

Introduction to the NSRJ-CURA

The Nova Scotia Restorative Justice Community University Research Alliance (NSRJ-CURA) is a five year research project funded through the Social Science & Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). Its aim is to study issues related to the institutionalization of restorative justice through the experiences of the Nova Scotia Restorative Justice (NSRJ) Program. The NSRJ-CURA research team includes academics and stakeholders in the NSRJ Program including community agencies, government and criminal justice system officials. The NSRJ-CURA aims to produce research that will advance knowledge among policy makers, practitioners, and the scholarly community about the theory and practice of restorative justice.

This newsletter offers an introduction to the work of the NSRJ-CURA. If you wish more information, please check out our website at www.nsrj-cura.ca.

Research Projects

Over the course of the project, 17 distinct research initiatives will be completed. Each addresses one or more of five themes related to the institutionalization of restorative justice: (i) translation of principles into practice; (ii) community; (iii) diversity & equity; (iv) gender; and (v) conceptualizing and measuring success.

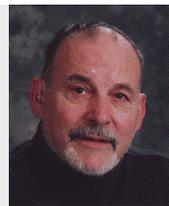
Each newsletter will introduce and feature a few of these projects as the research progresses. Please look for updates on our website. This issue includes three of the projects, one on issues relating to African Nova Scotians, the second relating to the relationship between and among RJ programs in Nova Scotia and the third exploring legal issues pertaining to due process.



A Critical Race Approach to Restorative Justice: The African Nova Scotian Context

Lead Researcher: Michelle Williams

This project will identify how restorative justice practice could better respond to the needs and concerns of African Nova Scotians. In light of anti-Black racism and structural and systemic inequality experienced by African Nova Scotians, it will be helpful to examine restorative justice theory and practice through a lens that accounts for such experiences. Consequently, the research will consider an Africentric approach to restorative justice that would draw upon and contribute to the strengths of African Nova Scotian communities. Moreover, a participatory research process including a town hall meeting, focus groups, interviews and workshops will be used in order to ensure community involvement in the project. Professor Williams says that she is very excited about the project and hopes that the research, and the process itself, will contribute to the empowerment of African Nova Scotian communities, and to the development of better informed RJ policy and practice.



Restorative Justice Programs in Nova Scotia

Lead Researcher: Don Clairmont

Nova Scotia currently has three province-wide restorative justice programs: the Nova Scotia Restorative Justice (NSRJ) Program, the RCMP's Community Justice Forums (CJF), and the Mi'kmaw Customary Law Program (MCLP). We also have an Adult Diversion (AD) Program operated by Community Corrections Nova Scotia. This project will compare and contrast these programs in terms of resources, referral sources, case management practices, types of sessions, compliance monitoring and formal or informal collaboration. Using documents, existing data sources and interviews, the project will explore the programs' historical evolution, their links to one another, and what types of collaboration is foreseeable or possible. It is hoped that this project will contribute to future policy by demonstrating how the programs can benefit from collaboration. It is also hoped that the results from this project will advance the RJ movement in Nova Scotia and provide a solid foundation for the other NSRJ-CURA research projects.

Graduate Fellowships



Due Process for Offenders and Victims in Restorative Justice

Lead Researcher: Bruce Archibald

Restorative justice processes must comply with the mandatory minimum statutory conditions laid out in the Youth Criminal Justice Act, due process requirements of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Restorative Justice Protocol*, which sets factors to guide those who make referrals to the program (i.e., police officers, Crown attorneys or correctional officials). This project will investigate the protection of procedural due process in restorative justice and explore whether and how due process protections operate in practice in the NSRJ Program. Typically, questions of due process relate to the rights of the offender but this project will expand the issue to further explore the legal rights of victims and community participants. Community participants in the restorative process represent the public interest. This project will address the question of how this is managed and whether it is perceived fair, by due process standards. It will involve legal research, examination of formal practices and interviews with NSRJ Program Stakeholders. Best practice recommendations should emerge from this particular examination of the interplay of theory and practice in restorative justice.

Research Clusters

Sub-committees, called research clusters, bring together projects that overlap or have common research focus or methods. We have three clusters:

- ◆ Principles in Practice (Marge DeBodt, Chair)
- ◆ Diversity & Equity (Yvonne Atwell, Chair)
- ◆ Program Operations (Pat Gorham, Chair)

Each cluster is chaired by one of our community partners and includes others (Lead Researchers and other NSRJ-CURA partners) interested in the projects covered by each cluster. Each member of the NSRJ-CURA team sits on at least one cluster.

The clusters will meet regularly over the life of the NSRJ-CURA to assist Lead Researchers with the planning, development, and implementation of their projects. The research clusters will also provide an opportunity to development knowledge dissemination and mobilization plans and recommendations relating to the specific projects within their clusters.

The NSRJ-CURA is committed to involving students through graduate fellowships, internships, and research assistantships. Involvement with the NSRJ-CURA, will enhance the students' abilities in participating in research as well and developing their knowledge of theories and practices of RJ. Each year, funding permitting, the NSRJ-CURA will provide a graduate student with a scholarship to assist with their research study.



In 2006, Audrey Barrett was awarded the first Graduate Fellowship to continue her studies relating to restorative justice in the Masters of Law Program.

A native of Sydney, Nova Scotia, Audrey holds a Bachelor of Science, Honours with Distinction from Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax. She received her Bachelor of Laws from Dalhousie Law School in 2006, having concentrated much on the area of restorative justice. She also worked as part of a CIDA-funded team in The Gambia advising the Government on the implementation of Restorative Justice and Community-Based Policing. Most recently, Audrey has been lecturing in restorative justice at Dalhousie Law School and is currently articling with the firm Burchell Hayman Parish of Halifax.

On April 13, 2007, Audrey presented her research project entitled "What Habermas Can Tell Restorative Justice" at a NSRJ-CURA workshop sponsored by the Faculty Law. It was a great success.



The successful candidate for the 2007 Graduate Fellowship is Kathryn Bliss. Kathryn is originally from Montreal and completed her undergraduate degree in criminal justice and public policy at the University of Guelph in 2003. She is currently pursuing her Master's of Arts in Criminology at Saint Mary's University.

Kathryn's research project will focus on how the community understands justice in relation to the Nova Scotia Restorative Justice Program, which could have implications on how restorative justice is presented to the public. She will be running focus groups in the Spring of 2008 and is currently recruiting individuals to take part. If interested in participating, please contact Kathryn at kathryn.bliss@smu.ca

Partnerships and Affiliations

Since its inception, the NSRJ-CURA has developed partnerships and affiliations with various researchers and organizations. As we move forward, we hope to have the opportunity to develop further relationships/partnerships with other researchers and those involved with restorative justice (locally, nationally and internationally). As part of these efforts the NSRJ-CURA will host a number of visitors over the life of the grant.

Restorative Justice Researcher from Australia Visits the NSRJ-CURA

Our first visitor, Tony Foley, was in Halifax in October 2007. Tony is a solicitor and legal aid lawyer from Australia and a Senior Lecturer at the College of Law at the Australian National University.



Tony's research examines the theoretical principles underlying the concept of justice and the manner in which restorative justice processes respond to these crucial underlying values. He argues that restorative justice processes have most resonance with the conception of justice that gives people what they deserve in a different way. He states that:

“Rather than being conceived in a retributive just deserts sense, restorative justice reinterprets the standard to encompass a meaning of justice that gives a person what they deserve in both negative (‘deserving of censure and denunciation’) and positive (‘deserving to feel vindicated and apologized to’) terms.”

During his visit, Tony conducted formal structured interviews and informal conversations with NSRJ Program personnel and NSRJ-CURA collaborators. He also met with Pat Gorham, Director of the NSRJ Program, toured the agencies in Halifax and Kentville and met RCMP and officials at the Waterville Youth Facility. Tony was also an official faculty visitor to Dalhousie Law School where he gave a comparative lecture on restorative justice to law students, and shared his research during a faculty seminar, attended by graduate students, faculty, and NSRJ-CURA collaborators.

This visit highlights the extent to which the Nova Scotia Restorative Justice Program is gaining international interest as one of the most comprehensive and significant programs in any jurisdiction around the globe.

Researcher to Study SSHRC's CURA Program

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) describes its Community University Research Alliance (CURA) Program as an opportunity for bringing community practitioners and academic researchers together for the purposes of generating “new knowledge, tools and methods to develop the best strategies for diverse aspects of intervention, action research, program delivery and policy development”.

While the differing priorities of community and the academy can create challenges for any research alliance, the CURA Program operates under the assumption that similar goals and differing strengths far outweigh the challenge when it comes to producing new and useful knowledge. This commitment, while obviously important, raises some interesting questions: What happens to the way knowledge is gathered, generated, and disseminated when community and academic researchers think about and produce knowledge? And what is the nature of the “new knowledge, tools and methods,” that collaborative projects produce?

Russell Westhaver, from the Department of Sociology and Criminology at Saint Mary's University, has recently received Research Ethics Board approval to study the NSRJ-CURA as a place where community members and academics work together. This will begin a project designed to answer the question identified above. In the upcoming months, he will be joining members of the NSRJ-CURA interested in participating in his project so that he can watch, listen, and understand the impact community-university collaborations have on knowledge production. We look forward to working with Russell and reviewing the results of his research. His project will capture and reflect upon the NSRJ-CURA's efforts to build and strengthen collaborative research partnerships.

Resources

Introduction to the NSRJ-CURA Website

Take a few moments to explore our website at www.nsrj-cura.ca. This website was developed to provide the public and those within our partner networks with an introduction to and information about the research and activities of the NSRJ-CURA. This site will also serve as a space that researchers and partners to the NSRJ-CURA can share and store information. The site also offers public access to our research database which contains all of the sources and resources used by NSRJ-CURA researchers. The database can be searched by keyword and topics.

You will notice that there is a members-only section of the site. Access to this part of the site is limited to NSRJ-CURA academic and community research collaborators. This section of the site will be used to post information for upcoming meetings, meeting notes, policies, project proposals, etc. Coming soon there will also be a virtual meeting space that will allow collaborative research meetings to be conducted on-line.

New Information on the Website

If you look under the link for the Public Opinion project you will find several new documents:

- Summary of literature reviewed
According to the literature review, the public does seem open to restorative justice processes for less serious offences. There is also more support for the use of restorative justice for young offenders than for adults.
- Notes from the Town Halls in Sydney and Millbrook
The notes are presented along several themes: How to achieve justice and community-based justice, barriers to achieving justice, and the meaning of restorative justice.
- Re-enactment of RJ session
During the Sydney Town Hall, some local high school students put on a skit re-enacting a typical RJ session. This was recorded and one of our student research assistants has taken the video and produced a well polished movie that has been posted on the website.

Completed transcripts of the Town Halls are available to NSRJ-CURA researchers and can be obtained by contacting the NSRJ-CURA Office.

News / Updates

We have great news! The NSRJ-CURA will partner with the Nova Scotia Criminal Justice Association (NSCJA) for their 2009 annual conference. This will give us an opportunity to present and provide an update on our research.

The NSRJ-CURA will also partner with the NSCJA and the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) for the CURA final conference in Halifax in the spring of 2011. This will be a great opportunity for us to disseminate results of our research and meet others from various parts of the world who are interested in restorative justice. Stay tuned for more details!

The IIRP will be hosting its 11th IIRP World Conference, "Restoring Community in a Disconnected World," from October 22-24, 2008, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. For more information about this event and future events, please visit their website at <http://www.iirp.org>.

Update on Research Process (Progress Update)

Most projects have completed the literature review and planning stages. We have also almost completed the process of negotiating access to research data from the Department of Justice. Since some of this data relates to young people in conflict with the law, we have worked closely with the Department of Justice to ensure the utmost care and highest ethical standards are met in dealing with this information.

The projects are now moving into the data collection and analyses phase. In conjunction with Restorative Justice Week 2007, we held town hall sessions in Sydney and Millbrook. In addition, several questionnaires have been developed which will be distributed to subjects over the next few months and focus groups are being planned for late fall. Data collected through these methods will contribute to many of the research projects.

Contact Information

Should you wish further information about the NSRJ-CURA, please feel free to contact us:

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