

Transcript of NFOA Bridge Episode with Erin Grant  
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**KB:** Welcome to this 10-minute episode of the NFOA Bridge mini Bodcast. NFOA is the acronym for Not For Ourselves Alone, Washburn's motto. And the virtual bridge is located right here on Teaching Tuesdays connecting Washburn with the Topeka community and beyond through Community Engaged Learning, also known as CEL.

I'm Karen Barron, community engaged learning coordinator for the Center for Teaching Excellence and Learning and host of this series. Today, our featured guest is Erin Grant, Associate Professor and Undergraduate and Graduate Coordinator in Criminal Justice and Legal Studies. Welcome, Erin.

**EG:** Thanks! I'm excited to be here.

**KB:** We're glad to have you. So, I know you have incorporated CEL into some of your classes, so my first question is, why do you do it? What do you see as the value of CEL to our students and to the greater community?

**EG:** I think that especially in the field of criminal justice, you know, regardless of what the emphasis is whether it's si or corrections, or law enforcement, or security administration, a lot of the students come in and just hear like the underlining definitions and they hear stories especially in the applied dept, a lot of us, well, all of us have worked in the field, so a lot of us tend to use old war stories or, or research they have done in the past, which is me because I was a researcher in the field, but they don't always tend to get access to understanding why that research is important or even if I tell them or explain to them and give them examples, it's kind of hard to grasp because it's not something that we see advertised. We see advertised serial killers and other exciting things but not like research and the importance of it, and so whenever I'm able to I do like to bring that component in, where they can maybe do research for an agency or help me with some research for an agency. So that's the value to my students for sure, or our students rather, and then in terms of the community, they're going to be, the community is going to be the ones who is going that have the practitioners working in them and so not even just the connection to agencies already but a connection to understanding the importance of that research and how it does affect the community. The community is only going to benefit by having practitioners in it that understand what their needs are, how to find out the needs are, how to find out what the needs are of the community without just making assumptions, which I think is a lot of the history of our system, or their understanding, is that we use students anecdotally, but going out and asking, getting qualitative information, getting info from agencies can help serve the community better and as civil servants I think it's is kind of vital to understand the importance, which I think for some people, it seems like cheesy and kind of boring but at the same time, once they get into it, they realize, like no, this is actually pretty exciting and so, that's, that's why I do it.

**KB:** Right. Well, yeah, and I think that you just described the beauty to me of community engaged learning because, yeah, it takes what they're learning in the classroom and adds a

practicality to it, a realism to it that you know will be used in the community and both you know benefit. And you know, it's like a steppingstone, you know, into their future lives, their future careers, and, yeah, I think it works really well for that. So, Erin, would you mind just sharing and describing maybe some examples of CEL in your courses past, or present, or even future?

**EG:** Absolutely. The first CEL project that I was able to get going and like was able to get to fruition was I believe it was the spring 2019, and it ended up lasting after the class as well. It was for my Research Methods course, and we were going to be helping the Topeka Police Department to figure out if they should civilianize their CSI division, which basically means instead of having sworn officers, they're going to have citizens that you know have still have some sort of training, but they're not sworn officers so they're, you know, they don't have the, the thin blue line and all those associated terminologies involved with their positions. They are there to work under the, under the management of officers to seal off crime scenes, collect evidence, etc. and help solve crimes, and so we went ahead and did a survey of students to see if they were majoring in the field of SI within our department if they would be willing to take on that job. I know historically it's been a lot of people thinking like you have to be a sworn officer in order to help solve crimes and to work in the system and just exploring whether or not students would be willing, and it was really interesting cause I noticed that since I started in 2013, there's been a turn from that, like, you know, everybody wanting to be sworn to a lot of people saying they don't want to be sworn. They want to be able to still be seen as a citizen that's sort of helping and being part of the system to potentially even select bias or at least the appearance of bias while they're doing that job. And then, in terms of the other student project, we also surveyed current sworn officers at TPD to see how they felt about having their CSI division civilianized, and a lot of them were actually, actually interested in having that as well, which, which is great because historically, there's usually again that like thin blue line—us versus them—within the dept like civilians don't have as good of a connection with people who are sworn officers because of training and based on what their job duties are and to see that changing is really exciting because it means that there will be more community interaction within the system to make sure that the needs of the community are actually addressed.

That same semester, I did try to work with a student individually on a restorative justice project with the local Center for Justice and Peace; unfortunately, it didn't, it didn't come to fruition just the student was busy getting ready for, for law school, but it was great to like even just have the interaction and to engage with that organization in the community and this was actually happening, so for the future, I can, I can reach out to them.

Currently, I am working with the KDOC to help them revise the handbook that's used to regulate incarcerated persons' behaviors within the, the state facilities here in Kansas, and so I'm going to be working with surveying and interviewing both incarcerated persons and employees of the DOC, and right now, I do have, it's, it's not a full class, but it's an independent study where a student is working with me on that individually, and then I have Research Methods class that I'm teaching right now, and I'm basically using this as an example and showing them how I'm working through the whole process and right now I'm also, I'm also trying to, trying to do some ungrading—shout out to Chris Jones for the inspiration—and part, part of the ungrading is I'm hoping they're able engage with the work better, and be interested in helping me with that research instead of like having to pick their own topics and becoming overwhelmed. I'm going to

use having them help me with like a lit review and figure out survey questions and figure out how to write the sample stuff up, basically use that as a consistent example in class, so that they can learn about what I'm actually doing, help with what I'm actually doing, and then I'm going to hope to have the person that I'm working with come in and talk to them about how it's going to go through to change those policies and procedures in the handbook to make it more, a more just system while people are incarcerated and potentially do some needs assessments in the future, potentially in future classes, for programming that we might be able to suggest based on those surveys and interviews. So, I think it's really exciting, it's been pretty limited I think mostly because of COVID days, and to have these opportunities coming back up has been pretty exciting, so I'm really hopeful for this project specifically and the longevity of how we can incorporate it into classes.

**KB:** Well, I, I am really impressed with all the different ways that you're using community engaged learning in your classes. I mean it seems so rich, just the, the examples that you've given. And, yeah, I have a zillion questions, but I don't have time to ask them right now. It's been a great pleasure talking with you, and yeah, we'll have to talk more in the future.

**EG:** Thank you so much for having me.

**KB:** Yes.

Well, for more information on how you can get involved with Community Engaged Learning at Washburn, please see the CEL pillar on the Center for Teaching Excellence web page and contact me, Karen Baron coordinator of CEL for CTEL.

A special thanks to Tom Morgan for composing our bumper music and the Washburn jazz band for recording it, featuring Craig Treinen on sax. See you next week on the NFOA bridge!

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