year diplomas or associate degrees in criminology or criminal justice, or from disciplines that are considered relevant to the justice field. There are roughly two dozen block transfer agreements with colleges in BC and across Canada that send students seeking to complete a bachelor's degree to RRU. Other students enter the program as mature students, some with previous college or university education, and others seeking recognition for career-related experience and training. The former require a "B" average for direct admission while the latter must satisfy criteria set out under the flexible arrangements policy (Royal Roads University, 2014b). Regardless of their acceptability to the program, all students register into a BAJS cohort which has distinct advantages. Students entering the program form friendships and help support each other through their education. This point has proven critical for students in online courses in terms of distributing work load in group exercises, for example. The collegiality de-

veloped during their time in the program often extends into post educational contexts where life long bonds develop.

The broad focus on justice in the program leads to a variety of educational and career trajectories for graduates of the program. Unfortunately, tracking students has not been undertaken in a systematic way so it is difficult to determine whether graduates' educational or career goals have been met, but anecdotally there is evidence to suggest success. Graduates report back on successful career advancement, applications to graduate and law schools, and myriad other professional career placements.

BAJS curriculum

The original curriculum of the BAJS program was developed along the lines of a learning outcomes approach to education. At the time, however, learning outcomes were attached to courses and not to overarching program outcomes. Although a university-wide curriculum committee was formed following the approval of the BAJS program, updates to curriculum and the development of program learning outcomes occurred later in the life of the program. Appendix A contains the current listing of courses, which has remained unchanged since 2009 when a course on culture and justice was replaced with one on research methods. We also anticipate there will be some changes to curriculum based on the feedback received from the committee responsible for the five-year review completed in 2010. In that review, recommendations for reduced emphasis on philosophical precepts, ethics and history were made so that further applied programming such as conflict mediation could be expanded (Young & Schellhammer, 2011).

In keeping with the original design, the BAJS program remains committed to delivering multidisciplinary curriculum and integrating academic and applied skills. In 2012, the program began the process of developing overarching program learning outcomes that resulted in the identification of five domains. These include: critical thinking; communication; research; knowledge; and professional skills. The domains

were created through consultation between BAJS faculty and faculty from other programs in the School of Humanitarian Studies during a review of all programs in the School of Humanitarian Studies. A key dimension of this process was the application of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of learning, which informs more recent versions of learning outcome development (Anderson & Sosniak, 1994; Anderson et al., 2001; Bereiter, & Scardamalia, 1999). The learning outcomes domains appear in full detail in Appendix B, but they will not appear on the program page of the university's website until the process of mapping individual courses to program outcomes is complete. It remains to be seen what effect on curriculum will result from this exercise.

Recent developments

The most significant change in the BAJS program has been the addition of a 12 month, face-to-face offering of the program. Compared to the 24-month blended model, this model includes the delivery of 60 credits over 12 months (Royal Roads University, 2014c). Delivery of this model was attempted from 2007-2009, but was cancelled due to low enrolment. However, by 2011 demand for the program had reached an all time high causing the university to consider the addition of a second blended intake. Rather than pursue this agenda, the program decided to canvas applicants as to their interest in the 12-month model. Student interest in this option was considered significant enough to reinstate the face-to-face model; in September 2013, 20 students started their studies in the face-to-face offering of the BAJS program.

Related to the reinstatement of the on-campus offering was the demand for course instructors and additional program resources. Recruitment of several instructors and the addition of a second administrative assistant to the program occurred quickly, within three months prior to the commencement of the on-campus offering. Given the continued demand for the program, both on campus and blended offerings, we anticipate that the current compliment of instructors and support staff will increase.

Challenges

While a complete account of the challenges is beyond the scope of this essay, there are significant issues that may be considered unique to the BAJS program. The first of these is the scholar-practitioner approach. Given the absolute number of courses offered and minimal contingent of core faculty, reliance on associate or sessional faculty can be a challenge for an undergraduate program, particularly considering the addition of the face-to-face offering. Thus far, the program has coped well with the increase in demand, in part due to the diligence of program support staff and core faculty in developing a resource base of potential instructors. Yet, the workload associated with teaching and research puts strain on core faculty as they juggle competing priorities while overseeing delivery of the program, a concern noted in the five-year review (Young & Schellhammer, 2010).

A second issue concerns the position of the BAJS program in the broader context of the justice field. Despite its unique contribution to studies in justice, the BAJS program is often conflated with criminology and criminal justice programs. The breadth of curriculum makes it difficult for more traditional criminology and criminal justice programs to classify the BAJS program in the justice context. However, this issue seems to be abating as graduates of the program take their place in justice-related careers, graduate programs and law schools.

Lastly, although popularity of the BAJS program has increased, knowledge of the face-to-face model still seems limited. That said, enrolment for 2014-2015 is higher than forecasted. The intensity of the on-campus model is a challenge to students and faculty alike. Students on campus are held to the same standards as their counterparts in the blended model, and instructors it seems, must be diligent in their role as educators and support persons to help ensure student success. This strain will diminish over time as the program develops strategies to facilitate the on-campus model. One aspect will involve changes to curriculum regarding the final applied research project, which is anticipated to occur in 2015.

The way forward

Although the recent growth in the program has caused some strain on resources, the popularity of the program speaks to the strength of the educational model and the BAJS curriculum. In essence, the challenges imposed by the applied and professional mandate of RRU are part of the original design of the university. The university, programs and instructors continually adjust and negotiate the parameters of this model so that it can be reflective of changing student and community demands.

Popularity of the BAJS program continues to grow, along with demand, which testifies to its academic and applied rigor. The program enjoys a solid reputation with agencies in the justice service field, but like other programs in the School of Humanitarian Studies, it is our alumni who market our program. Recently, Royal Roads University underwent a rebranding process, reconfirming its commitment to the university's mandate. The slogan emerging from the exercise was the result of feedback from graduates of the university, not from an administrative exercise. That slogan, *Life.Changing*, reflects the experiences noted by graduates. Over the past 10 years, the BAJS program has contributed to students' lives in many ways, and intends to continue doing so.

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Appendix A: BAJs curriculum

Course ID	Credits	Course Title
JUST 300	3	Human Service Skills in the Justice Field
JUST 301	3	Canadian Criminal Justice System: Part 1
JUST 306	3	Canadian Criminal Justice System: Part 2
JUST 302	3	Logical and Analytical Thinking in the Justice Context
JUST 303	3	History and Philosophy of Law in the Canadian Context Until 1867
JUST 304	3	Canadian Constitution
JUST 308	3	The Family
JUST 305	3	Civil and Administrative Law
JUST 401	3	History and Philosophy of Law in the Canadian Context From 1867
JUST 400	6	Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms: Theory and Practice
JUST 402	3	Public Policy and Justice
JUST 403	3	Comparative Global Legal Approaches and Philosophies
JUST 404	3	Justice Studies in International Law and International Organizations
JUST 406	3	Human Resources and Regulatory Environments
JUST 410	3	Research Methods for Justice Practitioners
JUST 407	3	Critical Justice Perspectives
JUST 408	3	Exercises in Ethics and Law
JUST 409	6	Applied Research Project
Total credits		60

Appendix B: Learning outcome domains

1.	Critical Thinking Domain
1.1	Apply a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to the field of study and practice.
1.2	Examine and situate one's own personal beliefs.
1.3	Demonstrate openness to ideas and actions.
1.4	Evaluate evidence, its sources, meanings and intentions.
1.5	Identify, select, and sort relevant information in order to be able to describe, draw inferences, synthesize and validate that information.
1.6	Identify and explain the ethical dimensions of professional conduct and practice.
1.7	Critically reflect on the impacts and consequences of decisions and resulting actions.
2.	Communication Domain
2.1	Articulate ideas and arguments effectively in oral and written formats.
2.2	Demonstrate competence in interpersonal and intercultural communication skills.
2.3	Select and employ different communication media based on assessment of situation and context.
3.	Research Domain
3.1	Identify and explain the core concepts and constructs of research.
3.2	Contribute to knowledge in the field of study or practice using systematic and recognized research design and methods.
4.	Knowledge Domain
4.1	Analyze and explain the Canadian legal system, its structures, processes, operational environment and its major regiments such as constitutional law, criminal law, civil law, administrative law and international law.
4.2	Differentiate the attributes of comparative legal systems from a Canadian perspective, and in a global context.

4.3	Critique Canadian identity emerging from sources such as federalism, multiculturalism and aboriginal self-government in reference to developed/established conceptions of justice.
4.4	Analyze and explain public policy analysis and participate in the public policy-making process in the justice context.
4.5	Explain the breadth and scope of complexities in the Canadian legal environment and emerging alternatives to traditional approaches to dispute resolution such as the use of technology or alternative dispute resolution.
4.6	Identify conflict resolution perspectives based on theories of culture, identity and communication.
4.7	Apply legal philosophy to the historical development of Canadian law, legal system and public policy.
5.	Professional Skills and Practice Domain
5.1	Produce and facilitate third party conflict intervention processes including mediation, facilitation and negotiation.
5.2	Demonstrate the ability to learn in a team environment.
5.3	Demonstrate leadership in a team context.
5.4	Generate a research objective and produce an outcomes-based research project related to the justice, legal or public administration contexts.
5.5	Demonstrate professional conduct in the research and/or professional work environment based on sound legal and ethical reasoning.