

Episode 38: Catching Up with 2 Doctor of Criminal Justice Students

Speaker 1:

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

Greg Lindberg:

Welcome to another edition of the Saint Leo 360 podcast. This is your host here with you as usual, Greg Lindberg. On this episode of the Saint Leo 360 podcast, we are speaking about our Doctor of Criminal Justice Program here at Saint Leo University. And I should mention that we launched this program back in the fall of 2018, and this is one of three doctoral programs that Saint Leo University currently offers. In addition to this DCJ, we also have the DBA, the Doctor of Business Administration, as well as the EDD program, the Doctor of Education.

Greg Lindberg:

So on this episode, we have two current students in this Doctor of Criminal Justice program joining us. And first off, I'd like to welcome John Bennett to the podcast. John, thanks for joining us.

John Bennett:

Thanks for having me.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely. And in addition to John, we also have Todd Hand with us. Todd, how's it going today?

Todd Hand:

It's going well Greg. Thanks for the invitation.

Greg Lindberg:

Definitely, looking forward to diving in here and kind of chatting about both of your backgrounds as well as your experience in the program and how it has already benefited you guys, in addition to kind of future pursuits.

Greg Lindberg:

So let's go ahead and start off here, and we'll start with John. John, if you could just give us a little bio about yourself in terms of your age if you don't mind, location, and family?

John Bennett:

Oh absolutely. So I'm in my late 50s, I'll be 58 in the middle of June. In Tampa, actually worked for the city since 1984 with a small break after 30 years and then back in my current role. And I've got I guess in modern era terms a large family. We have four children. My youngest just graduated high school Monday night. And then we have one at University of Florida, one that just graduated from Saint Leo with an education degree. And then our oldest, she was in Navy intelligence and now raising her own family.

Greg Lindberg:

Nice, and very cool that you also have an alum in the family as well, another alum.

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John Bennett:

Yes, very pleased with that journey.

Greg Lindberg:

Excellent. And then Todd, how about you?

Todd Hand:

I'm just about the age of John, and I have a daughter who is married and lives in Maryland. I just became a grandfather for the first time about three months ago, pretty excited about that. And I am excited to be here.

Greg Lindberg:

Excellent. Congrats on becoming a grandfather.

Todd Hand:

Thank you.

Greg Lindberg:

So in terms of your careers, let's dive a little further into those. John, let's go to you. Talk to me about your work history. I know you mentioned longtime involvement in terms of criminal justice. Talk to me about some of the roles you've had over the years, and then we can get into your current role.

John Bennett:

Well my first brush with government service, or public service, happened in my summer of my high school graduation year. I graduated from high school in Pasco County, and I was offered a baseball scholarship locally. Actually, it was the inaugural scholarships for junior college to play baseball, and like any other rising student, you needed money.

John Bennett:

So I ended up working for Pinellas County Parks and Rec, and did maintenance over the summer. And I really enjoyed that, and then of course I did the college here. And then, my financial support, not so much the college because that was all paid for, but the wraparound things that you need to attend college kind of disappeared overnight, and I needed to change my college outlook.

John Bennett:

So I ended up taking a full-time job at Pinellas County to do the same line of work, and one of my best friends who also got a baseball scholarship was able to stay on track, but then he was moving to Tampa to go to USF for his junior and senior year. So I ended up room-mating with him, and continued to work in Pinellas County.

John Bennett:

And I decided to start taking adult classes at USF to keep my college career moving, and there was a job fair, and that job fair was recruiting for the Tampa Police Department. And I figured at that point in time

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in the early to mid-'80s that right out of high school, and at that time you didn't really need ... They were hiring more military or just non-degree students in law enforcement at the time.

John Bennett:

So I applied, and I was barely 21 years old when I applied, and selected to go to the academy, which then was actually a higher position, a little different than it is today. So I was an employee of the city by fall of '84, hit the street in '85. My career was a plethora of amazing opportunities. Front line work, field training work, detective work, command levels, specialty teams, special operations, and then command and I retired as Assistant Chief of Operations in 2015 on 30 years to the day.

John Bennett:

And then I was fortunate because one of our previous mayors, Mayor Pam Iorio, her husband was the County Administrator in Pinellas. And no coincidence to my previous work in Pinellas, but he was looking for a Public Safety Administrator. So shortly after I retired from Tampa PD, I was hired over there to oversee the Health, Safety, and Welfare Program for Pinellas County, which really involved emergency management, their 911 center, the EMS program for the county, which is all covered under the county, and then all of the social sector and animal services and a bunch of other departments including communications.

John Bennett:

So I did that for about three fiscal years, and then I had a short stint in the private sector supporting law enforcement intelligence-led policing, with a program that I worked on while I was at Tampa. And then when the current mayor, Mayor Jane Castor got elected in 2019 and she asked me to come back as her Chief of Staff, and that's my current position.

Greg Lindberg:

Wow, very interesting. Quite a varied career there. And Todd, let's go to you. Talk to us about your work history and your career journey.

Todd Hand:

Well my first law enforcement position was county policing in Pennsylvania after I graduated from college. And during my time in Pennsylvania, I also was an Investigator for the City of Pittsburgh and for the State of Pennsylvania. I then took a position in Florida at the Pasco County Sheriff's Office to begin with, and over time I took a position with the State of Florida and I remained there for 27 years, and I retired from the State of Florida in June of 2016.

Todd Hand:

In the fall of 2016, I began teaching full-time at a private college in Maine, where I instructed classes in criminology, police ethics, leadership, report writing, fly fishing. And I taught capstone classes for seniors that involve the latent investigation of actual unsolved cold case homicides. These classes involve the students grasping, and the goal was understanding of the underlying motivations of crimes of homicide and the application of criminological theory, their personal ability to organize an investigation, the ability to work independently, communicating skills within the work group and with other stakeholders that we dealt with during the investigation, their interview skills, and their ability to plan, prepare, and present the investigative findings to the faculty, the student body, and to the law enforcement stakeholders that were involved in the initial cold case homicide.

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Todd Hand:

So in 2019 with the college that I taught at switching to a generally online business model, I accepted a Chief of Police position with a small coastal town in northeastern Maine, where I still remain.

Greg Lindberg:

Wow, very interesting. And I think both of you demonstrate just the high caliber of students, highly experienced students, that we're lucky enough to have in this doctoral program.

Greg Lindberg:

So speaking of higher education, John, talk to me about your education prior to this doctoral program.

John Bennett:

Thank you. So as I mentioned in my work history, my initial college years were a little bit disrupted, but I quickly wanted to get back into that. And in Tampa, there was a lot of opportunity to gain specialized training. A matter of fact, there were stipends given by the State of Florida depending on how many hours you had, and you could get additional compensation for either college or the specialized training courses.

John Bennett:

So because college wasn't a primary focus of law enforcement in the early to mid '80s as much as it is today, I had a unique amount of those training courses and certifications. And I was looking to finish my formal education, and Saint Leo was a great opportunity to come back to because they looked at these 100s of hours of training courses and found a unique way to leverage those towards my undergraduate.

John Bennett:

So I finished my undergraduate at Saint Leo, and in between there and my master's program I had the opportunity to go to the FBI National Academy in Quantico, which was arguably captured as graduate work although it really didn't lead to a degree but it gave a sense of the next level of education, which led me to apply for the Naval Postgraduate School that was being kind of programmed after 9/11 to unify or unite public safety officials in different functions to share their experiences in exchange for a master's program.

John Bennett:

And so, I was fortunate to get accepted into the Naval Postgraduate School in 2011, and finished my masters by the end of 2012 and the accompanying thesis with that work. And that kind of led me towards this opportunity because the work was rigorous and we had exceptional instructors and professors from all over the world actually in the different domains. And one of the key things that they reminded us is, "You can use this to leverage towards your doctorate, and all of you should not stop at this point," so it laid as a seed inside me for some time.

Greg Lindberg:

Right, I see. Very interesting. And Todd, let's go to you in terms of your education prior to this doctoral program.

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Todd Hand:

Well, I completed my undergrad education at the Main Campus of the Pennsylvania State University in University Park, Pennsylvania, and graduated with a bachelor of science degree in criminology from Penn State. And I completed my master of science degree in criminal justice with a concentration in forensic psychology at Saint Leo, and of course now I'm beginning the dissertation process for the doctoral program there.

Todd Hand:

I also graduated Class 11 of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Senior Leadership Program in 2005, which helped me quite a bit in management and administration in the field of law enforcement.

Greg Lindberg:

Right, I see, excellent. And then in terms of this DCJ program, John I know you kind of briefly touched on leading up to this program, and talk to me a little further about how you actually decided to enroll in this program.

John Bennett:

So I had a few different segues into applying. Some of it is timing like many adult learners. We were going through some organizational change in the City of Tampa in the latter part of my policing career, and I wanted to get a different set of experiences other than criminal justice. So I was dually enrolled at the University of Notre Dame in their Leadership Program at their Business School, and it gave me a different viewpoint of running government more like a business instead of the standard bureaucracy.

John Bennett:

And then when I finished my masters, as I mentioned, I was told by my thesis advisors that, "You shouldn't stop here. You should really look for that ideal program." And part of the opportunity with Saint Leo was it was our understanding that this was the inaugural doctorate program for criminal justice students. And in that discovery process and applying for the program, the key excitement for me was that it was really focusing on the scholar practitioner model as a terminal degree approach towards criminal justice. And I felt in my career I had some unfinished business.

John Bennett:

And so Saint Leo, the way my history with Saint Leo was both as a student and on occasion somebody who's called on to do an ad hoc lecture or something, that Saint Leo is progressing very well in the community. And so, everything just seemed to converge at the right time, so I wanted to take advantage of that program. And so far, I've really enjoyed it.

Greg Lindberg:

I see, excellent. And Todd, I know you also like John, you also had prior experience taking courses with Saint Leo. Was that a factor for you as well in making the decision to enroll in this doctoral program?

Todd Hand:

Yes. I initially discovered Saint Leo University when I was working in the area as a law enforcement officer in 1990 actually. While I was working, I remember there specifically the day that I first went over to the campus. It was a Sunday morning, and I slid into the rear of the chapel for mass actually. I was

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working in uniform, and stifled my radio and attended mass there. And there was just something about Saint Leo that I was drawn to and I still really don't know what it is, but over the years I have had many friends who have went to Saint Leo and enrolled in classes and so on and so forth.

Todd Hand:

So that piqued my interest to further my education, and thus I enrolled in the master's program there. During that time, I was teaching at the Florida State Academy up in Havana, Florida. And I always wanted to teach and I liked to teach at the Academy, and I thought that if I had an opportunity to teach at a college, that would really be something that I would be interested in later after I retired.

Todd Hand:

And as I went and attended classes at Saint Leo in my graduate degree, I got to student teach there a couple semesters, and I really enjoyed it. So that kind of hooked me, so to speak, into wanting to teach. And fortunately as I said earlier, I got a teaching job at a small college after I retired, and I realized that a doctorate degree in my field would be a very good asset for me, so thus I end up here at Saint Leo again.

Greg Lindberg:

Yeah, it's funny how life happens, right?

Todd Hand:

Yes.

Greg Lindberg:

And then John, was it the fall of 2018 when you started in the program?

John Bennett:

I did. I was excited to be part of that initial group, and so pressing on three years at this point.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. And then Todd, you as well started when we first started offering it, correct?

Todd Hand:

That's correct.

Greg Lindberg:

Right, very nice. Let's dive a little further into the program in terms of the courses, the faculty that teach in the program, and let's go back to John on this one. Talk to me about any classes that have really stood out to you, in addition to faculty that you've had that have really made a positive impression on you.

John Bennett:

So I think when I look across all the different classes, every one of them brought a sense of real-time value. I can highlight a corrections class, and how in my current role in government you can look at things like recidivism and other issues in a whole different way than I would've done 10 or 20 years ago,

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and look at the social challenges on the opportunities that you have different resources now and controlling different outputs to get unique outcomes.

John Bennett:

So I mean that's just one example, but the journey has been full of opportunities in different categories, some of them purely academic about your quantitative or qualitative analysis. But then more in that practitioner, like Homeland Security, and of course that's the track that I selected. But there's been just a globalness to the program so far that has found its way, again using the term real-time, into my current role. Which is really what I enjoy, is keeping that saw sharpened every day and using the research.

John Bennett:

I mean it's almost once a week that I'm leveraging some sort of peer review article and sending it out to staff, and focusing on current events and recently done research. So as far as professors go, they've all been great. Every one of them brings a unique set of values and experience, especially the ones that have been outside the law enforcement community and more strictly research-based or academic-driven.

John Bennett:

But two of them that I would like to highlight based on their style is Dr. Eloy Nunez and Dr. Phillip Neely, and just the way that they have interacted with the class in a very dynamic way. And more importantly than the classes, that I've been able to reach out to them during this journey, whether it was process-driven or curriculum-driven, and ask questions after their courses have ended. And they've always been highly responsive. And most of them, again if I've reached out, I would say that they arguably all have been that way. But I just thought I would highlight those two as some key contacts to support, especially since we're the first class there's things that we're all learning and smoothing, and they've been a good outreach group to support that conversation.

Greg Lindberg:

Wonderful, that's great to hear, and we certainly appreciate that positive feedback. Todd, in terms of your experience, talk to me about any classes that really have resonated with you, any instructors that you've really hit it off with and found very valuable.

Todd Hand:

I would echo what John said that I think Saint Leo University has done an excellent job of assembling quite a crew of instructors that are very sensitive to our particular needs because we are not a typical student group. And also, their knowledge, their depth of experience, is quite remarkable.

Todd Hand:

It's a difficult question to narrow down the most memorable classes and instructors, but I'll give it a shot anyways. I particularly liked Dr. Delmar Wright's International Perspectives in Criminal Justice. I thought that was very, very enlightening and placed at almost the beginning of the curriculum so it would give us a good knowledge base for the rest of the courses.

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Todd Hand:

Dr. Carla Coates, Criminology Theories were excellent. Dr. Nunez, as John said, in his Global Extremism & Mass Movements, was really stimulating and it really made me think deeply about the subject material. Attorney Joseph Cillo's Terrorism & Domestic Radicalization class, he had a different approach but it was really challenging for me, and I got a lot out of that course. And Dr. Harrington's Organizational & Community Resilience was outstanding also.

Todd Hand:

Additionally, I want to say that one professor that I especially admired, and he wasn't in the course of study now but in my masters course I learned so much from him and I really admired him, was the late Barry Glover. I never actually attended any of Barry's classes ever, but I was chosen to student teach two cold case homicide capstone classes at Saint Leo under Barry's supervision. And Barry left an un-erasable imprint on me regarding the importance of student motivation and how it relates to positive change and success.

Todd Hand:

And what Barry imported to me has greatly increased my effectiveness as a college instructor, and I realized that especially over the last three years when I was teaching full-time at a college.

Greg Lindberg:

Excellent, I really appreciate that feedback. And Professor Glover, I know, had such a great impact on the university and our criminal justice programs, so thank you for that.

Greg Lindberg:

I did just want to mention that obviously both of you have many, many years of experience in the field, and just to hear that these classes and these faculty have really opened your eyes and your minds in so many different ways, I think just goes back to the quality and caliber of this program.

Greg Lindberg:

So in terms of the dissertation, which is certainly a requirement of this doctoral program which certainly involves a lot of research as well, let's talk about just some of your areas of focus in terms of research and looking ahead to your dissertations. And we can start with John on that one.

John Bennett:

Thank you Greg. So when I went into the DCJ program, it's been a building journey for me. In the city of Tampa in the early 2000s, we were as a police department self-assessed at number two in the country of high crime per capita, the crime rate if you will. And we worked really hard to retool our mission statement, our strategic plan, and our desired objectives to lower that. And we're excited that after about 18 years of continuous progress and improvement, that we are well below the statewide average, and we've managed to do that with reducing other forms of risks, like arrests with both in adults and juveniles, etc.

John Bennett:

So I got really interested in policing more as a business if you will, and without losing the sense of community and all the reasons that public trust relies upon law enforcement, and that delicate balance

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of knowing that our objective is to prevent or reduce crime, improve the quality of life for the community, and do it in collaboration and cooperation with partners including the community, that I really wanted to continue that journey and do it in a very prescriptive manner.

John Bennett:

And so, what I had been working toward was knowledge management, sense making, and information literacy as a way to understand how the department would communicate from a hierarchical point of view inward and outward and across the community, and make sure that every person's role in the organization knew what the mission, vision, values, and the desired outcomes would be.

John Bennett:

And there was a school of hard knocks during this journey of 18 years, supported by again a journey of continuous improvement. And through a process of reductionism over my coursework, I had narrowed my scope down to the idea that mission statements matter, and how those mission statements are crafted will leverage the strategic approach towards the desired outcomes in law enforcement.

John Bennett:

And I hate to be redundant because a lot of people use the Peelian principles as those nine categories of how policing should be done back in the early 1800s forward as contemporary law enforcement, but they were really well-crafted in the sense that the police are the community and the community are the police. And so finding a way to examine mission statements for their quantitative, actionable, and measurable lexicon, and how that moves towards results.

John Bennett:

Because the journey that we experienced in Tampa was that we had this what I used to joke as the Hallmark greeting card version of a mission statement. It had a lot of eloquent language in it, and it had a gilded frame, and it hung by the elevator or it hung in the lobby. And nobody really knew how to make it actionable. And when we went through our exercise 18 years ago and decided almost like a startup company is, "Why do we exist and what are our desired outcomes?" And we wrote that mission statement with purpose and actionability, and then that became the foundation for our strategic plan, and then that became the foundation for our performance measurement.

John Bennett:

And everything built from that mission statement forward, so what I thought I would do is some sort of quantitative correlation between the mission statement and the performance of agencies as a sample. That led me to narrow the scope to look at a sample of law enforcement agencies' mission statements and compare and contrast that against their crime rates for a specific period of time, basically in line with the average term of a police chief, and to see if mission statements, unlike what they are in the private sector which have tremendous strategic value, are being done in more of a ministerial way or in a way that doesn't have the same business purpose that a for-profit community would have.

Greg Lindberg:

Very interesting, and I think that's such a great point that oftentimes organizations or people in general live by certain words, but when you really delve in, is that really actually going on and everything, and what's the meaning behind those words? So that's some great insight right there. And then Todd, how about you?

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Todd Hand:

Well, my initial idea of what I wanted to pursue as far as my dissertation has changed, to no surprise, of course our interests are often products of our experiences. I've had a very diverse career as far as experiences go. Calculated it a few years ago as far as of the years' experience, they're almost equally between patrol work, either as a deputy or an officer and supervisory patrol work, and the other equal half is investigative. And the investigative part, was fortunate enough to be able to investigate some diverse crimes, mostly internal affairs investigations, covert investigations, and crimes against persons.

Todd Hand:

And I've always been fascinated with the homicides part of the investigations, and what intrigued me by those were the motivators and the triggers and the actions of the typologies of the various offenders. I still remain very interested in those particular research endeavors, but my dissertation now will focus on the impact of the strains of societal interactions with police regarding the need for refocus towards the best traits for future police officers, what we need to look for in our future officers to reflect the present and future needs and culture of society. I think that's very important, certainly is relevant right now, and I'm hoping I can find some good results from my research.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely, that's very timely, like you said very relevant work in today's society and some of the challenges we're dealing with.

Greg Lindberg:

Just a little more on the programs in terms of the online format of this program. Let's talk about how this is really ... that format has benefited you guys as students in this program. And John, let's start with you.

John Bennett:

Thanks for that question Greg. I think the online format, especially in the dynamic portion of my lifestyle, raising a family, coaching athletics, long days at work, has really been valuable. I was a little programed for this because the Naval Graduate School that I went to was both a residency period and then ... So you would go as a resident for two weeks, and then you would be online for eight weeks. So I got really used to that format of a little bit of classroom and a lot online and a lot of interaction online, whether it's the material or the discussion process if you will.

John Bennett:

But that's what also drew me to Saint Leo's program was the fact that they kicked it off with a residency type setting, and then they did that, or at least the plan was to do it two other times. We were a little disrupted, or I could argue we were a little more resilient, because of COVID, and we already had a platform that would allow us to stay socially distant and safe but still continue with the program. So it was a little fortuitous to have all of this in place before we got hit with the COVID-19 experience.

John Bennett:

But it's worked very well for me. All the different platforms, whether I'm on my desktop or laptop or iPad, or even in some unique cases my phone, it's just been a great opportunity to use all of this technology to interact with the class or individuals. And I think Saint Leo's done a great job giving good

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access to the library. There's just been a lot of capacity and capabilities towards this journey that have made an executive lifestyle more accessible to the information, whereas as much as I love the classroom environment, it clearly would not have been feasible at this point in my life to do it that way.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely, I appreciate that perspective. And then Todd, anything to add to that?

Todd Hand:

Yes, just since I went and completed my master's degree at Saint Leo, I was interested in getting a doctorate degree, and my preference of course was Saint Leo College but at the time they did not have a doctorate degree regarding criminal justice or anything close to that. And when I was notified that that program was developed and they were ready to release it, I was excited because the online format before really worked for me. I still value the quality and the reputation of Saint Leo as far as putting classes together that really mean something, and the instructors they pick to instruct these classes are, in my opinion, unequaled. I think they do a very good job of designing that.

Todd Hand:

There's many different online formats, but I just feel comfortable with Saint Leo, perhaps because I am used to it. But it is user-friendly, which is a big asset for people like John and myself that are still working. I've worked my career in Florida and I retired, now I am doing what I want to do. And the format of the program that we're in right now works for me.

Todd Hand:

Interestingly, the pandemic affected the program in a way, but we were pretty resilient and just because the design of the program, it didn't really affect us too much. But I think it affected us because we were so looking forward to getting together as cohorts, which we had the chance to do two times before the pandemic. And it was so beneficial in more ways than just instruction, but in socializing and getting to know each other, that we soldiered on and we made the best of it through Zoom meetings. So we're electronically socializing now, and hopefully we can get together and graduate together.

Greg Lindberg:

Right, very well said. And I'm glad both of you did bring up the residency aspect of this program, and obviously COVID has had an impact on that, but we certainly call this an online doctoral program but we do offer the residency where students can actually get together in a normal environment, let's say, and have that face-to-face interaction and actually get to meet each other, shake hands. And that's something we're really proud of and think is unique in this program.

Greg Lindberg:

And I guess on that note, let's talk about the connectedness that each of you have felt with your fellow students, professors, and just kind of the whole environment. And John, we can start with you on that one.

John Bennett:

Thank you, great question. I think because there was an opportunity to kickoff the program in a group session face-to-face, having lunch, doing things after hours, it created that initial bond. And then you're

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able to carry that into the virtual system. There's probably several of us in small groups that have had either similar work journeys or have been colleagues or peers from their founding organizations if you will, or at least you know each other from the region or some other level of the industry if you will of law enforcement. And then there's many others that have unique experiences that are different than just the traditional law enforcement side.

John Bennett:

And I would say in the classroom setting, whether it was live or virtual, that that really blossomed well, and it extended beyond that. When we have discussions or we re-introduce ourselves each course and kind of capitalize on where we are at the moment, and we hear Todd talk about a grandchild. I may add something to my opening remarks for a new class where something's changed in my life, and everybody seems to grab onto those changes and communicate about them. And so, it's personalized in a way that you do get to know each other and it gives you an opportunity to say, "Oh, I didn't know you were from here or your background or you moved here or you retired from this and now you're doing that," so it was good. It wasn't the same as being in a classroom for three, three and a half years, but it's a perfect balance between being able to access the information and get the work done and yet still develop these strong bonds.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely, no question. And Todd, how about you?

Todd Hand:

Well, I think John kind of hit everything that I wanted to talk about. I especially like the idea that we have a cohort that is made up of some diverse careers of different people. There's some of us that are directly in law enforcement, but not that many. And there's some that were in law enforcement. There's some that are on the periphery of law enforcement, and others that really aren't even connected with law enforcement as we know it.

Todd Hand:

And that affords us the opportunity to listen and learn from these other people on their perspectives of our profession. I'm speaking for myself, and John's former profession, we get to experience what these other people that are in the cohort feel about certain things that we may feel differently about. And I think that tampers our ability to be polarized because we are in the profession so we kind of own it and we get a different view, different perspective, of people's view of what we've been doing for so long as a career.

Todd Hand:

And I think that just makes us better, and hopefully it helps them to understand our point of view. It's like when John was at the National Academy and I went to FDLE Senior Leadership for quite a while. When you're immersed with a certain group for a long time, there's a bond. That's camaraderie, and it's a special thing, and it just doesn't go away. It's one of the unintended consequences of these kinds of educational endeavors I believe.

Greg Lindberg:

Sure, very well said. In terms of advice for a prospective student who might be listening to this considering this Doctor of Criminal Justice Program, John what kind of advice would you give to that

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individual specifically in terms of this program and then just in general about what's actually involved in being successful in a doctoral program?

John Bennett:

So thanks Greg. I think the first thing is don't be shy about it. I think we all feel some sense of professional intimidation at some point about experiencing a next level. Whether you're trying to get your black belt or you're trying to take on a new career path or whatever, there's some trepidation that occurs. And my comment to that is don't be shy. If you've got through your masters and you handled that rigor okay and your capstone projects or your thesis worked out well, you already have the foundational skills to enter the program.

John Bennett:

Just make sure that you're ready to roll up your sleeves a little bit, which would be my second point. It's real work. Nobody's going to give you this doctorate, and you're going to have to do the work. You have to do the writing. You're going to have to do the research. But, it's very rewarding and very stimulating to go through it. And there's a lot of instructor/professor support and a lot of peer support that those areas that you may be less familiar with, somebody's willing to, again, communicate with you and support you and team up on things. And that's the beauty of Saint Leo is those things are encouraged.

John Bennett:

And then lastly, if the first two things don't really entice you enough, the last piece would be the pay it forward approach. I would feel remiss that the blessings that I have felt based on Saint Leo's core values a little here that my coming up on almost 40 years of public service, coming out of high school and then my real career in law enforcement and then my follow-up career in more of executive government, that if I didn't take this terminal degree and then try and make it benefit those that are coming up behind me in some capacity whether it's in the real classroom, the virtual classroom, the research, or even using it in the private sector for other deliverables, that I would've not felt satisfied. So even if you end up doing it for others and not just for yourself, there's tremendous value in that.

John Bennett:

And then just to put a little icing on that, is at some point when you really do want to hang up your cleats from the office and not necessarily go to a location every day and check in into a building, you can probably teach from just about anywhere in the world. In my case, getting close to an empty nest and if my wife and I after the kids finish school and get married off and we want to roam the countryside, whatever that means, as long as I have connectivity I could teach. And so, there is some sort of remote benefit that allows the bifurcation of paying it forward and yet being able to move around the globe for that matter and being able to teach a group and fulfill that paying it forward aspect. So those would be my recommendations.

Greg Lindberg:

Excellent, you summed it up quite well there. Thank you for that. Todd, how about your advice and your perspective to someone considering the program?

Todd Hand:

In a utilitarian way, my advice would be plan on sacrificing some of your family time and social life. Plan on reading, and plan on writing, and writing, and writing. A lot of writing, but that's part of the deal.

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What I remember, and I still actually may exhibit it sometimes, when we first started, our first cohort meeting at Saint Leo, I was a little intimidated. I think I was suffering from the imposter syndrome. I think I thought I didn't know anything.

Todd Hand:

And what this course, this program, has taught me is I didn't know as much as I thought I do, but I know a lot. So it made me value the education and not to assume that I know it all because I don't, and also made me realize that I have value in my experience and my knowledge, and I can impart that to other people.

Todd Hand:

I just enjoy teaching, and I thought that the doctorate would be the best avenue to drive towards as far as teaching in higher education, and I still believe that. And I think the Saint Leo program, it's a tough program, but if it was easy it wouldn't be challenging, it wouldn't be fun, it wouldn't be rewarding. And that's what I'm all about. I want to challenge myself.

Todd Hand:

And I'll end with this. I originally wanted to do this so I would be better at teaching, and I think it already has made me better at teaching. But I also think that, and I'm sure John is doing it right now, we set the example for our children and others that follow us. And I think that part of our responsibility is to prepare and educate those that will follow us. And I think this program is excellent as far as that goes.

Greg Lindberg:

No question, very well stated. And then just one final question here. I know we've already talked a lot about this, but if you could just both summarize in a nutshell how this program has benefited you in your careers, and kind of just looking ahead in terms of what you'd like to do and aspirations and whatnot? And John, we can start with you.

John Bennett:

Thanks Greg. Yeah, summing it up for me is I used to say that there's a difference between achievements and accomplishments. And I think the longitudinal aspect of a career could be looked at as an achievement, whereas the accomplishments are kind of iterative. And so, I tend to not look at this as a career benefit as much as I look at it as a service benefit to do this knowledge transfer.

John Bennett:

I always feel like I'm immersed in the coursework and the writing and the reading and the interaction with my colleagues, and then I always look for opportunities to prepackage that and bring it back out and serve it up. And whether somebody leverages that or they shelf it, that's up to them. But I think the real-time benefit of what's going on, and I experienced the same thing with my master's program, is right in the middle of doing that we were planning for the 2012 Republican National Convention, and I felt like I had 30 of the best and brightest people around me. So even though my thesis wasn't based on that, I was able to use the library and research and colleague feedback to plan an event that ultimately went very well for the city. And it's kind of the same thing here is I feel like there's real-time value in the program and in my current position.

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John Bennett:

And then, again not so much benefiting me although the ability to teach beyond my what I would call hard retirement year is opportunistic, to me it's more important to share all of the bumps and bruises and smooth those out with academia and practitioner experience with people who are interested in that. And it's just another caliber of learning and caliber of knowledge transfer that I think has importance.

John Bennett:

Again, I tie it back to what Saint Leo stands for, which are those core values of sense of community, so that works for me.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely, that's wonderful. And Todd, any final words you want to mention?

Todd Hand:

For me, I think it's about preparing people for the future, whether they are going to follow in the policing or some dimension of law enforcement career or not. But I think with this program, it allows us to be able to influence that in a good way to impart our experience and our ability to learn new things and develop new theories and test them out. And I think it will make law enforcement stronger. I think it will make the relationship between policing and the community stronger.

Todd Hand:

So I think it's all about the transfer of what we've learned and our ability to put it into a form that is most beneficial to society. And if we can do that, mission accomplished.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely, no question, very well said. All righty, well again we've been visiting with John Bennett and Todd Hand, two students in our Doctor of Criminal Justice Program here at Saint Leo University. And John and Todd, really want to thank you so much for your time, your perspective, your insight on this program. Really appreciate you joining me here on the podcast, so thank you both so much.

Todd Hand:

Thanks Greg. Take care John.

John Bennett:

My pleasure. Same to you Todd, thank you.

Speaker 1:

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