2016

Collecting to the Core--Cross-disciplinary Criminal Justice Resources

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Recommended Citation
Sheehan, Beth and Doherty, Anne (2016) "Collecting to the Core--Cross-disciplinary Criminal Justice Resources," Against the Grain: Vol. 28: Iss. 6, Article 20.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7566

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Many two-year and four-year colleges offer associate or bachelor’s degrees in criminal justice and criminology. It is also common for sociology and other social science programs at colleges and universities that do not offer dedicated criminal justice degree programs to include criminal justice courses and course concentrations within the curriculum. However, even when colleges lack dedicated criminal justice degree programs or academic courses, students often require criminal justice and criminology resources. Whenever students are given license to select topics for research projects, invariably some will choose a theme that intersects with criminal justice. Whether it is the sociology student examining issues related to undocumented immigrants and border control, the education student who wonders whether prisoners with access to G.E.D. classes are less likely to be re-incarcerated, the computer science student writing a software encryption protocol to deter hackers, or the social work student studying the relationship between intimate partner violence and substance abuse, all will require some level of criminal justice research relevant to their topic.

If a college library has a limited budget for purchasing criminal justice resources because it is not a major curricular focus of the institution, careful selection is critical to ensure that titles will be useful for applied and interdisciplinary criminal justice research. This essay recommends several titles drawn from the “Criminal Justice and Law” section of Resources for College Libraries: Career Resources that should be considered core for supporting criminal justice-related study and research, even at institutions without criminal justice programs or course concentrations. This list is not all-inclusive but offers one or two representative titles for each type of reference resource.

**encyclopedias**

With a potentially vast and diverse number of student research interests, ideal collection candidates are those which provide breadth of coverage on a variety of criminal justice and criminology topics, balanced with sufficient depth of content to provide students with useful background information and suggested readings for further research. Two comprehensive encyclopedia sets that fit these criteria were published in 2014, with nearly identical titles: The Encyclopedia of Criminal Justice and Criminal Justice published by Wiley-Blackwell and Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice published by Springer. If limited resources require a choice between these two large, expensive sets, this author recommends the Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia, edited by Jay S. Albanese. This five-volume work contains approximately 500 entries and is available in print and electronically. It has received several accolades, including selection as a 2014 Choice “Outstanding Academic Title,” and recommendation by the Reference and User Services Association in the “2015 Outstanding Reference Sources List.” Although the Springer encyclopedia provides more breadth and depth, since it is comprised of 10 volumes and approximately 600 entries, the Wiley-Blackwell version offers accessibility for introductory-level students and those with limited prior background and knowledge of criminal justice. The online and print versions of the Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia facilitate browsing by topical category in addition to the traditional A-Z alphabetical list and search functions, a feature which is lacking from Springer’s encyclopedia. In addition, some of the Wiley-Blackwell entry headings are more intuitive and contain less jargon, and the content of entries is generally written to provide a general overview as opposed to the more in-depth analysis of subtopics found in some of the Springer entries. For example, the Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia has one entry on...
entitled “Police Discretion” on this topic, while the Springer encyclopedia has three separate entries: “Police Discretion and Its Control,” “Police Discretion in Law Enforcement,” and “Police Discretion in Providing Services and Assistance.” In terms of breadth and depth of coverage on this subject, Springer comes out on top. Although both encyclopedias have entries edited by scholars from around the world, the Springer version has a more obvious international scope (as evidenced by main entries like “Community Service in Europe”), making Springer’s encyclopedia potentially preferable if global criminal justice is a curricular focus.

In summary, both of these encyclopedias provide thorough overviews of criminology and criminal justice terms and concerns, and are complimentary in terms of coverage rather than strictly duplicative. Entries in both works include extensive bibliographies of references and balanced coverage of topical issues. If collections budgets allow, it would be worthwhile to purchase both sets; however, the Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia may be more accessible and helpful to the general researcher without criminal justice specialization.

Endnotes
15. See table of contents in each of the five volumes in the Key Issues in Crime and Punishment series (SAGE) for complete lists of chapter titles.
*Editor’s note: An asterisk (*) denotes a title selected for Resources for College Libraries.