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Assessing the Effectiveness of Reality-Based Focusing Events Across the Curriculum

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Abstract

A mythical Democratic-Republican National Convention (DRNC) was created as a focusing event which serves as the overarching theme for all newly redesigned courses in the graduate Criminal Justice Department at Saint Leo University. The study examines the effectiveness of focusing events in a graduate level curriculum. Students in the newly redesigned DRNC courses were surveyed. The results indicate that the overarching theme was perceived as being a valuable learning tool. The respondents indicated that the DRNC scenarios were highly realistic and would strengthen decision-making skills in their individual criminal justice careers. Somewhat surprising was the finding that the newly designed courses were perceived as not being any more interesting than the non-DRNC courses. Another concern was that some of the students did not seem to be aware that an overarching theme existed at all. This finding may indicate a weakness in the initial presentation of the concept to the students.

Introduction

The criminal justice field is comprised of many different disciplines including forensics, criminal investigations, critical incident management, criminal psychology, law, corrections & rehabilitation, and homeland security, just to name a few. The graduate criminal justice curriculum at Saint Leo University contains elements from all of these disciplines and tailors its instructional content to the needs of its student practitioners in the various specializations.

In the real world of criminal justice, nothing brings these disparate disciplines together better than the planning and execution of a large-scale event such as a political convention or a sporting event such as a Super Bowl. The planning of such complex large-scale events involves multiple stakeholders and a broad interdisciplinary approach. These large-scale special events serve as focusing events that bring together every aspect of criminal justice and emergency management fields (from A to Z) under a single umbrella.

The graduate criminal justice program at Saint Leo University is in the process of redesigning all its courses to include the broad overarching theme of a large-scale focusing event that ties all its disparate disciplines together. This was done with the recognition that, while there is a need for instruction in the various specializations, there also exists a need to tie all of these specializations with an interdisciplinary approach to problem solving. In the real world of criminal justice, no one can do it by themselves anymore: it requires all these moving parts working together.

A mythical Democratic-Republican National Convention (DRNC) was created as a focusing event to serve as the overarching theme for all newly redesigned courses for the graduate Criminal Justice Department at Saint Leo University. The new courses and their reality-based scenarios are designed by instructors who have had considerable experience in planning and executing similar large-scale special events. This brings a great deal of realism and legitimacy to the scenarios used in the courses.

This study examines the effectiveness of the use of a focusing event as the overarching theme in a graduate level curriculum that specifically targets student-practitioners in the criminal justice field. The study also examines the effectiveness of reality-based scenarios that are derived from the central overarching theme.

Background

The curriculum for the Criminal Justice Department at Saint Leo University focuses on providing education for learner-practitioners to apply in real life careers. The new practitioner-oriented curriculum that is being tested is based on the notion of a "focusing event" as an overarching theme that runs through all of the courses in the Criminal Justice program. This overarching theme has to do with the planning and executing of all the necessary aspects of a fictional "Democratic-Republican National Convention" (DRNC).

The premise behind establishing an overarching theme for the courses is that it will provide the students with a sense of cohesion, continuity, and interconnectedness whereby all the "moving parts" of criminal justice come together under a single umbrella. This overarching perspective of the criminal justice field is integral for the graduate-level student practitioner to attain a complete understanding of this multi-disciplined field.

The idea behind the incorporation of the DRNC focusing event into the graduate Criminal Justice program was conceived in 2011, during a brainstorming session with the department chair and two associate professors. One of the professors made a casual comment about how successful the past year's *Command School* had been with the use of a simulated planning of a Super Bowl event as the class project for the Critical Incident Management course. Command Schools are part of an outreach program, whereby Saint Leo University provides college level courses to various Sheriff's Offices in the Central Florida region.
This program has been a very successful partnership between the University and the various law enforcement agencies in the region. It has been so successful, that some of these agencies have formally codified into their procedural manuals that the successful completion of the Command School curriculum is a condition that must be met in order to attain promotion to higher rank within the organization. The students at these Command Schools are mid-managers ranging from the rank of sergeant to captain in their respective agencies.

The class project for the Critical Incident Management (CIM) course was to simulate the planning of all aspects of the security for a Super Bowl event in three Florida cities (Miami, Tampa, and Jacksonville). These three cities were chosen because all of them have hosted Super Bowl events in the past. Normally, it takes over a year, and hundreds of planners from many agencies and organizations to plan all aspects of a complex, multiple stakeholder large-scale special event such as a Super Bowl. But for the Command School's CIM course, the students were given only one week to simulate the planning. The class was divided into three groups, and each one

was assigned the planning of one of the three selected cities. On the last day of class, the groups had to do a PowerPoint presentation for critique by the rest of the class. The assignment covered 26 planning deliverables that needed to be achieved in order to pass the course.

The simulated planning of the security for a Super Bowl was well received by the students when it was first used in the 2009 Command School in Lake County, Florida. The focusing event theme changed to the Republican National Convention for the 2011 Command School in Sumter County, Florida, due to the actual event being scheduled for the Tampa area in 2012. Both times, the post-class student evaluations indicated that the idea had been warmly received as providing practical, real-life experiences for the student practitioners.

Positive feedback from the Command School students about the use of the Super Bowl and the Republican National Convention as focusing events for the simulated planning exercises in the CIM courses led to the idea of incorporating a focusing event across the entire graduate Criminal Justice curriculum. However, instead of a Super Bowl, or a Republican National Convention, the mythical DRNC theme was chosen as the focusing event for the graduate studies curriculum. The mythical DRNC would be very similar to an actual real life event, but would use fictional names of characters to avoid any privacy issues. The Miami-Dade/Broward County area was chosen for the mythical DRNC because of the professors' familiarity with the area and because they had played a role in the planning of prior Super Bowls and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Conference in years past.

The rationale for choosing the DRNC Convention as the overarching theme for courses of the Criminal Justice program is that these large-scale special events provide an ideal setting whereby most issues related to the criminal justice field can be addressed. These large-scale special events are complex and involve virtually all the stakeholders and issues associated with criminal justice.

Incorporating the DRNC Focusing Event into the Online Classroom

Once a decision was reached to incorporate the DRNC theme into all the graduate Criminal Justice courses at Saint Leo University, the pace of the implementation process was dictated by the existing re-design schedule. Courses at Saint Leo are redesigned every five years, or as needed. Since a new cycle was about to begin in 2011, implementation commenced immediately. A total of 30 courses were scheduled for redesign, commencing in the Summer 2 term in 2011, at a pace of two courses per 8-

week term, through the Fall 1 term in 2013. Individual instructors/subject matter experts were given autonomy to design the new courses as they deemed appropriate, as long as they met the general guidelines set forth by the Instructional Technology Department (ITD) of Saint Leo University.

The course design process usually involved three people: The lead instructor/subject matter expert (SME), the Instructional Designer from ITD, and a subject matter expert on large-scale special event planning, whose sole purpose was to design one DRNC scenario per course. The lead researcher of this study served as the DRNC subject matter expert (DRNC-SME).

The individual instructors/subject matter experts (SME) worked closely with the assigned ITD Instructional Designers to design the courses on the *eCollege* online platform. These courses are comprised of 8 Modules that are presented to the students online in an asynchronous basis over an 8 week time span. The responsibility for designing the majority of the course content lies with the main instructor/SME. The DRNC-SME was solely responsible for creating and infusing the DRNC scenario into the framework of the course design.

Usually, the DRNC scenario and related assignment were placed into the sixth or seventh Module of each course. Typically, the main course designer (instructor/SME) and the DRNC- SME would work closely together to ensure that the DRNC scenario for the course would align with the course objectives. The level of collaboration between the instructor/SME and the DRNC-SME varied from course to course. Some collaborated closely on ideas. Others took a less collaborative approach. Regardless of the level of collaboration between the main course designer and the DRNC-SME, 20 courses have been completed thus far as of the writing of this study. There was only one course in which all parties decided that there was no clear fit for the DRNC scenario. This one course was allowed to go forward without a DRNC component. All the others have been infused with a DRNC scenario, along with a graded assignment, usually a written essay that answers questions posed by the instructor.

The typical DRNC scenario is comprised of a short vignette involving fictional characters closely depicting real life persons who were involved in the planning of Super Bowl XLI in Miami, Florida from 2006 – 2007. The stories deal with the myriad of planning challenges that are faced by real life planners of these large-scale events. Some of the stories are loosely based on real life incidents, while others are totally fictional accounts of things that occurred in the one year time span leading up to the week of the mythical DRNC event. The stories range from relatively simple personnel

management issues to more complex terrorist plots. Some of the fictional characters appear in several vignettes. An effort was made to keep the characters consistent throughout the 20 stories. To help the designers and the students keep track of the characters, an organizational chart was created and provided to the students in all the courses.

In addition to creating the 20 vignettes, the DRNC-SME also wrote a script for an audio/visual overview of the entire DRNC concept and how it applies to every course in the graduate Criminal Justice program. This overview is intended to familiarize the students with the concept of the DRNC overarching theme across the entire curriculum.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the efficacy of the newly designed Graduate Studies in Criminal Justice program that incorporates the DRNC as a focusing event throughout the entire curriculum. It is intended only as an internal evaluation mechanism, and nothing more. The results of the study cannot be generalized to a broader population since a purposive, non-probabilistic sampling method was used. Nevertheless, important lessons can be learned from the results, which may be helpful to other academic institutions that are considering similar initiatives in their curricula.

Theoretical Basis

Criminal Justice courses prepare students for real-world experiences in which their decisions greatly impact the safety and future of themselves and the people around them. One challenge for instructors involves modeling "thinking like law enforcement personnel" while engaging students in activities that promote critical thinking and decision-making along with structured reflection upon these acts. Using reality-based focusing events (simulations) as a pedagogical strategy has been purported to strengthen student engagement and learning (Crow, 2008; Kaufman, 1998; Torney-Purta, 1990). Such strategies enable students to collaborate in developing frameworks for problem-solving and decision-making which optimize the development of discipline-specific skills.

Reality-based focusing events contextualize learning by creating authentic contexts for discovery. All students are invited to make connections and use prior knowledge in order to make sense of both the event and the tasks before them. In other words, students are catapulted into scenarios that engage them in constructing meaning and testing their theories and hypotheses with their peers. The simulation (or focusing event) provides a

common scenario, giving students both a narrative sequence and agency----in which they choose likely outcomes based on rich course content. R. Lindgren and R. MacDonald's research (2012) suggests that "the capacity of digital technologies to produce dynamic content and create detailed records of user pathways through this content makes them uniquely suited to support these two elements" (p. 344).

Classrooms are artificial settings at best; regardless of whether they are delivered on-ground or on-line. Students who engage in scaffolded simulations often better understand and empathize with the perspectives of many diverse stakeholders. Joyce P. Kaufman (1998) compared the impact of using simulations vs. training students as negotiators without the use of simulation within the field of international negotiation. She concluded that students better understand subtleties and issues more deeply when they have been immersed in simulation experiences. In addition, Kaufman's research suggests that three factors impact the efficacy of using simulations: 1) the instructor's ability to connect the simulation to prior learning within the course itself; 2) the instructor's facilitation of student debriefing and reflection throughout the simulation; and 3) the instructor's explicit planning for connecting to subsequent learning experiences. In order to maximize learning when using reality-based focused events, instructors must have clear goals for using this pedagogical strategy, coupled with sharing clear and explicit expectations with their students.

Kaufman's work suggests that reality based simulation learning works best when students make connections between prior learning, current learning, and subsequent learning. In other words, connecting the pieces of the puzzle makes more sense when it is done on a "before, during, and after" context. Therefore, a schema that takes into account the long view of student learning across the entire curriculum seems to be the best course of action to take.

The designers of the DRNC overarching theme sought to improve the learning outcomes for students in the Graduate Criminal Justice program, not just within the individual courses themselves as Kaufman suggests, but *between* courses, across the entire curriculum. This has been a challenge for the course designers because of the incremental manner that courses are designed and re-designed. Typically, existing courses are redesigned every five years to keep the content fresh. Given that teaching and learning at Saint Leo University, as it is with any higher learning institution, is an around-the-year proposition, it is not feasible to update and redesign all the courses at one time. Out of necessity, the course designers, instructors, and subject matter experts who design the courses have little choice but to do only a few courses at a time. It is simply not feasible to make a transition

whereby the DRNC theme could be introduced to all the courses simultaneously across the curriculum. Instead, the DRNC theme has been infused into the curriculum in bits and pieces. This study examines whether the incremental approach to the implementation of the DRNC theme has been effective.

Another fundamental challenge for designing the DRNC theme across the curriculum was that the students in the Saint Leo University Graduate Studies in Criminal Justice program were basically two very different types. There are the experienced *learner-practitioners* who are currently working in the criminal justice field, and the *non-practitioners*, who are seeking employment in the field, or who are considering changing careers into the criminal justice realm from another unrelated field. This creates a challenge whereby course designers have to be mindful of not infusing too much discipline-specific knowledge and jargon into the realistic scenarios so as not to intimidate, and possibly alienate the non-practitioner students. At the same time, the realistic scenarios need to conform to certain discipline-specific norms, or risk alienating the knowledgeable learner-practitioner students. Thus, the course designers need to find the "Goldilocks" sweet spot where reality-based scenarios are not too complex to intimidate the non-practitioner students, while at the same time, not too simplistic to alienate the learner-practitioner students. This study looks to assess whether the expectations of both the learner-practitioners, and the non-practitioner students are being met.

This study examines the efficacy of the DRNC focusing event as a learning schema *within* individual courses, as well as *between* courses and across the entire Criminal Justice curriculum. To that end, the following research questions were examined.

RQ_1: Will the overarching DRNC theme increase learner interest in the Criminal Justice curriculum?

RQ_2: Will the DRNC theme be perceived by learners *(non-practitioners)* and *learner-practitioners* to be relevant for careers in the criminal justice field?

RQ_3: Will the DRNC theme be perceived by learners *(non-practitioners)* and *learner-practitioners* as providing a realistic portrayal of what managers in the criminal justice field are faced with?

RQ_4: Will The DRNC theme be perceived by learners *(non-practitioners)* and *learner-practitioners* to be relevant for advancement in their specific careers in the criminal justice field.

Methodology

The sampling frame for this study is identified as all graduate students currently registered in the 2013 Spring 1 term in all Criminal Justice courses that have implemented the DRNC focusing event theme at Saint Leo University. The sample was purposive in that it targeted a specific sub-population of students in the graduate Criminal Justice program.

The data collection instrument for this study was a 12 question multiple choice survey administered to graduate-level students currently enrolled in online Criminal Justice courses at Saint Leo University. The survey also contained an open forum question that solicited written comments from the respondents.

The surveys were administered by the instructors to their students via the online *eCollege* platform used by Saint Leo University. Assurances were made to the students that participation was strictly voluntary. The participating course instructors were directed to collect the completed surveys, absent any identifying information and then forward them to the researchers. This was done in order to ensure the student's confidentiality and encourage honest feedback about the course content.

A total of 198 surveys were administered to students in nine different courses. Of these, 74 were completed and returned to the researchers, via the course instructors for a return rate of 37.4%. No extra credit or any other incentives were offered to the students to complete and return their surveys.

Results

Descriptive Data

Twenty nine percent of the students responding to this survey indicated that this was their first course in the graduate Criminal Justice program. The rest (71%) of the respondents were students who had taken anywhere from 1 to 10 or more graduate-level courses at Saint Leo, with the median number of courses taken at five (13%).

Since the DRNC concept was put into place on newly designed courses in late 2011, components of it have only been around for a little over a year. Not surprisingly, 44.3% of the respondents indicated that this was their first exposure to a DRNC designed course. The remaining 55.7% have taken at

least one previous DRNC course. Four respondents (5.7%) indicated that this was their fifth exposure to a DRNC designed course.

As to the question of how many students were considered as *learner-practitioners*, the results indicated 17.4% described themselves as being currently employed as ranking supervisors or managers in a criminal justice agency, while another 26.1% described themselves as currently occupying a non-supervisory position in a criminal justice agency. Combined, the learner-practitioners comprised 43.5% of the students responding to the survey.

Over half (50.7%) of the respondents described themselves as *non-practitioners* in the field. Nearly a quarter (24.6%) of these students are actively seeking employment with a criminal justice agency, and another 26.1% are currently considering a career change to the criminal justice field. The remaining 5.8% of the respondents indicated that they have no interest in entering the criminal justice field.

In response to the question, "Which statement best describes the reason for seeking a graduate degree in criminal justice?" 21.1% indicated that they sought to improve their post-retirement opportunities, while 33.8% indicated that their reason for seeking a graduate degree was to gain higher rank or better position within their criminal justice agency.

Another 33.8% of the respondents indicated that they hoped to use their graduate degree to gain employment in a criminal justice agency. The remaining 11.3% were looking to improve their general knowledge about criminal justice issues (8.5%), or were seeking employment (2.8%) in a non-criminal justice organization. The emerging pattern from these results indicates a fairly even split between *learner-practitioners* who are seeking advancement in the criminal justice field, versus *non-practitioners* who are seeking employment on a criminal justice organization.

Table 1-1 shows the breakdown of sub-disciplines that the respondents indicated as their area of focus.

Table 1-1
Breakdown by Criminal Justice Sub-Discipline

Criminal Justice Disciplines	Responses	Percentage
Forensics	10	14.7%
Criminal investigations	8	11.8%
Critical incident management	6	8.8%
Psychology	2	2.9%
Law	2	2.9%
Corrections & Rehabilitation	5	7.4%
Homeland Security	12	17.7%
Other	8	11.8%
Multiple	15	22.0%
N =	68	100%

Research Questions

RQ$_1$: Will the overarching DRNC theme increase learner interest in the Criminal Justice curriculum?

There was no clear indication from the data that the DRNC theme increased learner interest in the Criminal Justice curriculum. A little over forty three percent (43.3%) of respondents indicated that the DRNC designed courses were equally as interesting as the non-DRNC courses. The same number (43.3%) indicated that the DRNC themed courses were much more, or slightly more interesting than the regular courses. A small number of respondents (7.4%) rated the DRNC themed courses as less interesting than the non-DRNC courses.

RQ$_2$: Will the DRNC theme be perceived by learners *(non-practitioners)* and *learner-practitioners* to be relevant for careers in the criminal justice field?

The data indicate that the DRNC theme was perceived by both *non-practitioners* and *learner-practitioners* to be relevant for careers in the criminal justice field. There was not much difference between these two groups.

Out of 40 respondents who described themselves as *non-practitioners*, 65% indicated that the DRNC theme was very relevant to the criminal justice

field. Another 27.5% indicated that the DRNC theme was "somewhat" relevant to the criminal justice field. Combined, these two groups accounted for 92.5% of the non-practitioner subgroup. Only 7.5% indicated that the theme was not very relevant to the criminal justice field.

The results for the 30 respondents who described themselves as currently working in the criminal justice field (*learner-practitioners*) were similar to the results of the non-practitioners. Seventy percent (70%) of respondents indicated that the DRNC theme was very relevant to the criminal justice field. Another 20% indicated that the theme was "somewhat" relevant. Only 10% stated that it was not relevant to the field.

RQ$_3$: Will the DRNC theme be perceived by learners *(non-practitioners)* and *learner-practitioners* as providing a realistic portrayal of what managers in the criminal justice field are faced with?

The data suggest that both *non-practitioners* and *learner-practitioners* considered the DRNC theme to be a realistic portrayal of what managers in the criminal justice field are faced with.

Out of 40 *non-practitioner* respondents, 64.1% indicated that the DRNC scenario in their particular course provided a very realistic perspective of what managers in the criminal justice field are faced with. Another 25.6% indicated that the scenario provided a "somewhat" realistic perspective. Of the 40 respondents, 10.3% indicated that the scenario was not a very realistic portrayal of what managers in the criminal justice field are faced with.

Similarly, 55% of *non-practitioners* stated that the DRNC theme in the entire Criminal Justice curriculum provided a very realistic portrayal. Another 37.5% of non-practitioners indicated that the DRNC theme provided a "somewhat" realistic perspective of what managers in the criminal justice field are faced with. The remaining 7.5% indicated that the DRNC theme was not a realistic indicator of what managers in the criminal justice field are faced with.

Out of the 30 respondents who described themselves as *learner-practitioners*, 63.3% indicated that the scenario in their particular course provided a very realistic perspective of what managers in the criminal justice field are faced with. Another 30% indicated that the scenario provided a "somewhat" realistic perspective. Of the 30 respondents, 6.7% indicated

that the scenario was not a very realistic portrayal of what managers in the criminal justice field are faced with.

Similarly, 53.3% of *learner-practitioners* stated that the DRNC theme in the entire Criminal Justice curriculum provided a very realistic portrayal. Another 40% of non-practitioners indicated that the DRNC theme provided a "somewhat" realistic perspective of what managers in the criminal justice field are faced with. The remaining 6.7% indicated that the DRNC theme was not a realistic indicator of what managers in the criminal justice field are faced with.

RQ$_4$: Will The DRNC theme be perceived by learners *(non-practitioners)* and *learner-practitioners* to be relevant for advancement in their specific careers in the criminal justice field?

The data suggest that both *non-practitioners* and *learner-practitioners* perceived the DRNC theme to be relevant to their specific careers in criminal justice. Not surprisingly, the responses from the experienced *learner-practitioners* were much more definitive on this question than those by the *non-practitioner* respondents.

Out of 40 *non-practitioner* respondents, 30% indicated that the DRNC scenario in their particular course was very relevant to their future career in criminal justice. Another 35% indicated that the scenario was "somewhat" relevant to their future career in criminal justice. Of the 40 respondents, 35% indicated that the scenario was not relevant to their future career in criminal justice.

Similarly, 35% of *non-practitioners* stated that the DRNC theme in the entire Criminal Justice curriculum was very relevant to their future career in criminal justice. Another 37.5% of non-practitioners indicated that the DRNC theme was "somewhat" relevant to their future career in criminal justice. The remaining 27.5% indicated that the DRNC theme was not was very relevant to their future career in criminal justice.

Out of 30 *learner-practitioner* respondents, 43.3% indicated that the DRNC scenario in their particular course was very relevant for advancement in their criminal justice career. Another 43.3% indicated that the scenario was "somewhat" relevant to their advancement in their career. Of the 30 respondents, 13.3% indicated that the scenario was not relevant to their advancement in their criminal justice career.

Similarly, 51.7% of *learner-practitioners* stated that the DRNC theme in the entire Criminal Justice curriculum was very relevant to their advancement in their criminal justice career. Another 37.9% of learner-practitioners indicated that the DRNC theme was "somewhat" relevant to their advancement in their criminal justice career. The remaining 10.4% indicated that the DRNC theme was not was very relevant to their career advancement.

Discussion

The results indicate that both the overarching theme throughout the graduate Criminal Justice curriculum and the individual course scenarios were perceived as being realistic and valuable learning tools. The respondents indicated that the DRNC theme based scenarios were highly realistic and more importantly, would help them get hired, or get promoted in their individual criminal justice careers.

As expected, the students who described themselves as currently working in the criminal justice field *(learner-practitioners)* were slightly more positive than non-practitioners in all aspects of the DRNC theme as it pertains to interest, realism, and impact on their individual careers. It stands to reason that those students who are currently working in the field would understand and appreciate the complexity of the stakeholder environment that the DRNC scenarios are based on.

In general, most of the comments from the students were very positive. One non-practitioner student stated, "The discussions and scenarios, such as the DRNC scenario, offered in this course were invaluable in providing perspective. There are many ways to look at issues that are not always black and white, and this class did a good job at exposing and exploring those different perspectives. I will walk away from this class with a lot of different views than I had prior to the class."

Two other non-practitioner students stated, "I thought the scenario was very relevant to criminal justice and accurately portrayed what supervisors face," and "the DRNC themes are a great way to put yourself in a role you might have to face at some point in your career in criminal justice. While some themes skimp on details, they do provide a great opportunity to really think about various situations. They provide the hands-on experience without the hands-on."

Yet another non-practitioner student offered the following, "I felt the DRNC theme provided a very beneficial perspective to complicated topics that

would otherwise have been presented without any real world context. This context allowed me to get a better handle on what I was learning and helped solidify the information in my mind. Despite having only used the DRNC theme in my current class, I think using it across the CRJ curriculum is an excellent idea and wish I had the opportunity to use it in my past classes."

Comments from learner-practitioner students currently working in the criminal justice field included the following:

- "The theme provides each student the opportunity to review material associated with the DRNC and use critical thinking skills to develop and implement action plans if they were the person in charge of the event. Also, it provided me with the opportunity to look at several related terrorist attacks and develop a common concept of how these terror groups plan and carry out attacks."

- "The scenario was very real in terms of ethics and the law in the criminal justice field. The leadership portion of the scenario was very real in that it encompasses duties and responsibilities and how it affects the overall position from top rank to bottom in the overall scope of value. The scenario is real in that it can happen any day in any large gathering. The politics, the public policy and perception, the internal struggles with the powers involved in decision making and the little people's perception on how their work matter. This is much better than no scenario at all and just studying theories. This theory application at its best."

- "It gives a feeling of real life scenario and could be used in several ways to promote problem solving. Make the student think and apply not just theorize."

- "My focus is on research and analysis to make the Sheriff's Office I work at more efficient and effective. Scenarios in general and the DRNC theme in specific are good for introducing topics in criminal justice, the way they are often approached, and more options on how they could be approached. While the actual scenarios used may or may not be directly applicable to my goals for criminal justice education, they enable discussion of relevant topics and how they apply."

- "I am a federal law enforcement agent and the DRNC theme is relevant to my profession in that we conduct undercover activities from time to time in furtherance of investigations. My agency does

not do "deep" undercover due to the risks. However, I appreciate the ethical issues posed in the scenario. I believe the issues in the DRNC scenario accurately reflect issues that law enforcement management has to address. It's a good theme full of ethical issues that force thoughtful consideration on the part of the student as well."

- "Most students enrolled in SLU's graduate program will most likely not be involved with high level events such as the DRNC. They will however be exposed to managing budgets, prioritizing expenditures, and dealing with events requiring multiple jurisdiction interaction and cooperation. In today's environment graduate students will most likely be dealing with illegal immigration situations, increased violent crimes, responses to natural and man-made disasters, and internet crimes and identification theft based on technology advancements and a crumbling economy. As a retired Naval Officer, I've been extensively trained in Law Enforcement, Physical Security, Antiterrorism, Force Protection and Port Security. I've been the Chief-of-Police for a 300-400 person military police force and have provided security for the President of the United States, Congressmen, Senators, countless 4 star Admirals and Generals, and have established security for a number of top-name entertainers who have performed concerts at military bases. I believe the DRNC scenario is realistic although it requires some modifications as mentioned in previous survey submissions. Concerning to me, based on previous classmate's content submission, is an inability to articulate thoughts and communicate coherently in writing."

- "This class (was) very useful. It provides a good start for those who are taking a leadership position and it can also improve a person' leadership role through their career and personal life."

Not all the comments were positive. One non-practitioner student put it this way, "The DRNC theme gets redundant and boring after several courses. It's the same discussion time after time, gets tiresome."

The perspective of one experienced learner-practitioner was the following, "I apologize for the negative comments on the DRNC Theme, but unless you are in a jurisdiction that an event of this magnitude is being planned or at a very high rank in your jurisdiction the probabilities of this information being useful to you is very slim. I do not feel that many will experience an event of this involvement. I did experience the DNC in 2012 as my jurisdiction did host it. While terrorism was a concern most of the planning efforts was toward the protestors and Anarchist threat."

Somewhat surprising was the finding that there was no great sense that the newly designed courses were any more interesting than the older non-DRNC courses. Another concern raised by some of the students was that theme was starting to get repetitious after several classes. That is probably because many of the scenarios used shared resource documents that the students may have to look at more than one time. While repetition can be a good thing, for some students it may lead to disinterest.

Implications of the Study

While this study was meant primarily to gauge the effectiveness of the DRNC overarching theme across the curriculum for the Saint Leo University Graduate Criminal Justice program, some of the lessons can be carried over to other learning institutions that are considering implementing similar concepts into their course design.

One of the lessons learned that can be imparted to other learning institutions has to do with the manner in which the overarching theme was "rolled out" to the students in bits and pieces, rather than as a cohesive whole. In retrospect, it would have been a good idea to have completed the re-design of all the courses before any of them were implemented. It would have been better for the students to see the beginning, the middle, and the end of the entire overarching theme, rather than being exposed to it in a seemingly random manner. As it turned out, different students were exposed to the DRNC scenarios at different points of their studies, and it gave the appearance of being a series of loosely related, but slightly disjointed stories.

Earlier in this paper, we discussed the importance of tying in the "before, during, and after" so that the student could make connections between all of his or her courses. Connecting the pieces of the puzzle makes more sense when it is done in real or realistic context. While the desired learning outcome is for the students to synthesize the lessons learned from all the courses by connecting the dots, the incremental manner in which the courses have been put into operation has been a definite detriment to this goal. Some students are being exposed to the DRNC theme halfway through their studies. It is as if students are jumping on a train that is already moving at 55 mph. Some students adapt very well to this, but others do not. Hopefully, the newer students who are being exposed to the DRNC theme from the very first course they take in the graduate program will have a better understanding of the "big picture" and what the purpose of the overarching theme is.

In the interim, during the gradual transition from non-DRNC to DRNC courses, the curriculum and course designers need to do a better job of showing the students the big picture so that they can have a better roadmap and to better understand the purpose of the DRNC concept.

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