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New Crime Data Analytics Lab Will Develop Cutting-Edge Skills for Criminal Justice Professionals

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BRISTOL, R.I. – If police departments could use their data on violent crimes, arrests, and traffic accidents to form a clear picture of what is happening in their communities, they would be able to target their law enforcement personnel and resources where and when it is needed much more effectively. But many are lacking the tools and training to evaluate the wealth of information at their fingertips.

Currently, Rhode Island's law enforcement agencies reported that only 11 police departments used computer crime analysis, and only seven of those specifically used crime-mapping applications, according to a survey by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics.

In response, Roger Williams University's [Justice System Training & Research Institute](#) (JSTRI) is developing a crime data analytics lab to train criminal justice professionals on how to collect and analyze arrests and incidents, channeling it into data-driven, evidence-based policy that is responsive to their communities. The Institute received a \$30,303 grant to establish the lab from the Champlin Foundation, which provides funding for critical initiatives that improve the lives of Rhode Islanders. Through the lab, RWU will offer courses ranging from crime mapping to traffic safety analysis and utilizing the

FBI's National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

“While the trend in other industries has been to develop data-driven decisions – New England sports fans are familiar with its use in formulating teams by the Red Sox and Patriots – a substantial challenge in implementing this for law enforcement is the lack of technological skills in the current and future justice workforce,” said JSTRI Director David Lambert, assistant dean of the School of Justice Studies at RWU. “Police agencies that are analytically-driven are better positioned to address emerging crime, mental health, substance use, and traffic issues. Our crime data analytics lab will develop the skills and knowledge around analytics capability with agencies across the region.”

As the nation continues to call for more justice and equality in policing, these analytical skills will help police agencies assess their calls for service, use of force, pursuits, and arrests with an eye toward ensuring they are using fair and impartial practices and policies. Crime analytics, Lambert says, can assist law enforcement with determining whether implicit bias has influenced motor vehicle stops, arrests and charging decisions.

“Analytical tools provide a degree of transparency and accountability, because you can show the community

what the issues are and where the most problematic areas are located,” he added. “Police agencies can work smarter, and point to evidence-based information to confirm why they need to spend more resources in certain neighborhoods. This approach to policing can bring the criminal justice systems out of the intuition-based, ‘we think we know where the problems are’ type of thinking.”

The JSTRI crime data analytics lab will offer five courses for criminal justice professionals. Designed to build upon skills through each sequential course, students are not required to take all five and may take individual courses according to their interest and skill level. The courses will develop analyst tools in the following areas:

- Introduction to Crime Analysis
- Computer Applications in Crime Analytics
- Traffic Safety Analysis
- Crime Mapping and Analysis
- National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) Training

RWU will begin offering the courses at JSTRI this June. For more information, please visit <https://www.rwu.edu/academics/schools-and-colleges/sjs/jstri/>.