



JUSTNET Goes to College

Professors and administrators want their institutions' courses to stand out from similar ones at other colleges or universities. Dr. Robert Scott, director of the Justice Studies program at Fort Hays State University (FHSU) in Kansas, has done just that. He has used his knowledge of the Internet to create a one-of-a-kind course that helps students take their degrees into the 21st century.

Six years ago, Scott came to FHSU to start a criminal justice program. University provost Larry Gould, then dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, suggested that Scott find a way to show that criminal justice "is not just a gun and a stick and a badge anymore."

"Our goal was not to be just another garden-variety criminal justice program, not to be 'Cop Shop 101,'" says Scott. "We hoped that by putting this course in our core curriculum, it would distinguish our program."

Scott spent a year researching and developing the course that eventually became Information Age Technologies and the Justice System, a graduation requirement for students majoring in criminal justice. The class requires students to spend a large amount of time doing research on the Internet; much of the research is conducted through JUSTNET, the website of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) system. The first of the course's 13 sessions focuses on the relationship between the U.S. Department of Justice, the National Institute of Justice, and NLECTC. Subsequent sessions concentrate on various NLECTC categories of technology, including communications, forensics and criminalistics, less-than-lethal force, and protective equipment. Each session requires Internet research on the assigned topic and a writing assignment based on related books.

Scott says the JUSTNET website plays such a prominent role in the course because of its usefulness. "During the initial research I spent a lot of time just poking around, seeing what was out there that I could use. I thought the JUSTNET site had a lot of information that would interest the students, and it is so easy to navigate. A lot of other sites are very frustrating, so I tell my classes to go to this website, poke around, and you'll get a lot of information that will help you. I like it; it's one that I go to time and time again."

Students not only spend a lot of time doing web-based research, they also have the option of taking the course through the Internet. Scott says that the course is actually two separate classes: a conventional classroom section and a web-based section that targets nontraditional students, part-time students, and those who live out of the immediate area. Classroom students, who are mainly following a traditional plan of undergraduate study, meet for discussion and follow a strict schedule of assignments. Internet students "discuss" topics on a bulletin board, e-mail or call the instructor with questions, complete assignments on the web, and receive feedback via e-mail. The university allows all Internet-based courses to have flexible schedules. Only the dates for final exams are fixed. Some Internet students complete their assignments in a few weeks, Scott says. Others wait until close to final exam time to do the work. Some students enjoy the flexibility, but others find that they cannot deal with setting their own pace, he says.

At present, FHSU offers one classroom section of Information Age Technologies and the Justice System, which is limited to 42 students, and one Internet section, which has a 25-student limit. Since its initial offering in 1998, the classroom section has been filled to capacity. Some of the overflow goes to the Internet-based class, and Scott admits they have stretched past its 25-student limit to try to accommodate everyone who is interested.

"I make them do a lot of work in my class, probably twice as much as they do in other classes, but surprisingly enough, it always fills up," Scott says. After the first offering of the course, he expected to "get fried" by end-of-semester student evaluations regarding workload. Instead, students praised his course. High marks by students have continued with each subsequent semester. "The feedback says that when it's subject matter that they're interested in, they don't mind working hard."

In addition to using the wealth of information found on the JUSTNET website and researching other Internet sites, students are required to subscribe to *Government Technology* or read it online, watch the movie "Pirates of Silicon Valley," and read *Invasion of Privacy* by Louis Mizell and *Business @ the Speed of Thought* by Bill Gates.

“I wanted to do something original,” Scott says. “Computers will continue to revolutionize all types of businesses in the 21st century. Criminal justice has lagged behind the curve for quite a while and is just getting up to speed.”

Although criminal justice departments at many colleges and universities have contacted Scott to learn more about the course, as far as he knows, no other school has started a similar course. “Many criminal justice instructors are generalists, or they specialize in law enforcement, corrections, or the courts,” he says. “Not many know a lot about information technology, so other schools feel they have no one to teach a similar course.”

During the year Scott spent doing development research, he looked for an appropriate textbook but found that none existed. Instead, because FHSU gave him wide latitude in creating the course, he pulled together bits and pieces from various print and Internet sources. Once the course was established, Scott tried to make it easier for other schools to start a program by writing the textbook he could not find when he started out. “What I heard from publishers, over and over, was that it sounded interesting, but there is no market for it,” he says. “I still would like to write the text one day if the market is ever there.”

Anyone interested in finding out more about Information Age Technologies and the Justice System and its use of the JUSTNET website can view the syllabus online at www.fhsu.edu/polisci/faculty/scott/jus322.html or contact Dr. Robert Scott at rfscott@fhsu.edu.

JUSTNET: Even Better

The JUSTNET website plays a prominent role in the Information Age Technologies and the Justice System course because during his original research, Dr. Robert Scott found it easy to navigate and filled with important information. A recently completed redesign of JUSTNET provides even easier access to its material.

Bringing the new site live culminated a lengthy process of designing, analyzing, planning, and implementing the migration of data. While JUSTNET retains its familiar colors and logo, the site as a whole is more user friendly. In addition to working with webpage designers and programmers, JUSTNET coordinator Donna Engler also relied on feedback from National Institute of Justice and National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) system staff. The site also was brought into compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act regulations.

“The biggest change is we’ve reorganized the site so it’s even easier for people to find information,” Engler says. “A lot of the information took several mouse clicks to access. We decided we wanted to bring the meat of NLECTC up to the top.”

The previous version of the site, designed in 1998, used frames and had subpages that could be reached only from the main pages of particular areas. In the revised version, popup menus on the home page carry through on every subpage. For example, a user who wants to find information on the Mock Prison Riot can reach it from any page on the site.

Knowledgeable users will find that most of the information is still online, including *What’s New*, *About NLECTC*, and the *Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology News Summary*. Some features, such as publications and technology projects, have been incorporated into the new NLECTC Virtual Library. “Of course, we still have lots of links,” Engler says. “The site even includes instructions for importing the links into your own browser.”

The biggest change remains the addition of the NLECTC Virtual Library. This newly programmed database is divided into six information categories: funding sources, NLECTC services, publications, *TechBeat* articles, technology projects, and websites. Information in the database can be accessed in three different ways:

- The user can click on any information category. For example, clicking on the publications category results in a list of all publications in the database regardless of subject matter.
- The user can access information through any of 27 topic areas that range from biological and chemical defense to crime mapping to school safety. This option provides the user with appropriate records from each category. Thus, with one search, a user might find publications, services, and potential sources of funding relating to electronic crime.
- The user can type in a keyword. Again, this option provides the user with appropriate records from each of the information categories.

To access JUSTNET, the redesigned National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center system’s website, log on to www.justnet.org.

Surfing Lessons

Students taking the course Information Age Technologies and the Justice System at Fort Hays State University learn to find information on the Internet and navigate the JUSTNET website. However, many law enforcement and corrections professionals, particularly those who entered the field before the advent of the Internet, may have difficulty locating information online. That’s where Jack Harne and Michael DeChene, information specialists with the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) in Rockville, Maryland, come in.

“Almost every day our center takes a multitude of questions through phone calls and e-mail requests,” Harne says. “These folks could probably answer most of their questions themselves if they knew more about our website and the Internet. I love talking to people, but basically I just walk many of them through JUSTNET. I find that once I get them oriented, they’re on it all the time.

“I was a correctional practitioner before we had the Internet,” Harne says. “If I needed to check on a product, I had to call manufacturers and vendors and ask them to come and give presentations. The Internet makes this process so much more cost effective and time saving. The Internet really can make things simpler if you know how to use it.”

Harne and DeChene realized, however, that walking people individually through the site was helping only one person at a time. They needed to orient a number of law enforcement and correctional officers and administrators to the website who in turn could train others in their departments and agencies.

Harne and DeChene have put together a train-the-trainer class, in which they can teach up to 15 individuals how to navigate the Internet and use JUSTNET. These individuals then can pass on the information they learn to their coworkers.

The 8-hour class is conducted in a computer lab. Harne and DeChene use a software program to present information; they also give their students hands-on exercises and individual attention. They start with an overview of the Internet and its history, then discuss its different capabilities and how to use them efficiently. They also cover the use of search engines and provide suggested terms and phrases for conducting information searches. The training concludes with information on the NLECTC system and its JUSTNET website. Participants receive an outline, a diskette of “bookmarks” of more than 600 criminal justice-related websites, and some sample publications to use in their own training sessions.

Course content is based on frequently asked questions, as well as on research and Harne’s and DeChene’s own use of the site. Links on the bookmarks diskette include information on such subjects as grant funding, forensic sciences, manufacturers and products, security

threat groups and gangs, and colleges and universities that promote continuing education. Harne and DeChene will make changes to the curriculum as needed based on participant feedback. They hope to receive accreditation for the course, which can be presented as either a half-day or full-day session, so that it qualifies for continuing education credits.

Several jurisdictions in metropolitan Washington, D.C., already have participated in the class, and Harne has visited others to promote it. The class can be offered onsite if the department has access to a computer lab, or students can be sent to NLECTC for instruction. Plans call to expand the train-the-trainer program so it will be available at the other NLECTC system facilities and to add a self-training module on the website.

Anyone interested in setting up a train-the-trainer session should contact Jack Harne at NLECTC–National, 800–248–2742, or e-mail asknlectc@nlectc.org.

NLECTC–Rocky Mountain in Denver also offers a class for criminal justice practitioners called Internet Resources for Criminal Justice. The class teaches law enforcement and corrections personnel (not trainers) how to use the Internet. The class includes a brief history of the Internet, an introduction to searching, hands-on exercises, and extensive exploration of several criminal justice websites. For those who cannot travel to Denver to attend a class, a diskette with its website bookmarks is available at no charge.

For more information, contact Joe Russo, corrections specialist, at 800–416–8086, or e-mail jrusso@du.edu. (An indepth article on this class, “Where Users Aren’t Losers,” appeared in the Summer 1999 issue of TechBeat. Call 800–248–2742 to receive a copy. Or, access the article online through the JUSTNET website at www.justnet.org.)



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