

Episode 11: Exploring Saint Leo's Doctor of Criminal Justice Program

Speaker 1:

Saint Leo 360, a 360 degree overview of the Saint Leo University community.

Greg Lindberg:

Welcome to another episode of the Saint Leo 360 podcast. This is your host Greg Lindberg. And on this episode, I'm pleased to be joined by Bill Elders, who is a graduate enrollment counselor here at Saint Leo University. Bill, thanks for joining us.

Bill Elders:

It's great to be with you, Greg.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely. So, today, we are talking about the DCJ program, otherwise known as the Doctor of Criminal Justice. And first off, Bill, I'd like to delve into the program. And then, we'll get into your background and kind of how you got into this role as a enrollment counselor, and specifically working on the DCJ.

Greg Lindberg:

So, first off, I did want to mention that this is one of three doctoral programs that we have at Saint Leo. The other two being our DBA, which is our Doctor of Business Administration program. And then, also the EDD, which is the Doctor of Education. And this DCJ program was launched in the fall of 2018. So first off, Bill, let's talk about the long history that Saint Leo has had as far as criminal justice programs go. I know we've offered criminal justice for quite a while, and I feel like it's kind of our bread and butter program here at Saint Leo.

Bill Elders:

I guess you could say our criminal justice programs here at Saint Leo has been one of the staples that's been here for a very long time, going all the way back to when the academy was held here at Saint Leo for law enforcement professionals. And then progressed on through the years up until 2004, when we started the master's program. And then, the online version of that in 2008. And we've been going strong ever since, and then launched this program for DCJ in 2018.

Greg Lindberg:

I see, interesting. And talk about kind of the reasons behind offering a doctoral program in criminal justice here.

Bill Elders:

Well, for a very long time, we were able to put a lot of our military and law enforcement through their master's programs. And we saw a need for developing a doctor of criminal justice program. Importantly, we did not want just another PhD criminal justice program out there. We wanted something that was practitioner based, and that would literally give our law enforcement professionals the opportunity to finish a doctorate, and put with that their experience that they've had along the way, and better contribute to the law enforcement and criminal justice world.

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Greg Lindberg:

Right, no, I see. And let's talk about who this program is really geared toward. Who are we targeting as far as this DCJ program?

Bill Elders:

Well, interestingly enough, it's been kind of a large pool of people we've been able to reach with this program that it has been applicable to their profession. Some of the folks are leaders at different training facilities across the nation. Others are instructors at either the community state colleges, or even universities. Some are leaders at police academies, substance abuse centers. We're starting to see some folks coming to the program from facilities that deal with a lot on the social work side of things as well. So, they're getting out of that some important information they need to help them in their careers. Also, a lot of them are wanting to teach outside of where they work and continue a second career, if you will, after they retire, and talking to folks going through the criminal justice degrees and their education, and being able to contribute to that pool of people that are in need of education.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. So, definitely quite a variety of individuals coming to us for this program.

Bill Elders:

Correct.

Greg Lindberg:

Now, from what I understand, there are two tracks within this program. Can you talk about those two tracks?

Bill Elders:

Yes. And that's one of the things I really like about the DCJ program is that it does have an education track, as well as a Homeland security track. The education track, it starts out... Well, let me put it this way, these tracks are the last three courses that students will take in their core courses for this particular program. And it starts out the education track with talking about instructional technology. If there were ever a time that we need to be teaching students how to develop their skills as professors, or instructors on the technical side of things it's today. And this course it deals with a lot of those things. Instructional design, some of the technologies that we're using in the classroom today from white boards and, interestingly enough, the technologies that we're using online, whether it's Blackboard, or we're using D2L, or Canvas, or some of the instructional design platforms that are out there.

Bill Elders:

Some of these technologies are allowing us to put into use things like gaming, which is going to be a very important to some of the new students that are into these programs today. And being able to use these platforms to better educate them, and something they can adapt to, and already are pretty proficient in. And make learning more not as a chore, but as something that they can really love.

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Greg Lindberg:

I see, very interesting. And I did want to mention this is an online program. But I think one of the unique aspects of it is the fact that there are a few residencies built into the program where students actually can get together and in-person meet faculty members, fellow students. Could you talk about that some?

Bill Elders:

Yes, it is an online program. The majority of it is going to be online, just like our master's programs work. However, what we wanted to do is to have a program set up, so that students could really feel part of what Saint Leo has to offer, the culture that is here. And being able to see our main campus when students begin the program, they travel here to Saint Leo, Florida. And when they're here, they're able to see what we already know. That it's a beautiful campus, it has a lot of resources here available to students, whether it's the library that is online, the databases that we have where they can do the majority of their research for each one of the courses that they go through. They can also see that we have onsite career services that can help them.

Bill Elders:

A lot of our students have already finished their career, or may be at the end of their careers, but there are some that are coming into this particular program for DCJ that are looking to launch out into the law enforcement world, whether it's on the federal side, or the local, or even state side. But the first time they come, the first day as an orientation day. They'll spend three days of lecture here with one of our professors. And then, about six months later, they travel to our Newport News Education Center in Newport News, Virginia. And they'll go through a course called Qualitative Research Methods. The last time they get together, or will ever have to travel for this particular program is about two and a half years into the program. And they'll travel to the Atlanta Education Center and go through a course there called Law Policy and Social Order.

Bill Elders:

Importantly, they'll see that Saint Leo is not just confined to a physical campus here in Saint Leo, Florida, but we, literally, have multiple education centers across the East Coast of the United States. And even all the way out to the West Coast of the United States. And see that we have many resources, and a lot of folks in those areas are already familiar with Saint Leo as they've finished their master's degree at our centers. Some hybrid courses that they've taken along the way have got them used to that. But we're hoping to allow folks to see who we are, and how vast we are, and able to help them through their career.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Very nice. Really gives them a full, like you said, exposure to not only university campus, but some of our education centers. And kind of gives them that broad view of the university, which I think is really, really neat.

Bill Elders:

Yes, it is.

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Greg Lindberg:

Let's dive into some of the topics covered within this DCJ program. I know you mentioned the two tracks. What are some of the general courses that a student in either track would be taking, and some of the topics covered?

Bill Elders:

Well, Greg importantly in this particular program, students will start out with a leadership course. And one of the things that we want to emphasize no matter where a person is in their law enforcement career, whether they're at the beginning of it or at the end of it, leadership is paramount to everything that is done. Here, in the leadership course, they'll go talk about different models of leadership and theories. Then, they'll go into a course called Critical Incident Management. Anything to do with law enforcement there's always going to be a critical incident somewhere at some point. And being able to handle that and be able to organize that is important.

Bill Elders:

They'll talk about international perspectives in law enforcement. Not everybody across the world and internationally does law enforcement the same way that we do. I think we feel that we do it better than anyone else, but it's great to hear different perspectives and learn from others. There may be some things that they do better than we do, and we can adopt those things into our law enforcement agencies.

Bill Elders:

Criminology theory, human resource management, juvenile justice, some of the social trends that are impacting our communities today, we'll cover that. We've just changed one of our courses from data analytics to a course that's called Action Research. The action research design will help students being able to better identify issues, whether it's in their agencies, communities, no matter what level it is, whether it's on the local, state, federal, national level, international level. But to identify some of those issues, and being able to put that along with their coursework and better help them to develop their dissertation towards the end of the program.

Bill Elders:

They'll also talk about correctional philosophies, global extremism, migration, law policy, and social frameworks will be covered throughout the program helping students to develop the ideas that they have for their dissertation and topic. And, at the end of the day, being able to put all of those ideas together and develop a very successful dissertation that they can do their oral defense with.

Greg Lindberg:

Oh, wow. That is quite a curriculum, quite a mix of courses. And sounds like a lot of practicality as well within the curriculum.

Bill Elders:

And I think that's, what's important about this. All of our professors here, I'm not aware of any that have less than 20 years experience in law enforcement. They've worked in all kinds of divisions throughout their law enforcement career. And they bring that to the classroom, whether it's online or in person at

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the residency requirements. But they bring that to the student and the student in this program, I think, they are very fortunate to be able to have that expertise behind this coursework.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. No doubt. And I know just, in general, we're so lucky to have so many experienced faculty members that have that practical experience they can bring to the classroom.

Bill Elders:

Absolutely.

Greg Lindberg:

I know you did mention the dissertation, which I know is kind of a cornerstone of most doctoral programs. Let's talk a little bit about that.

Bill Elders:

The dissertation is one of those things that I think all doctoral students, they fear and they have a lot of anxiety going into that. And so, one of the things that Dr. Diemer, who is the program director, and the faculty has wanted to do is to remove some of that anxiety out of the way. And let students know that it's not going to be an academic hazing. It's a process that all students go through in a doctoral program, but we want to make it one where they can be challenged. And, at the same time, know that they can be successful.

Bill Elders:

And so, the first course in the dissertation, students, they're going to write their chapter one, two, and three, they'll cover their introduction, problem statement, purpose of their study, literature review, which is the meat of their paper that they're going to be writing their dissertation. Their research question, they'll deal with the methodology. The draft of their design, and then their dissertation proposal.

Bill Elders:

The second course is they're going to develop and submit their proposal to the institutional review board. And that's something they got to be very good at. And it's got to be clear and concise, and on point because you want that to pass. The longer that you go through that process, it's not good. We want to make sure that everything is ready to go there.

Bill Elders:

So, the third course they'll continue to work on that, get that approval from the IRB, and then start their data collection, and analysis of that data for their project. And in the last course, the fourth course, this is when they're going to bring everything together, they're going to bring all five chapters together. They're going to bring all of their data together. They're going to put together their manuscript, and get ready for the oral defense. Sometimes I chuckle a little bit at that because it seems like we do all of this work for all of these three years and about four months that it takes to go through this program, and the dissertation oral defense will take about 45 minutes to an hour to complete. But everybody's looking forward to that, I'm sure.

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Greg Lindberg:

Right, yeah. And I do find it interesting that the dissertation is built into the courses rather than just being one course, or kind of the final capstone. There are those steps leading up to it, which I think can be helpful.

Bill Elders:

Exactly. That's one thing, through a doctoral program students want to be working towards that end goal constantly, and consistently from start to finish.

Greg Lindberg:

Yeah. That's a wonderful option that we have there. Let's talk about careers. Obviously with, say, a traditional college student, they may get a degree, and hope that that degree can help them launch a new career. Or just a career in general, say, if they're a traditional college age student. As far as doctoral programs, though, obviously students in these programs probably have quite a few years of experience within some type of discipline. And so, with this particular doctoral program, what would you say upon completion of it, what types of career opportunities would be available?

Bill Elders:

Well, with a doctoral program, the majority of the students going through the program are looking forward to retiring from active law enforcement, or even active military and teaching. For most of the folks into the program, they're retiring early 50s. And so, sitting on the couch for the next 25 years is just not an option. They've been very active through their life. They've got a lot of experience. So, they're wanting to take that experience, put it with formal education, and being able to teach and contribute back to the criminal justice profession.

Bill Elders:

So, we're going to see a lot of professors come out of this program. There are folks that are looking to excel in their own career choice that they've made. Some are looking to be executives in whether it's non-profits or for-profit organizations. Administrators at universities, they can certainly benefit from having their doctorate degree. And if they're wanting to stay around the criminal justice profession this will be an excellent program for them. Even if they want to branch out a little bit it's still going to give them some leadership courses, and it's going to give them some other things that they can use as administrators in universities or colleges as well.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. And then kind of on that note, what are some examples of some of the students currently enrolled in the program, as far as what they're currently doing? Is it primarily those that are active within law enforcement?

Bill Elders:

The majority of them are going to be active, or getting ready to retire from law enforcement, and ready to launch their next area of their life, which is going to be probably teaching. However, we do have some retired military, or military that are still active waiting to finish their careers. The last cohort that we had, we had one gentleman that had just finished just over 20 years in the military, and wanting to get his doctorate degree. He had two master's degrees, and wanted to just continue to pursue education. And

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interestingly enough, we've had some from all branches of the military in the program, all different facets of law enforcement. And we've had folks from the corporate security world wanting to get their doctorate degree to enhance their own position in their companies. So, also, it's something that private investigators are looking at as well, because they do a lot of consulting work, as well as the private investigation end of things. So, consulting is important. It's important to the private sector, and also to the public sector.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Very well said. Now, as far as just graduate criminal justice programs in general, and even doctoral programs, from my understanding, there are very few doctoral programs specifically within criminal justice aside from, say, a PhD in criminal justice. Can you kind of talk about the current landscape, maybe trends within criminal justice at the graduate level out there?

Bill Elders:

Well, the trend is today that I believe society, in general, is looking for a workforce in criminal justice that is better educated. Today, we have jurors that are better educated than they've ever been before. We have a society, today, that's probably better educated than it's ever been in its history. At the same time, I think law enforcement has got a rise to that level as well.

Bill Elders:

The day is gone when we can get by with just a high school education, or possibly even an AA. So, we're trying to encourage students to go back if they're wanting to move through their careers and look at promotions later on, and look at being able to lead an organization they're going to have to have the formal education to go along with that. For the majority of cities, it's no longer the little office on the corner somewhere. But it's multimillion dollar organizations that are needing to be run, and run effectively and efficiently. And the only way that happens is through education and learning how to do that.

Bill Elders:

So the trend, I would say, in the landscape today is pushing our law enforcement professionals to complete their degrees wherever they are, and to continue to pursue that, the doctoral programs. And I've said this, if I've said it once I've probably said it 1000 times. Leaders, we can't wait for leaders to be born anymore. Things happen too fast today. Society is moving too fast. Trends are moving too fast. We have to be able to have people in place that have the degrees, that have the education to mentor people from the time that they start their career in law enforcement, to when they finish their career, mold them to be the leaders of tomorrow. Just like everybody else, I'm growing older and everybody else in the profession, they all grow older, they have to have somebody that can fill those shoes. And to do that they're going to have to be well-trained.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Very well said. Now, I did want to delve a little bit into your background. I know prior to Saint Leo, you were definitely involved in criminal justice yourself. If you could talk about your career and kind of the positions and accomplishments that you've had.

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Bill Elders:

Okay, I'd be glad to do that. Well, first of all, I wasn't always in law enforcement. Many, many years ago, I spent a few years working in a church services and building churches when I was very young. And later on, I got into the private sector a little bit working as a machinist. Moved to Florida and decided that law enforcement was for me. And so, got started working in law enforcement for the Florida Department of Corrections, and working in a state prison here in Florida.

Greg Lindberg:

Wow.

Bill Elders:

Went from that to the county jail here in Pasco County, and decided that I didn't know if I wanted to spend my entire career locked in more than most inmates will ever see. And decided to transfer to the road. Once I did that, I had the opportunity and the privilege of serving the citizens here in Pasco County as a patrol deputy, and then working in community policing. That has always been really where my heart's been is working with the community and talking to them on the street about what affects them, what's impacting them. Went from that to being a corporal on the road. And then, as a detective in property crimes. Went from that to vice and narcotics. Worked there for about three and a half years. And went back to property crimes. And then out to the road as a sergeant. And ended up leaving as a sergeant about four years ago now. And came to Saint Leo to finish my degrees. And look forward to teaching eventually.

Greg Lindberg:

Wow, very nice. What would you say you learned in all of those criminal justice roles that you might be able to relay to a prospective student or someone interested in criminal justice, whether it's a leadership position or maybe just starting out entry level wise?

Bill Elders:

Well, I would say that, especially when everybody's young, everybody is thinking about just working and making money, and taking care of the family. If they can spare the time to go back to school, do it while you're young. It's much easier. Although, it seems harder it is much easier to get those things done, so that when you get to the end of your career, and you will, everybody gets there. And to have something else to do and continue to contribute there is always life after law enforcement. It takes a while to figure that out, even after you retire, and not feel the adrenaline rush, I guess, all the time.

Bill Elders:

But get that education, build that foundation while you're young, it'll help you to move through your career to be able to excel, to be able to understand legal issues that come up, and whether it's the legal issues of dealing with criminals on the street, or it's the legal issues of running that organization, the education that you will gain, especially here at Saint Leo, with the practitioner based courses that we have, and those folks that are teaching these courses, who've been there and done that, and walked in your shoes, and been where you're at and they've felt what you feel it's important to have that.

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Bill Elders:

And what I would tell them is to take advantage of it. Take advantage of every minute of it and get it done. And the rest will be history.

Greg Lindberg:

Yeah, that's great advice. And I'm sure you can also relate to prospective students that you talk to in your role, as a graduate enrollment counselor, just having had that background within criminal justice.

Bill Elders:

Absolutely. I have a lot of students call me and they're a little apprehensive at first because they don't know who they're talking to. They're not quite sure which route to go. The moment that I tell them that I've been where they are, I've felt what they feel, and I understand when they're talking about deciding whether to pursue this degree now, or wait until they retire it's almost as if you can hear the wall come down. And their apprehension goes away a little bit knowing that they're talking to someone that understands them.

Bill Elders:

Too many times in law enforcement we think nobody understands, nobody hears us. But I can guarantee them here, at Saint Leo, we understand, we know where you're coming from. And we definitely know what you need when it comes to education.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. All right. Well, I definitely want to thank you, Bill, for your time. And I think this has been a very informative conversation. And I hope everyone out there learned a lot about our Doctor of Criminal Justice program here at Saint Leo University. So, thank you Bill so much.

Bill Elders:

Thank you very much, Greg. It's been my pleasure

Speaker 1:

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