
CRIMINOLOGY DEPARTMENT

2025-2026 NEWSLETTER

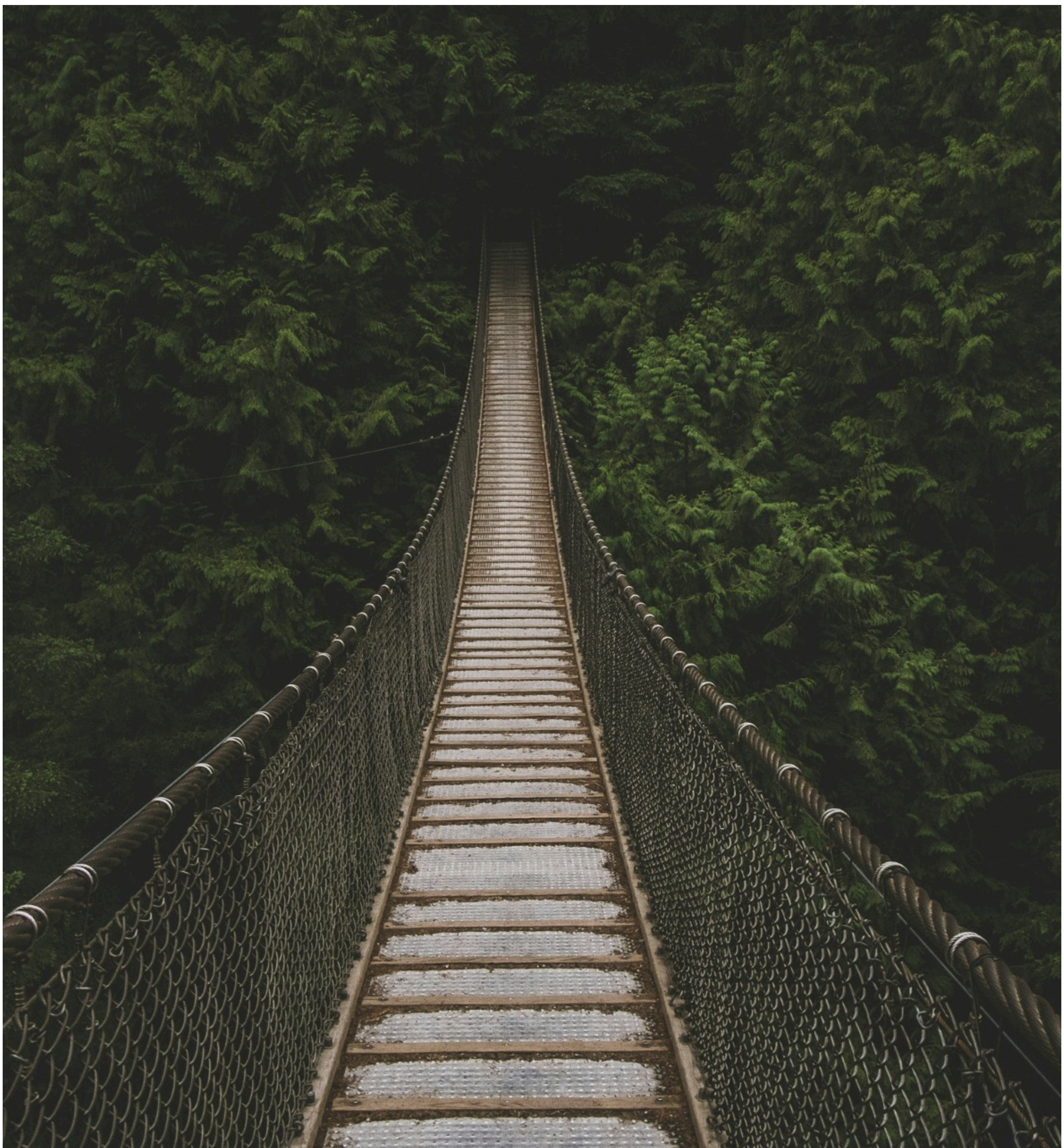


IMAGE BY MARK AUTUMNS

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**It is not enough
to do good, it must
be done well.**

– St. Vincent de Paul

DEPAUL
UNIVERSITY



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One of the greatest privileges I have serving as department chair is welcoming new students while also celebrating and offering words of farewell to our graduating seniors. These moments remind us that the academic journey has a beginning and an end; in between is filled with challenges, growth, and accomplishments.

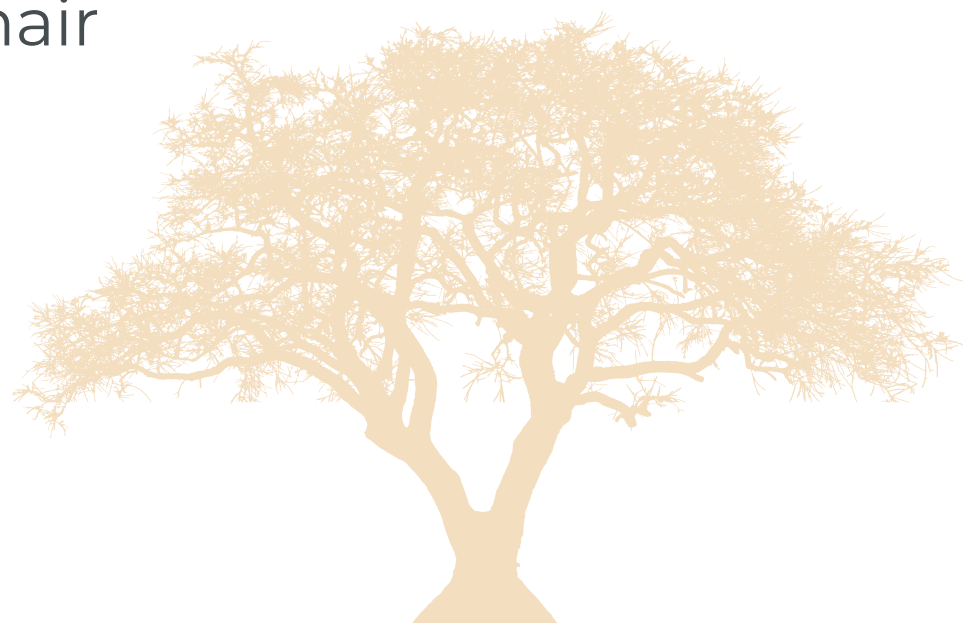
This past year has been no exception. From the anticipation of the new academic year evidenced during our fall Open House to the celebration of our seniors and their accomplishments during Senior Night, our community has come together to learn, connect, and support one another. Yet, unlike previous years, there is a heightened sense of uncertainty about what lies ahead. What remains certain, however, is what truly matters: people. There is nothing artificial about the talent, insight, and dedication our criminology students bring to the world. They are thoughtful, original, and uniquely prepared to take on whatever challenges await. The criminal legal system and its role cannot be reduced to algorithms or outsourced to artificial intelligence. It is, and always will be, about people and relationships, and it is through these relationships that real impact is made.

While no one can predict the future, I do know that it is shaped by the experiences we carry forward, the lessons we learn, and the resilience we build along the way. Every day offers a new opportunity to grow, to respond to challenges with purpose, and to celebrate successes—both large and small. Though we may not control what comes next, we do control our reaction to it, what we learn from it, and our commitment to one another.

Importantly, this is not a journey you take alone. You are part of the DePaul community, and that connection endures. Our faculty are committed to supporting you, just as your peers and the broader network of alumni walk alongside you as well.



Megan Alderden, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Chair



History and Vincentian Mission

Established in 2017, the Criminology major at DePaul University has grown into the second-largest major within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Rooted in DePaul's Vincentian mission, the department is committed to preparing students for meaningful careers in criminal justice and adjacent fields, while promoting humane and community-centered approaches to crime, justice, and public safety.

St. Vincent DePaul's commitment to serving vulnerable persons inspires our mission and reminds us of the importance of humanizing the legal system and amplifying voices of those impacted by crime

Coursework and Goals

The curriculum encourages students to engage critically with our current systems, assessing how social, political, and economics shape crime, punishment, victimization, and access to justice, with attention to how marginalized communities are impacted by the criminal justice system.

In addition to critical thinking and analysis skills, students acquire valuable applied skills. Faculty work to build the leadership, problem solving, communications and the research skills students need to

"Make it a practice to judge persons and things in the most favorable light at all times and under all circumstances."

- St. Vincent DePaul

tackle challenging careers in law enforcement, corrections, research, law, and advocacy.

The department provides students hands-on experience, tailored to their interests, to deepen their understanding and gain insights from practitioners and others with lived experiences.

Our students leave ready to advance justice.





DEPAUL
Vincentian Service Corps

The Tomato
Biting of Life

OUR JOURNEY TOGETHER

2025 - 2026

CONVOCATION



DePaul faculty and staff welcomed the academic year at the annual Academic Convocation. This event ushered in another great year for the department. Joining us this was our newest faculty member: Dr. Baylee Allen-Flores (left).



OPEN HOUSE

In October, we hosted our annual Open House, bringing together students, faculty, and staff for an evening of connection and community. Students had the opportunity to explore academic and professional opportunities. The event also featured brief remarks from faculty offering insights into diverse areas of study.



“TRUE CRIME NIGHT”

In October, the department along with Alpha Phi Sigma (Honor Society) held a Halloween-themed “True Crime Night.” Students were taken through a murder mystery with Professor Del Toro, who works in crime scene investigation and teaches our Forensic Science class.

Students learned how to dust for fingerprints, search for clothing fibers under a black light, and analyze footprints, tracks, and bullet trajectories.

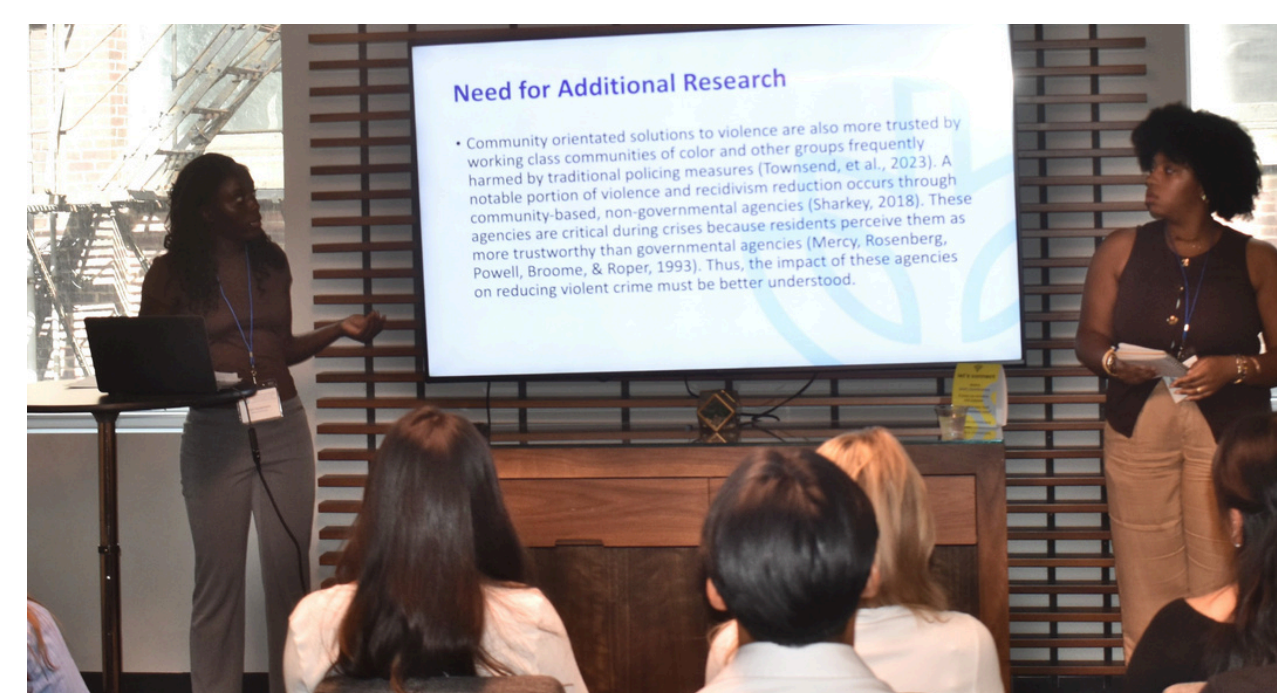


MIDWESTERN CRIMINAL JUSTICE ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

Six undergraduate students gave presentations at the annual MCJA conference held in Chicago. Their presentations were described by one participant as the most impressive panel of the event!

Presentation Titles:

- An Evaluation of DePaul’s Inside-Out Program
- Sexual Homicide: Exploring the Impact of Victim, Incident and Police Organization Characteristics on Case Clearance
- Interpersonal Victimization: Acceptance of Couples Violence, and Police Contact in the English-speaking Caribbean
- Violence Prevention Through a Community-orientated Approach



ASC PRESENTATIONS

Students Amanda Operana and Keera Stelmak, presented their research projects (working with a faculty mentor) at the annual American Society of Criminology Conference held in Washington, D.C. in November.

Amanda worked with Dr. Kayla Freeman exploring interpersonal violence in the Caribbean. Keera worked with Dr. Megan Alderden on a project exploring the impact of case characteristics on sexual homicide case clearance.



LAS NIGHT - DEPAUL WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Criminology faculty, staff, and family were joined by the Dean of LAS, Guillermo Vásquez de Velasco, for LAS Night at the DePaul women's basketball game. It was an amazing evening of Blue Demon pride, good company, and cheering on of our incredibly talented student-athletes. We even got to hang out with DIBS!



GO BLUE DEMONS!

LAW SCHOOL PANEL

This informative panel discussion included alumni and current law students sharing their experiences. The event focused on practical strategies for succeeding in law school and maximizing opportunities within DePaul's 3+3 JD program.

Panelists shared insights on the application processes, academic expectations, and how to balance the rigors of law school.



**The Department of Criminology & Alpha Phi Sigma
Present**

CRIMINOLOGY LAW SCHOOL PANEL:
Strategies for Success in Law School and the
Combined JD Program



Tuesday, February 24, 2026, 5:30 - 7:00 pm
Arts & Letters 207

Student panelists will share their experiences and key insights regarding the law school application process and achieving success in both law school and the Combined JD program. All students interested in law school are welcome to attend.

Questions? Contact Prof. Xavier Perez, XPEREZ2@depaul.edu

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT MIXER



For the first time this year, the department hosted an event for first-generation students to have fun, build community, and discuss the challenges and opportunities of higher education.

The mixer connected student life with professional development, offering students the chance to network with peers and faculty, while gaining tools for success. Representatives from TRiO and the Office of Multicultural Student Success also shared key resources, including academic support and mentor opportunities.



INCARCERATED WOMEN PANEL

We celebrated National Criminal Justice Month with a panel on experiences of women in the criminal legal system. Panelists included researchers, persons with lived experiences, and practitioners from the Illinois Department of Corrections. Dr. Baylee Allen-Flores moderated the event.

Panelists discussed the pathways that lead to incarceration, conditions of confinement, trauma, behavioral health, reproductive health, and the effects of incarceration on families.

The event concluded with a call to action for students seeking to make a meaningful impact, highlighting career paths in research, social work, law, and advocacy.



VINCENTIAN SERVICE DAY

The department proudly participated in our first Vincentian Service day by lending a hand at a local community garden. Contributing to DePaul's annual tradition was a meaningful and valuable way for students to connect with one another while embodying St. Vincent de Paul's mission of service to others.



SENIOR NIGHT



We ended the Spring Quarter celebrating our seniors! The evening brought together students, their families, friends, and faculty, to honor the achievements of the 2026 graduating class of criminologists. The program speakers included Department Chair Dr. Megan Alderden, Amanda Operana ('26), recipient of the Outstanding Senior Award, DePaul alumna MacKenzie Savage ('20), and incoming president of Alpha Phi Sigma, Dulce Alfaro ('27).

CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES OF 2026!





**FACULTY, STUDENTS,
AND ALUMNI**

Baylee Allen-Flores, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor



Dr. Allen-Flores studies corrections, focusing on risk-needs assessments, correctional policy, and incarcerated individual behavior. Her dissertation, "What About Those

We Left Behind?: The Unintended Consequences of Decarceration for Those Who Remain Incarcerated," examined changes to misconduct rates during and after decarceration efforts in Washington state. Her 2024 study "Risk Contamination and Dilution: Advancing the RNR Model in Prison Settings" published in *Crime and Delinquency*, found that an individual's risk of misconduct can be reduced or increased based on where an individual is housed inside the prison. Her work with Risk-Needs assessments has helped shape the use of actuarial tools in correctional facilities.

Before entering graduate school, Dr. Allen-Flores worked for the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, where she held various positions. Those experiences solidified her commitment to research and education that improves the safety and quality of life for those who live and work in prisons.

Melissa Swauncy-Coleman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor



Dr. Swauncy-Coleman's research examines various forms of state violence, including genocide, racial and political violence, and police brutality.

Her dissertation, "Strain, Clientelism and Symbolic Politics in Mass Dictatorships: A Qualitative Case Study of Suriname," involved qualitative fieldwork in Suriname, South America, where she interviewed supporters and opposers of the former dictator to understand how a history of colonization and neo-colonization can impact support for violent state leaders.

Currently, her research focuses on police brutality and hate crimes and hate ideologies. This work informs her teaching, and she encourages students to recognize inequalities in the criminal legal system and to consider strategies for reducing them.



Megan Alderden, Ph.D.

Associate Professor and Chair

Dr. Alderden is actively engaged with the Illinois Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee and worked with other key stakeholders to start the very first fatality review team in Cook County, Illinois. The group officially convened in January 2026, and is currently conducting its first case review. Domestic violence fatality review teams conduct in-depth reviews of fatalities and near fatalities to identify ways to improve systems' responses to domestic violence. Cook County accounts for the largest number of domestic violence related fatalities.

Kayla Freemon, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor and Associate Chair

Dr. Freemon partnered with the Cook County Adult Probation Department on research to examine what wellness looks like and it means for probation clients and staff. This work will be presented by the research team (which includes two Criminology students) at the American Probation and Parole Conference, held in Chicago over the summer, as well as other conferences next year.



Xavier Perez, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Dr. Perez was honored to receive the DePaul Center for Latino Research Fellowship in recognition of his project "Latino Resilience in Action: Community Violence Intervention and Cultural Wealth in Chicago's Latinx Communities." In addition to this prestigious fellowship, he also received the Provost's award for Inclusive Engagement for his work in advocating for marginalized voices, particularly the Latinx community.

Yong-Chan Rhee, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Dr. Rhee's paper titled, "Reexamination of Multi-level Representation and Critical Mass: The Roles of Black Leadership and Its Relationship With Street-Level Officers in Police Killings," was selected as the recipient of the 2025 Review of Public Personnel Administration (ROPPEA) Best Paper Award. His paper was chosen because of its theoretical rigor, the importance of the issue it addresses, the significance of its findings, and the quality of the research and analysis.



Joe Rice, MSW

Teaching Professor

Professor Rice taught his second Inside Out course at the Cook County Jail; this time in the Women's Division, where he formerly worked full-time as a counselor. Professor Rice and his Inside Out teaching assistant, Alice, also facilitated a community dialogue at the Northwestern TeachX conference, about their restorative justice pedagogy. Joe also wrote an article on the "Treatment Not Trauma" public health and safety campaign that will be published in a forthcoming edition of *Twenty-First Century Chicago*.



Alpha Phi Sigma

The Criminal Justice Honor Society

Alpha Phi Sigma is the National Criminal Justice Honor Society that recognizes students demonstrating the strongest performance in the field of criminology. The organization is grounded in the values of academic excellence, leadership, service, and unity. At DePaul University, students take part in research, attend events, and connect with others. Alpha Phi Sigma provides a community for those who are passionate about criminal justice while offering opportunities to grow and prepare for future careers.

Amanda Operana, President
2025-26 Alpha Phi Sigma



This year, APS students participated in criminal justice conferences, including the Midwestern Criminal Justice Association, the American Society of Criminology, and the Big East Undergraduate Research Symposium. Participating students demonstrated strong academic initiative, thoughtful research, clear communication, and an ability to engage audiences on meaningful topics.



2025-2026 CHAPTER OFFICERS:

President: Amanda Operana
Vice-President: Emanuel Lopez
Treasurer: Dulce Alfaro
Secretary: Mackenzie DePue
Event Coordinator: Natalie Anchundia
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Xavier Perez

OUTSTANDING SENIOR AWARD - AMANDA OPERANA



Growing up, I blindly trusted authority. But seeing the very people sworn to protect us cause harm, forced me to start paying attention. Witnessing racial injustice and police brutality on the news, forced me to start questioning the system. I felt like I had a calling, and DePaul gave me the opportunity to turn it into something meaningful.

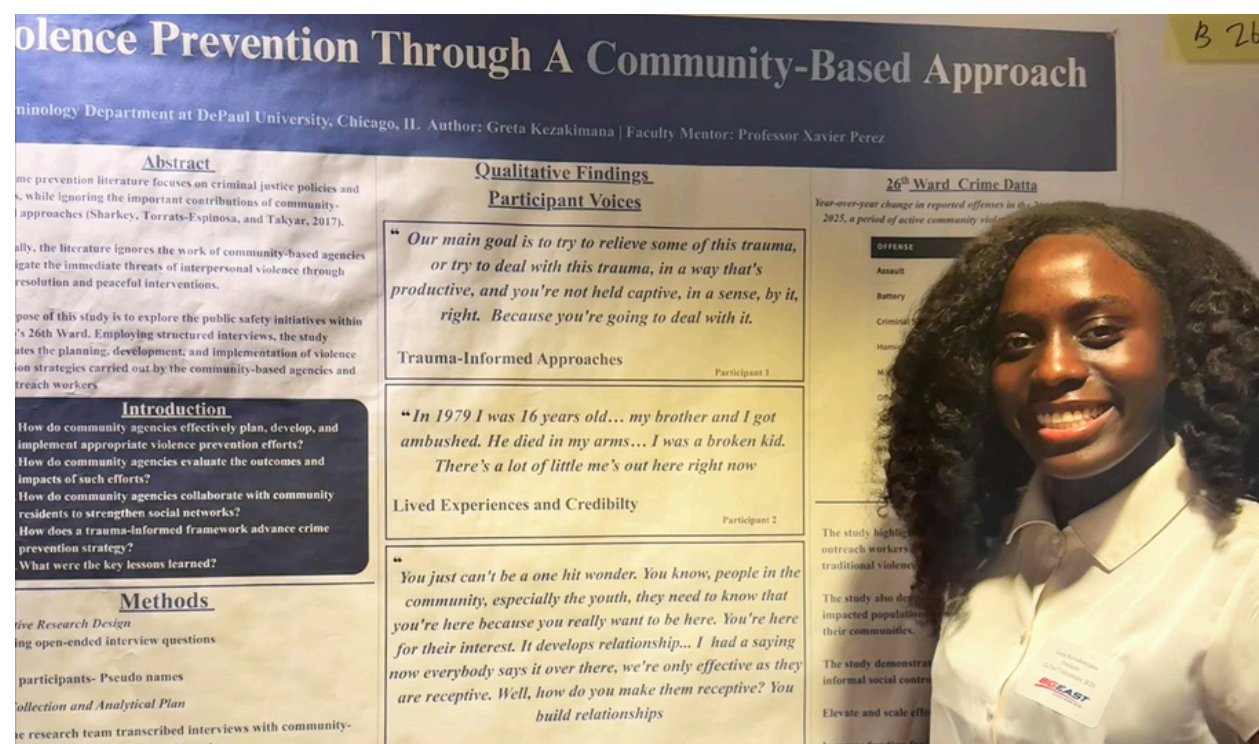
The Criminology faculty played a major role in shaping my experience. Working alongside Professor Freemon as an Undergraduate Research Assistant provided real-world context to my academic work. Through that role, I had the opportunity to present at the Midwestern Criminal Justice

Association Conference here in Chicago, and at the American Society of Criminology Conference in Washington D.C. These inspiring experiences made me feel like I truly belonged in this field.

Serving as President of Alpha Phi Sigma taught me that leadership means showing up consistently and making sure every member feels supported. I took pride in building community within the major and organizing events that connected students to one another.

My Inside-Out class stood out above the rest. Learning alongside incarcerated students in Cook County Jail gave me a profoundly humanizing perspective. It moved me from focusing on the problem to searching for the solution. I came to DePaul searching for accountability and left with a deeper passion for repair. I'm proud of what I've built here, and I'm leaving ready to advocate for those who go unheard and to keep challenging the system

GRETA KEZAKIMANA



Special congratulations to Greta Kezakimana for placing 2nd overall for her presentation at the Big East Undergraduate Research Poster Symposium!

A standout accomplishment for Greta as the only DePaul student to earn this recognition. Her achievement highlights both the quality of her research and her ability to present it effectively among peers from prestigious universities such as Butler, University of Connecticut, Creighton, and Georgetown.

Greta noted that the response to her work was overwhelmingly positive, with many attendees expressing strong interest in her research exploring violence prevention using community-based approaches in Chicago's 26th Ward.

ALEXIS TURNER

Alexis Turner has been awarded the Summer Undergraduate Research Grant (SURG) for her study, "Disrupting the Pipeline: Addressing Educational Resource Inequality to Reduce Youth Incarceration." Alexis will examine the school-to-prison pipeline across Illinois middle and high schools, informed by her current internship with the Juvenile Probation Department in Cook County (IL).

She will be presenting her study in a poster at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting in November of 2026.



Jasmine Catalan

What are your goals for post-grad?

I will be interning at the Cook County Sheriff's Office doing



video surveillance support with hopes of employment afterwards. Otherwise, I will be taking a gap year to gain experience in the field before returning to DePaul to earn my Master's in Legal Studies (MLS) with a concentration on Criminal Law.

What advice do you have for future students?

I'd advise students to keep an open mind, because doing so will allow you to engage more deeply with differing criminological perspectives, challenge assumptions, and gain a better understanding of crime and its broader social implications.

Miabella Ortiz

What are your goals for post-grad?

I'm excited to start as a Victims Advocate with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center's Violence Prevention initiative.



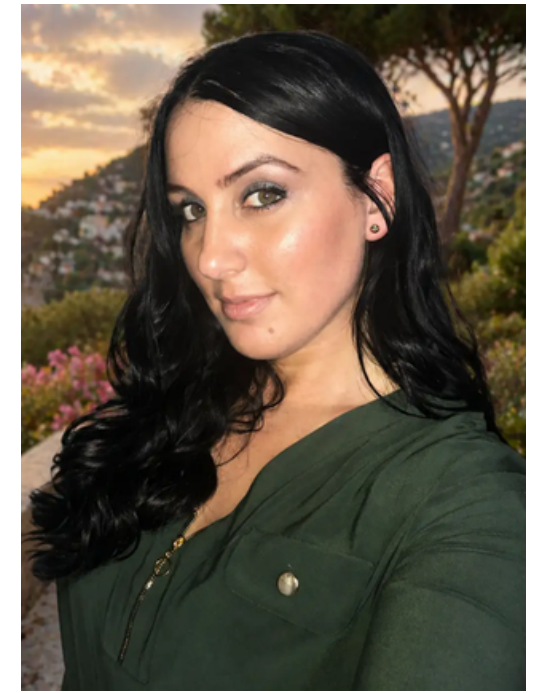
What was your favorite DePaul memory?

The service immersion trip I took to El Salvador. I learned so much about culture, power, and resistance and it introduced me to amazing people.

Jennifer Dodge

What are your goals for post-grad?

I will attain my Juris Doctor and with that, work with youth recidivism



prevention programs in areas of low socioeconomic status. By doing so, I wish to become the adult that saved me as a child.

What was your favorite DePaul memory?

The unexpected connections that I will cherish forever. Jada, Lia, Payton and Juan, thank you for your warmth and kindness. You came into my life when I needed it the most. I will never forget you.

What advice do you have for future students?

If it is your true desire to become a police officer, understand that one day in the future, you will be forced to affect an arrest. It is crucial that you understand the magnitude of this action in which you are granted the authority to enact. If you must revoke a person's freedom, do so, but leave them their dignity.

Zakariya Lockhart*What are your goals for post-grad?*

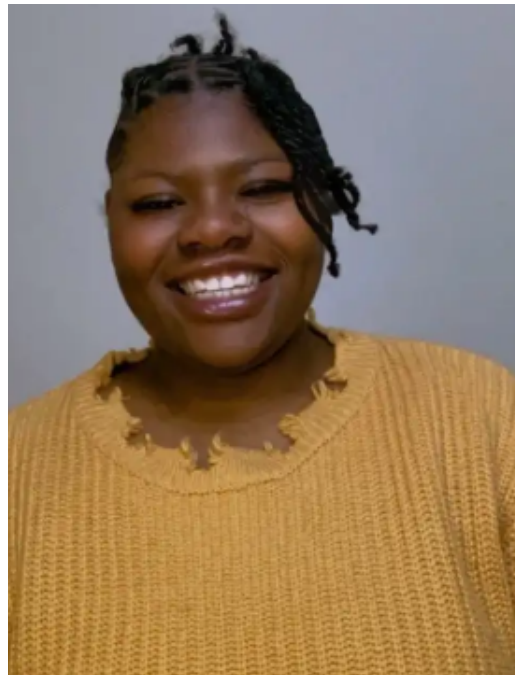
After graduating, my goal is to become a police officer and gain experience in the field. I've always been interested in criminal justice and helping people, which is what pushed me toward this career path. Within the next few years, I want to work my way up to becoming a detective, because I'm interested in investigations and solving cases. I know it'll take hard work and discipline, but I'm focused on doing what I need to do to get there.

What is your favorite DePaul memory?

Taking CRIM 264 with Professor Del Toro. It changed how I look at the criminal justice system and made me think more deeply about a lot of the topics we discussed.

What advice do you have for future students?

Stay focused and try to understand the material instead of just trying to pass. Ask questions, stay consistent, and don't be afraid to challenge yourself. The program can get difficult, but remembering why you started can keep you motivated. Keep an open mind because criminology can change your perspective on people and the legal system.

**Gyahatzee Galilea Vargas***What are your goals for post-grad?*

Prepare for the LSAT to enter law school by 2027. I also want to gain experience in the legal field by conducting research and to learn more legal terminology.

What was your favorite DePaul memory?

One of my favorite memories at DePaul was assisting on campus during orientation. It felt surreal to realize that I was finally pursuing an education in something that I am truly passionate about. As a first-generation student, it was important for me to take advantage of every opportunity because I understand the sacrifices my family made to help me get here. Being on campus made me feel proud of myself because I achieved another one of my goals. I look forward to continuing my education and gaining more knowledge through law school.

What advice do you have for future students?

Make connections with the people around you. It can feel difficult to build strong friendships. When you take the initiative to talk to others you can make meaningful bonds.



MACKENZIE SAVAGE ('20)*What is your current job?*

I am a Deputy District Attorney, Contra Costa County, CA (Bay Area) in the IMPACT Unit. I handle all felony DUI fatalities and the most serious felony DUI cases. Because IMPACT is a vertical prosecution unit, I am involved in these cases starting with the investigation and filing of the case to seeing them through to the resolution (whether that's a trial or a negotiated disposition.) A big part of my job is working alongside law enforcement as we investigate DUI-related fatalities. I build the cases, make tough decisions, and advocate for justice. I spend a significant amount of time with victims and their families explaining the process to them and providing them the support and compassion they need. The victims in my cases are often going through the most painful chapter of their lives. As the prosecutor assigned to their case, I try to make sure they feel supported, informed, and seen throughout the entire process. In addition to handling my caseload, I also lead trainings and take part in community outreach to try to prevent DUI tragedies before they happen. At the heart of my role as the IMPACT prosecutor is the hope that accountability, awareness, and compassion can make a real difference in the community of Contra Costa County.

How does your work connect to what you learned through the Criminology program at DePaul?

The lessons I learned as a Criminology major at DePaul University have helped shape me into the prosecutor and person I am today. As a prosecutor, I understand that every decision I make has a broader impact beyond just that individual case. I always consider how my choices will affect the victim, the community, the defendant, and the court system. My criminology background inspires me to approach each case with a thoughtful, human-centered perspective where I try to understand the behaviors, circumstances, and underlying factors that contributed to an incident. That insight not only guides my pursuit of justice in a specific case but also helps identify ways to prevent similar harm in the future. My goal is to combine the criminology-based perspective I gained at DePaul with my real-world prosecution experience, ensuring that each decision I make is responsible, balanced, and grounded in a genuine commitment to justice.

What are your future goals?

I deeply love my work as a prosecutor. Being able to help victims, be their voice, and work toward making my community safer is incredibly meaningful to me. I feel very fortunate that I get to wake up every day knowing that I am trying to make the world a better place. It's that reason that I can picture myself as a career prosecutor. At the same time, I can also see myself serving as a judge one day. The idea of bringing that same commitment to fairness, compassion, and accountability to the bench is something that resonates with me. But right now, and for the foreseeable future, my heart is in prosecution and in standing up for victims and the community.

The background is white and filled with various four-pointed stars in orange, blue, and grey. Some stars are large and prominent, while others are small and scattered. A thin black horizontal line is positioned above the text, and a thick dark blue horizontal line is positioned below it.

**CONGRATULATIONS
CLASS OF 2026!**



CONNECT WITH US!



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