

Social Work and Criminal Justice Interdisciplinary Degree

05/21/2021

Social Work and Criminal Justice Interdisciplinary Degree



CHaSS to emphasize mental health in law enforcement with new program

By: Lyndi Robins, CHaSS Communications Journalist

Recent demand for law enforcement officials who understand mental health has led USU administrators to create an interdisciplinary program that combines social work and criminal justice.

This new program offers students in the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology a stipend to participate in social work and criminal justice cross-training through additional minors and practicums.

“The challenge of police and first responders being called out to work on mental health crises is that they aren’t prepared for it,” said Derrick Tollefson, department head of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology. “There is a need for cross disciplinary individuals and/or teams that can respond to mental health crises and support the mental health of first responders.”

Criminal Justice majors can receive cross-training in social work by completing a Social Work minor and/or practicum. Social Work students at both an undergraduate and graduate level can receive cross-training in criminal justice by completing a Criminal Justice minor and/or practicum.

Students in the program will receive a stipend, similar to a scholarship, each semester.

“That’s the idea behind this program, to provide students with a stipend to incentivize them to complete a more complicated education pathway,” Tollefson said.

The stipend amount is estimated to be about \$3,000 to \$5,000 per student. There is enough funding to continue this program, supporting a few students each year, for two to three years. After that, the program will be re-evaluated based on participation and success.

“There is going to be an emerging field that is essentially a hybrid between social work and criminal justice. We are already seeing the beginnings of this around the country,” Tollefson said. “We need professionals who understand how the criminal justice system works but who also understand mental health and how to intervene appropriately in a crisis.”

Utah State is one of the first universities to emphasize this combination of majors through this unique approach.

“Most people who go into either of these careers want to help people and make a difference in the world,” Tollefson said. “That’s why I think social work and criminal justice are an interesting mix; they are both motivated by the same altruistic goals. They use different methods to achieve their ends, but they have a lot that they can understand and learn from each other.”

Junior and senior undergraduate students in Criminal Justice and Social Work as well as master’s students in the Social Work program are encouraged to apply. Interested students should contact Derrick Tollefson at derrick.tollefson@usu.edu.

Share

Related Stories