

A WELCOME MESSAGE

by Co-Director Joel Capellan

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the CERC Quarterly. It is a privilege to launch this forum for our partners, colleagues, and the growing community of scholars dedicated to advancing research excellence at Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs).

The Center for Enhancing Research Capacity at MSIs (CERC-MSI) was established with a singular mission: to empower MSI faculty and institutions to compete for, manage, and sustain externally funded research that meaningfully impacts policy and practice. We recognize that the primary obstacles facing MSI scholars are structural, not a lack of talent or vision. Our work is rooted in the conviction that targeted support, strategic partnerships, and sustained mentorship can effectively bridge these systemic gaps.

Through initiatives like the Research Nexus, InnovaMSI, Propel, and our Speaker Series, CERC-MSI is building pathways for individual scholars while simultaneously strengthening institutional infrastructure. We view capacity building not as a one-time intervention, but as a long-term investment in people and the systems that support them.

In this issue, we highlight our ongoing projects, introduce our dedicated team, and share resources designed to support researchers at every career stage. We invite you to join us—to collaborate, engage, and help shape a more inclusive and impactful research landscape in criminal justice and beyond.

Please note that the opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

Thank you for your commitment to this mission.

IN THIS ISSUE

A MESSAGE FROM A
DIRECTOR

MISSION STATEMENT

INITIATIVES

SPEAKER SERIES

MEET THE TEAM

THE PROBLEM
STATEMENT

MISSION STATEMENT

The Center for Enhancing Research Capacity (CERC) for Minority-Serving Institutions at John Jay College is committed to strengthening the ability of MSIs and Research Emerging Institutions to compete, thrive, and lead in externally funded research in Criminal Justice.

We focus on advancing the skills, infrastructure, and support systems that enable faculty and institutions to secure funding and expand their research portfolios. Our primary objectives are:

- **Strengthen Research Infrastructure:** We help MSIs build the infrastructure and organizational capacity needed to successfully secure, manage, and sustain externally funded research. Our support strengthens grant-writing processes, project management systems, and compliance structures so institutions can compete more effectively and operate with confidence.
- **Expand Research Contributions:** We work to increase the number of MSI researchers producing innovative, evidence-based solutions to pressing issues in criminal and juvenile justice—spanning criminology, forensic sciences, law and society, forensic psychology, and related fields. By fostering researchers' skills and expertise, we help MSIs expand their impact on policy, practice, and scholarly discourse.
- **Promote Sustainable Growth:** We design initiatives that cultivate long-term research capacity within MSIs. By supporting the development of sustainable systems and a culture of research excellence, we help ensure that MSIs thrive, strengthen their visibility, and grow as leaders within the broader research community.

INITIATIVES

Research Nexus

The Research Nexus Program provides hands-on training about the nuts and bolts and various aspects of the research process via workshops, lectures and the like. The research nexus also connects MSI researchers with established experts to foster collaborative research efforts. It promotes joint research projects and facilitates networking opportunities, increasing the pool of influential MSI researchers who contribute to innovative solutions in the field of criminal justice.



InnovaMSI

The InnovaMSI initiative identifies and addresses gaps in research support infrastructure at MSIs through in-depth assessments. It develops customized, strategic plans to strengthen these institutions' research infrastructure, positioning them to more effectively compete for and manage external research funding.

Propel Initiative

The Propel Initiative delivers immersive, cohort-based training and mentorship to MSI researchers who are selected via a rigorous application process. This initiative enhances select researchers' abilities to secure external funding and conduct impactful, science-based research that addresses key criminal justice challenges.



LAUNCHING IN 2026: THE NEW MSI RESEARCH SPEAKER SERIES

The Grant Proposal Roadmap:
From Planning to Writing

February 17 | 11:30 AM - 1 PM

Finding External Funding
Opportunities in Criminal
Justice

February 24 | 11:30 AM - 1 PM

Formulating Strong and
Impactful Research Questions

March 26 | 11:30 AM - 1 PM

Crafting a Winning
Proposal

April 22 | 11:30 AM - 1 PM

Budgeting and Financial
Management for Grants

May 19 | 11:30 AM - 1 PM

Winning or Losing: What's
Next?

June 23 | 11:30 AM - 1 PM

In 2026, we are thrilled to introduce a **new Speaker Series** specifically designed to empower MSI faculty and researchers. This series will provide **practical, expert guidance** from leaders in criminal justice and related fields, directly supporting your research endeavors.

- **Focus on Research Success:** The series will feature **six virtual sessions per year**, each concentrating on a concrete aspect of the research lifecycle: **developing, funding, and managing high-impact projects**.
- **Interactive and Accessible Format:** Sessions will be hosted on Zoom and structured for **live interaction and Q&A**, giving you the opportunity to clarify concepts, discuss real-world challenges, and directly connect the material to your own work.
- **On-Demand Resources:** Can't make a session? No problem. Recordings and key resources will be made available on our website to ensure faculty can revisit sessions as needed.
- **Broad Access:** Key takeaways from each event will also be shared through our website, newsletter, and social media channels to ensure broader access across MSIs.

Stay Informed! To receive updates about upcoming sessions, new resources, and registration links, please visit **our website** or contact us directly at **cerc_msi@jjay.cuny.edu**. We encourage you to sign up and stay informed as this valuable series continues to expand!

MEET THE TEAM



JOEL CAPELLAN
CO-DIRECTOR

Dr. Joel A. Capellan directs the Center for Enhancing the Research Capacity of Minority-Serving Institutions (CERC-MSI) and is an Associate Professor at John Jay College. He received his Ph.D. from the CUNY Graduate Center/John Jay College in 2016. An expert in gun violence, race and policing, and policy evaluation, he has authored over 35 peer-reviewed articles featured in outlets like The Guardian, NPR, and ABC News. Governor Phil Murphy appointed him to the New Jersey and Regional Gun Violence Research Consortium.

Dr. Capellan also has extensive international experience managing public safety and judicial reform initiatives in Central America, including serving as Co-Principal Investigator for the USAID-funded Academy for Security Analysis.



JOSHUA FREILICH
CO-DIRECTOR

Joshua D. Freilich is a professor in the Criminal Justice Department at John Jay College. His research has been funded by DHS and NIJ and focuses on the causes of and responses to targeted violence, open-source research methods, and criminology theory, especially situational crime prevention.



JUSTICE EVANS
PROGRAM MANAGER

Justice Evans is a 5th-year Ph.D. student in the Criminal Justice department at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. She holds a B.S. and M.A. in Criminal Justice from Old Dominion University and John Jay College of Criminal Justice, respectively. Justice's research interests include police surveillance technologies, program evaluation, data visualization, and causal methods. She has experience as a court advocate and more recently completed an Applied Justice research fellowship with the Reshaping Prosecution initiative at the Vera Institute of Justice and the Research and Evaluation Center at John Jay.



DAVIA WILLIS
PROJECT ASSISTANT

Davia Willis is a Dual BS/MA student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She works as a research assistant and first got hands-on experience through the CUNY Research Scholars Program, where she spent a year working on a project with a faculty mentor. She has also completed Honors Contract research papers that allowed her to go beyond the regular curriculum and explore topics through independent data collection and analysis. She is especially interested in research connected to current affairs and in the fields of psychology, criminal justice, and sociology. Being an international student from Jamaica has shaped the way she sees the world, and she tries to bring that perspective into both her studies and research.



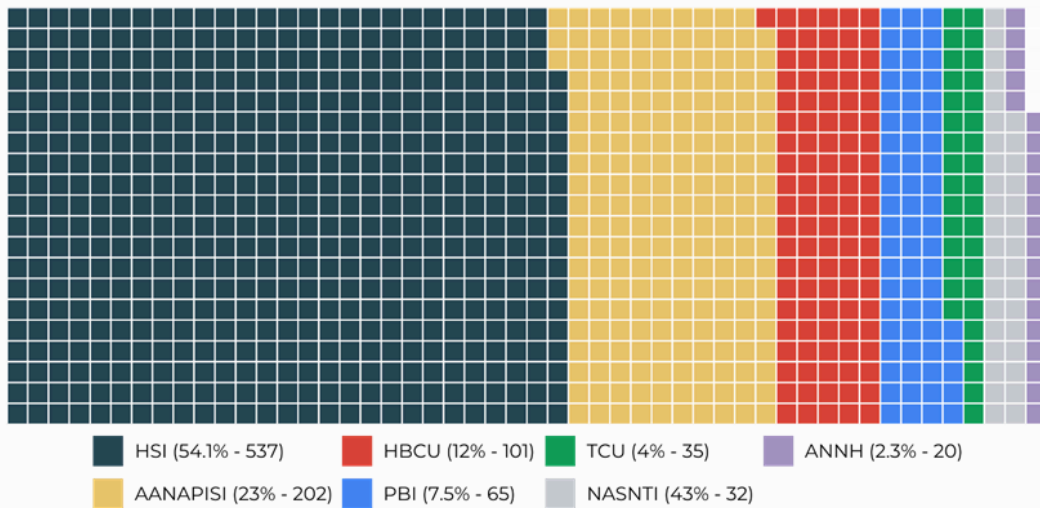
NOREEN ALI
COMMUNICATIONS
MANAGER

Noreen Ali is a fourth-year doctoral student at the CUNY Graduate Center and a graduate assistant at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She holds a B.S. in Criminal Justice from Pace University and an M.A. in Criminal Justice from Fairleigh Dickinson University. She has worked as a research assistant on multiple projects focused on sexual abuse, criminal stigma, terrorism, voter suppression, abortion, and dark web sexploitation. Her current work centers on the prevalence of sexual abuse in youth-serving organizations and examines how childhood sexual abuse impacts survivors' reporting behaviors and personal outcomes.

THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

What are Minority-Serving Institutions

Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) are a vital part of America’s higher education system. By mission or historical legacy, they serve large numbers of students from communities that have traditionally had fewer pathways to college (Gasman & Bowman, 2011). Today, **there are 868 federally recognized MSIs** educating more than eight million students across the country.



Note: Each square represents one institutional designation. Institutions with multiple designations are shown with separate squares.

Why They Matter?

MSIs open doors to students who face a **variety of barriers**—offering academic programs, student support, and campus cultures designed to help them thrive (Hu & Ma, 2010; Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005; Minor et al., 2008). However, their importance extends beyond education. Many MSIs serve communities grappling with **high levels of violent and property crime** and significant law enforcement presence. This positions them as uniquely valuable to the field of criminal justice.

MSIs are training the next generation of police officers, practitioners, and scholars who understand the local context and experience of the communities they serve. They also conduct research that guides crime **prevention, problem solving, public safety strategies, and justice policies** tailored to those realities—helping bridge the gap between evidence-based practice and community needs (NAACP, 2022; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2022).

Research and Funding Barriers Confronting MSIs

The literature identifies several factors that can make it more challenging for MSIs to compete for and manage external research funding. These factors generally fall into three areas:

1. Institutional Capacity

- Many MSIs operate with limited grant administration infrastructure — with 64% lacking a dedicated grant office — which can affect the ability to develop competitive proposals and efficiently manage awarded funds.
- Faculty at MSIs often have heavier teaching and service commitments, leaving less time for research and proposal development (Gallo et al., 2021; Guerra & Wilson, 2024; Toldson, 2017).

2. Professional Networks and Engagement

- Faculty at MSIs may have fewer opportunities to participate in national research networks, which can limit access to collaborative projects and timely information about funding opportunities.
- Lower levels of representation in national grant review panels may also reduce opportunities to share perspectives on institutional strengths and constraints (Gallo et al., 2021; Toldson, 2017).

3. Proposal Development and Review Processes

- Complex application requirements can present barriers, particularly for institutions with fewer dedicated research support staff.
- Limited participation in the peer review process can reduce familiarity with reviewer expectations and successful proposal models (American Institute of Biological Science, 2022).