

# Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

## Progressive Scenario Approach to Criminal Investigative Skills

### Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

A number of practical steps are emphasized in this Criminal Investigations course, which uses a progressive scenario approach to address the five basic investigative skills described below. One important component is for the instructor to recruit role players (such as students from other classes or college staff), making sure to recruit volunteers with diversity in mind.

### Practical Exercises for the Five Basic Investigative Skills:

#### 1. *Observations and Memory*

The instructor models observation skills in class, emphasizes their importance, and discusses ways students can improve these skills. To practice this in class, students are randomly assigned to teams, go outside, and memorize a scene. Each person on the team studies the same scene for no more than five minutes. After returning to class, students reconstruct the scene to see how much is actually remembered and what, if anything, is remembered differently by each team member.

#### 2. *Documenting a Crime Scene*

In pairs, students go to a local park near the college that has been set up as a crime scene. This exercise offers the benefit of the physical experience of collecting evidence in a potentially real setting. One

example crime scene involves a teenager reported missing and someone reports finding this person's driver's license in a local park. Students have to document the scene by taking measurements, creating a sketch, and taking photographs—including documenting geographic coordinates to mark the vantage points for photographs, the angle of the photograph, and distance from the subject of the photograph.

#### 3. *Interviewing*

One exercise featured for modeling interviews involves a stolen satchel. The professor places a satchel/briefcase on the floor next to the podium/lectern and has recruited a role player to act as the thief. At some point during the class, the “thief” enters the room to “steal” the satchel. After the “theft,” the professor asks the class what happened. The professor then models how to interview witnesses by interviewing the class on what was observed.

#### 4. *Preliminary Investigation*

Using the information gathered in the exercise with the missing teenager, students write a report complete with the sketches and maps created on-scene.

#### 5. *Surveillance*

This course teaches FBI methods for both on foot and car surveillance. Students form groups of six or seven. For this exercise, volunteers (not students in the class) are recruited to play the role of “the rabbit” (the person being followed). Students use a means to communicate

with each other that also allows the instructor to listen. Students download Voxer, a free radio app, to their phones and share the connection with the instructor. The students complete a one-hour practice exercise on campus in which they trade off roles as the “primary eyes” and “secondary eyes.” If the surveillance team loses “the rabbit,” they must attempt to find them. A graded exercise, also an hour in length, is conducted on a different day at a different location with which the students would not be as familiar. Either school transportation is used to transport students to the test location or the students can arrange to get there on their own. Again, students form teams and trade off primary and secondary roles to follow “the rabbit,” and the team must be in complete communication throughout the exercise.

### Notes From the Instructor About This Innovative Teaching Practice:

“Reach out to your community to form partnerships, and consider forming an advisory board. Our program created an advisory board with representatives from various divisions of the justice system (for example, the FBI; Border Patrol; Joint Terrorism Task Force; and local police, parole, and probation officers) who give advice and help structure the program with the most current skills and needs. This board meets once a month. This was part of a pathways initiative to invite industry people to meet once a month to help shape what a graduate should be able to do at the end of a two-year program. This board came up with 11 competencies that are tested as a capstone project for each degree seeker.”

“Some advantages of this format for student success are that students support and learn from each other. This format also gives students a chance to practice the skills they will need in their careers and helps them be better prepared to compete for jobs and excel in the academies.”