

HOW NIJ IS BUILDING THE NATION'S RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

BY **ANDREW MARCOUX**

NIJ provides a multilevel system of support helping researchers at every level of their careers.



In 2013, a team of doctoral students at Purdue University's School of Aeronautics and Astronautics won NIJ's Body Armor Challenge, which sought ways to determine how long body armor maintains its viability. The problem had been that testing body armor being used in the field by shooting a bullet into it destroyed the armor. The Purdue students proposed a solution called the Vibration Energy Signature Test.

Two things about the Challenge winners are noteworthy: First, their solution drew on aeronautics rather than from criminal justice research, and second, the winners were young. Greg Ridgeway, former Acting Director of NIJ, said the Challenge represents one of several approaches that the Institute is using to build up the next generation of criminal justice researchers across the United States.

"Young researchers are important because they don't have preconceived notions of how things are supposed to be, which allows

for creative solutions to questions, as well as innovative approaches to problem-solving," said Ridgeway.

NIJ provides a multilevel system of support — helping researchers at every level of their careers — through programs and initiatives such as the W.E.B. Du Bois Fellowship, the Graduate Research Fellowship, the Data Resources Program and various internships. Below is a brief overview of these programs and how they support and promote America's next generation of criminal justice researchers.

W.E.B. Du Bois Fellowship

The cultural backgrounds of millions of people are inextricably woven into the fabric of the United States. As a research agency, NIJ recognizes how important these cultural intricacies are to furthering our understanding of

race, gender and culture and how they interact with crime and the administration of justice. NIJ developed the W.E.B. Du Bois Fellowship to support new scholars as they explore the intersections of these social phenomena.

Under the guidance of Nadine Frederique, a social science analyst with NIJ, the program has grown and expanded in recent years. According to Frederique, when she started at NIJ, there was generally one fellow selected each year for up to \$100,000 of funding. In 2013, that increased to three fellowships. This year, \$150,000 is available for each fellow, depending on the type of research.

"We are strongly encouraging new and emerging scholars to apply for the fellowship," Frederique said. "The program is a great opportunity to help young scholars dip their toes into the grant-writing enterprise — and our Du Bois Fellows often go on to receive tenure at their institutions."

In fact, helping researchers achieve tenure is one of the program's goals. Another goal is disseminating the Fellows' research and raising awareness of their work to a national level through panels and workshops at NIJ and at national conferences.

The W.E.B. Du Bois Fellowship allows for a broad range of research topics. In 2013, the program made awards for research on the following topics:

- **Victimization and fear of crime among Arab Americans in metro Detroit.** This project investigates Arab Americans' experiences with crime, their fear of crime and factors that affect their risks of victimization.
- **Racial socialization among African-Americans.** This project looks at how racial socialization and gender can moderate the impact of racial discrimination on crime among African-Americans.
- **Dispute-related violence.** This project examines how disputes shape violence.

Explore other research projects at NIJ.gov, keyword: DuBois.

Graduate Research Fellowship

The Graduate Research Fellowship (GRF), one of NIJ's signature fellowship programs, supports promising doctoral candidates with a paid fellowship for dissertation research on crime, violence and other topics related to criminal justice. Marie Garcia, a fellow herself before she joined NIJ as a social science analyst, manages the GRF program in the social and behavioral sciences. For more on the program, see sidebar, "Marie Garcia Talks About NIJ's Graduate Research Fellowship."

Learn more about the GRF program at NIJ.gov, keyword: GRF.

Data Resources Program

"Educating and supporting young researchers at key levels of their career paths is indispensable," says Patrick Clark, a former NIJ social science program specialist who managed the Data Resources Program (DRP).

According to Clark, this is one of the main goals of DRP, which allows researchers free access to one of the oldest social science archives in the U.S., the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD). The NACJD database collects and preserves the raw data sets created through NIJ-funded research so that researchers can further analyze them using new techniques.

DRP uses a two-pronged approach to help young researchers. First, it provides a small grant of \$40,000 to young, tenure-track scholars looking to conduct research and publish their findings. These scholars can work with secondary data — data already collected by another researcher and stored in NACJD — and analyze it in new ways, possibly replicating previous research or yielding different results.

Second, the program allows professors to access NACJD and give their students the opportunity to learn research design and data analysis with real-life data sets. For example, Janet Lauritsen, a professor of criminology and criminal justice at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, has her students attempt to replicate results from past criminal justice research that has had its data stored in NACJD.

“The value in this,” said Clark, “lies in the fact that this is a reasonable facsimile of real research. Hopefully, this is what these students will be doing when they graduate — they are analyzing data from actual sources collected by criminal justice researchers.”

In the coming years, NIJ plans to modify the program to respond to the changing needs of the next generation of researchers. By developing webinars and videos that can be accessed on the Internet, Clark hopes to teach young researchers necessary skills such as data collection, preparation and management. He added that NIJ is trying to make DRP more relevant by talking with professors about what they need to educate their students.

Learn more about DRP at NIJ.gov, keyword: DRP.

NIJ Internships

Over the years, NIJ has worked with student interns, including through the University of Maryland’s Federal Semester Program. For more on this internship program, see sidebar, “My ‘Federal Semester’ Intern Experience.”

Students Working With Researchers

In addition to programs that directly focus on building the next generation of criminal justice researchers, the types of projects NIJ funds have an important indirect effect: Students often get to work with the primary investigators.

Here is just one example: To understand why there are so many untested sexual assault kits in evidence or storage rooms across the country, NIJ funded what is called an “action-research” project, in which academics team up with practitioners. Over the past three years, NIJ awarded grants to the Houston Police Department, which subcontracted the research portions to both Sam Houston State University and the University of Texas at Austin. The lead investigators are seasoned and respected researchers, but — as is often the case in an academic environment — the projects have had a “trickle-down” effect that may greatly affect some young researchers’ careers. Three doctoral students who have worked with the lead researchers in the sexual assault action-research project offer their unique perspectives on this experience in the sidebar “Building Young Researchers in the Trenches.”

Investing in the Future

All of these programs are examples of how NIJ is building the research infrastructure in the United States, a goal the National Academy of Sciences specifically called for in its 2010 report *Strengthening the National Institute of Justice*. By providing young researchers with the tools and skills they need to succeed, NIJ is also investing in its own future, as the Institute begins to embrace a new generation of criminal justice researchers who have benefited from this variety of support programs.

Building Young Researchers in the Trenches

by **Deidi Olaya-Rodriguez**

I became a social worker to change the lives of others, but what I did not know at the time was that along the way, the very people I sought to help would change my life forever. In 2005, I accepted a position at Casa de la Mujer, one of the most influential women’s rights organizations in my native Colombia. My initial responsibilities included training health care providers to detect, report and respond to cases of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. But as my experience grew, I took on new responsibilities, including conducting workshops for women survivors of sexual and other types of violence.

Building Young Researchers in the Trenches *(continued)*

The workshops centered on empowerment, psychosocial support, legal consultation and political advocacy. At Casa de la Mujer, we worked almost exclusively in multidisciplinary teams that included social workers, lawyers, social scientists and sociologists. Drawing on each of our respective fields allowed us to develop trust and implement an integrated approach that had astonishing results. The workshops inspired women to tell their stories, gain autonomy and confidence, and influence change in their communities; some even ran for public office. Profoundly moved by the firsthand accounts of violence and its aftermath, I decided to start a new journey, one that would take me to the University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work.

I began pursuing a master's degree in social work at the University of Texas at Austin in 2012. I was immediately drawn to the work of Noël Busch-Armendariz at the university's Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (IDVSA). IDVSA is similar to Casa de la Mujer in many ways, including its feminist approach, work on sexual assault and intimate partner violence, and partnerships in the community. When Busch-Armendariz and her colleague Caitlin Sulley approached me in early January 2014 about working on the NIJ action-research project, I was immediately interested. The issue of untested sexual assault kits (SAKs) and backlogs struck me as crucial for achieving justice for thousands of sexual violence survivors across the United States.

For the project, I have analyzed data from case studies to improve systems of communication and operation related to SAK evidence collection. I have also had the opportunity to attend meetings with our collaborative partners, listen to a survivor and read transcripts of several interviews on victim notification in cold cases. Witnessing the emotional impact on these U.S. survivors reminded me of hundreds of similar cases I heard during my time at Casa de la Mujer; there, survivors of sexual violence often experienced discouraging and revictimizing responses from the judicial system. But during this project, I have heard positive responses from survivors in Houston, who are reporting much better treatment from law enforcement. This renews my hope for justice and institutional change.

Although I have only been working on the project for the last few months, I have already learned a great deal. One of my key takeaways is that action research requires more than just a multidisciplinary approach. It requires something I have often heard about in Houston Police Department meetings: "having the right people in the right place." I have been amazed by the level of synergy between the different stakeholders in our Houston project, and I believe that their willing collaboration has played a key role in the progress made to date.

I have also learned about the importance of trust between all stakeholders. Producing change requires a dialogue between theory, process and practice. Without trust, it is hard to have open and honest conversations about the issues.

This project has also expanded my knowledge of the process of action research. It is not just about working together to understand what would work and why; it is about taking findings to the action level and implementing them in real-world settings. My experience on this project has allowed me to expand upon my time at Casa de la Mujer, and I know it will help me as I pursue doctoral studies on preventing interpersonal violence.

Building Young Researchers in the Trenches *(continued)*

by **Tasha A. Menaker**

I am pleased (and relieved) to be a recent graduate of the doctoral program in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at Sam Houston State University (SHSU). With a master's degree in clinical psychology from SHSU and bachelor's degrees in criminal justice and psychology from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, I strive to integrate psychology and criminology into research and practice. My research focuses on trauma and violence against women, including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and sex trafficking and prostitution. I am passionate about creating awareness of gendered violence, enhancing policy and service provisions for survivors, and ultimately eliminating violence against women. Perhaps the latter goal is lofty, but it is certainly worth the fight.

I am fortunate that my undergraduate and graduate studies have provided me with abundant opportunities to achieve these goals. In particular, I worked as a research assistant on the NIJ-funded action-research project during my first two years as a Ph.D. student. The project — carried out in collaboration with the Houston Police Department (HPD), community victim advocates, the District Attorney's Office, sexual assault nurse examiners and other stakeholders in Houston — looked at sexual assault kits (SAKs) that were never submitted to a crime laboratory for analysis. It also examined the local response to sexual assaults and the implementation of reforms.

William Wells, who served as the lead researcher on the project, selected me for involvement based on my prior research on sexual assault and my experience collecting data through interviews. My primary role was to conduct interviews with investigators in HPD's Sex Crimes Unit and collect data about sexual assault case processing, investigators' use of SAK evidence, and collaborations with victim advocates and prosecutors. I also authored papers summarizing project findings and delivered presentations to HPD personnel and criminal justice researchers.

This experience was particularly meaningful for several reasons. I valued the opportunity to conduct research with direct implications for victims. In addition, the project enhanced my skills as a researcher and taught me about the complexities and advantages of collaborative research with practitioners. I gained practical knowledge about interview strategies, creating field notes, and developing technical reports and presentations tailored to a practitioner audience. My experiences on this project also strengthened my ability to apply research to real-world problems.

Most important, I learned about collaborating with practitioners toward a common goal. It is essential to find a balance between being knowledgeable and being humble — researchers have much to learn from practitioners, and vice versa, and our willingness to learn must be evident. Accordingly, soliciting stakeholder input on study protocols is critical, because stakeholders' knowledge and experience can enhance the quality of data collection, as it did with our interview protocol.

I also developed an understanding of the daily challenges that confront practitioners, such as political climates, financial constraints and media scrutiny, which researchers must consider when working with these agencies. Finally, I learned the importance of establishing strong communication channels and trust

Building Young Researchers in the Trenches *(continued)*

between researchers and practitioners. Stakeholders should be regularly updated on research progress and findings. Applied research often seeks to understand problems that may reveal inadequacies in agency functioning, so researchers and practitioners must have honest discussions about how to present and discuss findings.

Collecting original data as part of an applied project is demanding, but the payoff is worthwhile. I spoke with many investigators and supervisors who made me feel hopeful about research's capacity to create positive change among practitioners who are open to suggestions and motivated to improve their agencies. I gained skills and knowledge from practitioners that I could not have obtained through other forms of data collection and reading. Moreover, I found that the connections I made with practitioners opened other opportunities, such as having sex crimes investigators speak in my gender and crime course, a truly beneficial experience for me and my students. This project demonstrated to me that working with practitioners has practical challenges, but it can result in positive outcomes for researchers, agencies and members of the public.

(For information on NIJ's work to encourage researcher-practitioner partnerships, go to NIJ.gov, keywords: researchers practitioners collaborate.)

by **Bradley A. Campbell**

While pursuing bachelor's degrees in criminal justice and political science from Saint Joseph's College of Maine, I worked as a summer law enforcement officer for three years. Through this (albeit limited) experience with law enforcement, I faced the challenge of balancing my duties and responding to crime victims. This experience solidified my interest in attending graduate school with the goal of studying policing and finding ways to help law enforcement officers improve their response to victims. As such, my research interests lie primarily in policing with a focus on police investigations.

I went on to earn a master's degree in criminal justice and criminology from Sam Houston State University (SHSU) and am currently a doctoral candidate in SHSU's criminal justice and criminology program. During the summer of 2011, as I transitioned into the doctoral program, William Wells offered me the opportunity to participate in the NIJ-funded action-research project with the Houston Police Department (HPD). The project examines the problem of unsubmitted sexual assault kits (SAKs) and seeks to identify ways of improving responses to sexual assault. Initially, I helped develop an interview protocol for police investigators and scheduled and conducted interviews with members of HPD's Sex Crimes Unit. I later analyzed the interview data for reports and presentations to HPD personnel.

I have learned several valuable lessons working on the action-research project that cannot be garnered in a typical doctoral classroom setting. First, I gained practical research experience. Specifically, I learned to effectively collect interview data and compile field notes that capture information relevant to the research questions. I also learned the intricacies of sexual assault investigations as well as the factors that investigators must consider when balancing their roles as investigators and as compassionate responders

Building Young Researchers in the Trenches *(continued)*

to victims. The in-depth interviews helped me understand the nuances of decision-making during an investigation in a way that analyzing only quantitative data would not have done.

Second, I learned that practitioners and researchers can form effective partnerships that have the ability to change practices. The project taught me that researchers can provide practitioners with tools to make their jobs easier. For example, I compiled a report that summarized information about other agencies' policies and practices for investigating cold cases. The report helped inform discussions within HPD about how to involve victim advocates during sexual assault investigations, and in April 2012, HPD created a victim advocate position in its Adult Sex Crimes Unit. It is exciting to see how small pieces of an action-research project can influence an agency's practices.

Finally, I learned the balance between being a researcher and respecting the reality of practitioners' work. As a researcher, it is easy to overlook practitioner concerns about outside influences, such as the media and local politics. We must be aware of these influences when presenting sensitive research findings.

I have come to view researcher-practitioner collaborations as a mutual learning process. Through my work with practitioners, I have gained insights into the realities of sexual assault investigations that I could not have learned in academic articles or classroom settings. This enables me to better frame research questions and, ultimately, allows my research to be more meaningful because it will be framed in a nuanced way. I was inspired by how receptive HPD's Sex Crimes Unit was to the research findings and by the unit's willingness to incorporate project recommendations. Because of this, I look forward to a career centered on research derived from researcher-practitioner partnerships.

Marie Garcia Talks About NIJ's Graduate Research Fellowship

Andrew Marcoux sat down with Marie Garcia, who manages NIJ's Graduate Research Fellowship (GRF), to learn more about the program.

Andrew Marcoux (AM): What resources does the GRF program make available to doctoral students?

Marie Garcia (MG): The GRF program supports universities that sponsor doctoral students who demonstrate the potential to successfully complete their degrees in academic disciplines relevant to NIJ's mission. The real benefit of the GRF program is that it provides doctoral students with funds in the final phase of their dissertation research, so they can focus on completing their degrees.

AM: How has the program changed since you began managing it?

MG: The GRF program has always encouraged doctoral students from all academic disciplines to apply for awards if their dissertation research has direct implications for criminal justice policy and practice in the United States. An important change to the program happened in fiscal year 2014, when we released

Marie Garcia Talks About NIJ's Graduate Research Fellowship *(continued)*

two solicitations. One sought dissertation research that focused on the social and behavioral sciences, and the second focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Although the goal of both solicitations is the same, this allows us to consider a broader range of topics for research fellowships, and it speaks to the changing nature of criminal justice.

AM: What other types of research have been funded?

MG: The dissertation research funded under the GRF program represents the diversity and range of issues that practitioners and researchers face when assessing the state of the criminal justice system. Recent fellowships have focused on how contact with the juvenile justice system affects delinquency and academic achievement and how physical and biochemical factors affect the recovery and analysis of DNA from human skeletal remains.

AM: Why is NIJ interested in assisting doctoral students?

MG: By helping doctoral students complete their dissertation research, we are investing in their futures and, in turn, in our own future. Our goal with this program and NIJ's other fellowship programs is to increase the pool of young researchers with innovative ideas whose research can have an impact on the criminal justice system.

AM: In what ways does NIJ assist doctoral students?

MG: Funds can be used in a variety of ways. For example, students can use their funds to travel to conferences to disseminate their research or pay for courses on new, innovative statistical techniques. This allows students to bring attention to their research while gaining valuable networking opportunities with scholars and practitioners in their field of study. Also, the experience of writing a successful grant application is hugely beneficial for those who will enter academia and want to continue their line of research.

AM: What made you want to apply to be a graduate research fellow? How did the program help you personally?

MG: I applied to the GRF program because if funded, I knew it would allow me the time and resources to focus on my dissertation research. Being able to dedicate all of my time and energy to the final phase of my program was one of the most important benefits of receiving the fellowship.

AM: How does one apply for a fellowship?

MG: NIJ typically releases the annual solicitation in late fall. Information about the program and the requirements for applying are on NIJ's website.

Learn more about the GRF program and find a complete list of funded projects at NIJ.gov, keyword: GRF.

To be notified when the GRF and other NIJ funding opportunities are released, sign up for email updates at https://service.govdelivery.com/service/subscribe.html?code=USDOJJP_8.

My “Federal Semester” Intern Experience

by **Andrew Marcoux**

The goal of the University of Maryland’s Federal Semester Program is to equip students with the skills needed to excel in a public-service career. The program includes a theme-based seminar course — my course, taught by experts from the National Counterterrorism Center, was on federal homeland security policy — and professional development workshops, a committed network of alumni and peers, and an unpaid internship for college credit. This is what brought me to NIJ, where I have witnessed the win-win scenario that arises out of pairing students with internship providers.

Joan Burton, director of the Federal Semester Program, put it this way: “The benefits of this program for employers and internship providers include the opportunity to mentor and prepare talented, diverse students for careers in public service and the ability to gain new, youthful and innovative insights into solving the challenges and needs of the future.”

Burton added, “Our student interns also provide insights into solving the challenges and needs of the future workforce.”

One thing that almost all college students search for in their education is inspiration for their future. This is perhaps even more true for millennials like me, to whom a college education is almost a prerequisite to getting a job. Through the Federal Semester Program, including my internship with NIJ, I am getting real-world experience that reinforces my personal passion about government work.

In my experience, most millennials do not know what they want to do and struggle with their search for inspiration. We want to know that our academic work is on the right track and is helping us to craft our futures. A good internship can help a student with both of these concerns. Working at NIJ has given me the motivation to pursue what I am passionate about. Through my internship, I have encountered a variety of criminal justice topics that have fostered a great respect for and interest in the research that NIJ conducts and promotes. By allowing students like me to be at the apex of criminal justice research — and to participate in front-line work with professionals in their fields — NIJ is helping to build the next generation of the nation’s researchers.

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