

Letter from the Faculty Advisors

What is the value of undergraduate knowledge production?

Academia has long been shaped by measurements of value that prioritize certain forms of knowledge and modes of inquiry over others. Institutional recognition, credentialism, peer-reviewed articles, impact factors, citation counts, and grant awards are the currencies by which intellectual labor is often valued. These conventions tend to exclude and underappreciate much-needed scholarship that unsettles the epistemological foundations upon which societal structures are built.

Anchored to historically white supremacist, colonial, and patriarchal modes of thought, conventional definitions of intellectual value demand performative objectivity and a disinterested research stance. Detached from the lived experiences and socio-political contexts within which knowledge is generated, traditional measures of academic value are thus inherently limited. Not only does “expert knowledge” reinforce these limited definitions of intellectual contribution, it also subjugates knowledge generated by young people, students who have yet to earn a degree, not to mention people marginalized by racialized, gendered, classist, and colonial hierarchies of power. That is, it discredits knowledge production’s power to transform, to uplift, and to illuminate the perspectives of those historically excluded from dominant scholarly conversations. In a sentence, traditional metrics of value often overlook the deeper value of knowledge production.

At its core, knowledge production is an act of creation. Through a process of generating, disseminating, and critically engaging with ideas, knowledge producers challenge, reshape, and refine our understanding of the world; not only for the intellectual exercise of adding to academic discourse but to contribute to movements aimed at changing the systems that govern our lives. Hence, the creation of knowledge is rooted in inquiry, questioning, and the pursuit of justice, often in opposition to dominant narratives that obscure systemic inequalities.

In this third volume of *The Annual Review of Criminal Justice Studies (ARCJS)*, we ask you to be unchained by conventional expectations of value and approach the works with a mindset that appreciates the broader, more profound value of

knowledge production. This journal, and the undergraduate research contained within it, is more than just a collection of academic papers. It is an ongoing dialogue about who gets to produce knowledge, whose voices are heard, and how we collectively reshape systems of injustice. Importantly, it must be said from the outset, as faculty advisors we do not merely “allow” undergraduate students this opportunity.

Bringing our own political commitments, advanced training, and habit of excellence to our academic work, each year we raise the bar of expectation for students looking to get involved with *ARCJS*. Volume 3 now in the books, we are impressed by not only the quality of the works, but inspired by the contributors. Not only did the authors in this volume deliver quality papers, but in publishing them each author has demonstrated creative brilliance by turning their lived experience into powerful scholarship. That is, each contributor to Volume 3 of *The Annual Review of Criminal Justice Studies* is a person with actual skin in the game; each is a survivor of systemic injustice of one variety or another.

To speak in general terms, our students study, research, and write from comparable contexts. San Francisco State University and the John Jay College of Criminal Justice are both designated Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), where many of our students come from immigrant and/or working-class backgrounds, communities of color, and first-generation college experiences. For these students, the production of knowledge is not just about academic achievement. It is a deeply personal undertaking intent on understanding and reasserting their place in a world that often marginalizes their voices. Knowledge production, for our students, is a means of transformation.

The value of undergraduate knowledge production in this context is much more than academic currency. It is the empowerment of individuals from populations who have long been excluded. It is a radical re-imagining of what success looks like, one that accounts for the struggles that have shaped our students’ lives and the dreams that fuel their drive toward better futures.

Under our guidance, *ARCJS* is centered on appreciating and creating this form of value. While rigor, validity, and intellectual integrity are cornerstones of academic scholarship—standards that we uphold—our mission is not just to produce work that fits neatly within established conventions. That is, we do not

aspire to be legible to white supremacist, colonial, and patriarchal modes of thought. Rather, we are committed to incorporate the broader context within which we work, and appreciate the political, social, and personal significance that undergirds each piece of undergraduate knowledge production we shepherd.

With this broader definition of academic value in place, the remainder of this letter provides brief commentary on the core values this journal stands on. These values—or core principles—are not just theoretical ideals. They guide our efforts to cultivate critical thinkers, engaged scholars, and future leaders who are ready to dismantle unjust systems and build a more equitable future.

Critical Analysis

At the heart of our mission is a commitment to radical scholarship—scholarship that interrogates the foundations of systems of power, particularly in relation to crime, law, and justice. We encourage our students to embrace a mindset that challenges dominant narratives, examines historical injustices, and uncovers the root causes of inequality.

Collaboration

At *ARCJS*, we believe in the power of community. Our students are not isolated thinkers; they are part of a larger network of scholars, activists, and creators who are committed to collective action. Albert hosts weekly Zoom meetings for aspiring authors during the fall semester, Marisa hosts regular workshops throughout the Fall and Spring semester both for authors and to support and deliver professional development to the *ARCJS* leadership team, we have regular bi-coastal discussion through formal and informal channels, and convene “In Real Life” at on-campus, regional, and national conferences. With this in mind, it is perhaps not surprising to hear alums from Volume 1 and Volume 2 refer to *ARCJS* programming as akin to an honors program. Hence, collaboration is fundamental to the work we do. By working together, sharing ideas, and learning from one another, we create a space where knowledge production is not a solo endeavor, but a shared effort that amplifies our collective voices.

Social Justice

Social justice is the driving force behind everything we do. Again, for our students, research is not just an academic exercise—it is a means of advancing equity and liberation. We encourage our students to engage with topics that challenge existing systems of power, inequality, and marginalization. In turn, they utilize their research to strive to make meaningful contributions to social justice movements and advocate for the rights and dignity of oppressed communities.

Strengths-Based Approach

In the face of systemic challenges and barriers, our students possess immense reservoirs of potential. Our strengths-based approach reciprocates the resilience, creativity, and determination that our students bring to their work. They juggle competing responsibilities related to family obligations, work schedules, and school assignments, struggle to make ends meet in a worsening economy, embark on lengthy commutes to reach campus because corporate, financial, and tech elites have made living near campus in either city an impossibility, and are often teaching themselves academic skills that their underfunded K-12 school systems were not enabled to provide. Notwithstanding, by focusing on strengths we empower undergraduate knowledge producers to navigate obstacles and achieve their goals, despite the structural disadvantages they may face.

Critical Analysis. Collaboration. Social Justice. Strengths-Based Approach.
These values are needed now more than ever.

We find ourselves in a historical moment that is increasingly hostile to critical thought, intellectual exploration, and the pursuit of higher education. The anti-intellectualism around us is marked by assaults on civil rights, the withholding of federal funding for universities, the cessation of grants for research on health disparities and topics related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and the shrinking of support for underrepresented groups. This can be a dangerous climate for scholars who dare to challenge the status quo and poses significant risks to the future of rigorous, transformative scholarship. Said directly, higher education is under attack and critical scholars are facing an environment that is hostile to their work. Thus, under our guidance, *ARCJS* will not lose sight of the fact that our collective enterprise has value in another way.

We see this journal as an epistemic counter-attack, an intellectual resistance to the forces that seek to undermine the integrity and social relevance of higher education. Refusing to let these forces define our work, we welcome, support, cultivate, mentor, and publish intellectual soldiers who are ready to fight back against forces and deconstruct systems that attempt to dominate and silence us. In this way, *ARCJS* is not just an undergraduate journal; it is a training ground for emerging leaders and social justice warriors who will graduate from university with the courage to ignite change. By way of conclusion, a final comment on value is in order.

The value of undergraduate knowledge production is not only found in the pages you hold, the principles that support it, or the profound meaning it holds for the authors. As faculty advisors, we also find value in the audiences who read this journal. Readers of *The Annual Review of Criminal Justice Studies* are people who engage with the ideas, contribute to the effort to challenge status quo assumptions, and are ready to take action. In a sentence, we value our readers because they are people who share our belief in a better world, are willing to fight for it, and understand that critical scholarship has the power to bring it to fruition.

Specific individuals and organizations come to mind as we reflect on our appreciation for our readers. While space limitation forces us to provide only a list of acknowledgements, it must be said that together these folks have laid the groundwork for *ARCJS* to exist, provided financial, intellectual, moral, and physical support for our efforts, inspired and/or cultivated our approach to undergraduate mentorship and knowledge production, and enlisted themselves to join our mission in the volumes to come.

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By way of conclusion, we say thank you directly to the person reading this letter. Your support of undergraduate knowledge production is deeply appreciated. More than that, we are inspired by your commitment to empower the next generation of radical thinkers who are equipped with the tools to counteract and deconstruct oppressive systems of law, crime, and justice. Let us continue onward together in this fight for social justice for all!

Sincerely,
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