

VERMONT LAW SCHOOL MASTER OF ARTS IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE (MARJ) CURRICULUM MAPPING AND EVALUATION PROCESS REPORT

By Lindsey Pointer, Alanna Ojibway, and Stephanie Clark

OVERVIEW

Vermont Law School (VLS) is home to the National Center on Restorative Justice (NCORJ) which is funded through the US Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), and is a partnership between VLS, the University of Vermont (UVM), and the University of San Diego (USD). The broad objective of the NCORJ is to improve criminal justice policy and practice in the United States, with restorative justice education being one mechanism to achieve this objective.

In 2020, the NCORJ began a full course mapping and assessment of VLS's Master of Arts in Restorative Justice (MARJ) program. In order to do this, the NCORJ utilized a restorative process which began with a series of circles (facilitated dialogues) on what students completing the MARJ ought to know, do, and value. These conversations included students, faculty, the NCORJ Advisory Council members, and restorative justice leaders associated with the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice (NACRJ). The findings were comprehensive and required several stages of distillation to identify broad programmatic needs and themes, which were embodied in a new set of Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs). Each broad outcome is supported by more specific outcomes, and all were designed using Bloom's Taxonomy to ensure they are measurable and reflect graduate level learning. The new set of PLOs are included on page 2 of this report.

In 2021, the NCORJ began analyzing the current MARJ curriculum in light of the new PLOs, investigating whether existing classes cover necessary topics and in adequate depth.

To do this, faculty in the MARJ program were asked to complete a survey indicating which of the new PLOs are covered in courses they teach and to what extent. The results of that survey are summarized in a matrix attached (pages 5-7).

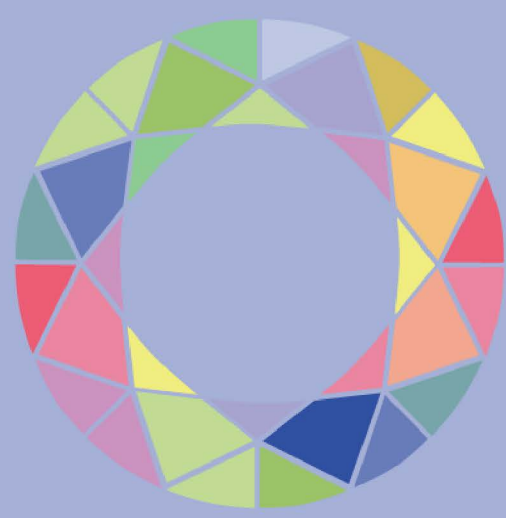
In the matrix, each course is listed in a column and each learning outcome is listed in a row. The cells indicate the faculty responses as to how each course supports the individual learning outcomes at the following levels:

- **N "None"**: the course does not address the material
- **I "Introduce"**: the course introduces the material
- **R "Reinforce"**: the course reinforces material that is introduced elsewhere
- **E "Emphasize"**: the course emphasizes material leading towards mastery

When there is more than one response per cell, there was more than one response for that course.

The new PLOs and results from the faculty survey were then provided to recent MARJ graduates, who were invited to participate in either an online student focus group or a residential student focus group, to provide their feedback on the survey results from their experience as students. These focus groups were less formal in their facilitation than the original circles and, like the faculty survey, asked the focus group participants to reflect on which PLOs were covered in the classes they took, and to what depth. This process began with an opening circle for each person to introduce themselves and check in and then, for each of the six PLO sections, eight minutes were budgeted for participants to discuss and reflect on the degree to which specific existing courses support each PLO. The focus groups ended with a closing circle inviting final reflections relevant to the PLOs and suggestions for new course developments to address gaps in current curriculum relevant to the new PLOs, and/or other recommended curricular changes. A summary of the insights of these focus groups is on page 3 of this report.

While additional analysis of the survey data will take place in Spring 2022, and the process will become iterative, this report offers immediate action steps to improve the MARJ program based on the outcomes of this course mapping and evaluation process.



MARJ PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

For each of the following Program Learning Outcomes, and upon completion of the Master of Arts in Restorative Justice (MARJ), students will be able to:

1. Restorative Justice Literacy: History and Foundations

- Identify and describe the core principles, philosophy, and theory of restorative justice.
- Explain the history of restorative justice, particularly its global indigenous roots.
- Recognize the problem of cultural appropriation and various strategies for RJ practitioners to avoid or ameliorate it.
- Critique restorative justice to identify its limitations, barriers, and failings.
- Devise solutions and approaches to infuse restorative values and practices into existing systems and institutions.
- Formulate new restorative systems, policies, programs, or processes across contexts.

2. Restorative Justice at Different Levels: Internal, Interpersonal, Institutional, Systemic

- Differentiate between restorative justice applications at micro and macro levels: internally, interpersonally, institutionally, and systemically; and be able to evaluate and assess situations and relationships across those dimensions and express the potential of restorative justice to address each meaningfully.
- Identify what it means to “live restoratively” and reflect on its relevance to one’s own thinking patterns, values, biases, assumptions, and behaviors.
- Develop relational policies for institutions. Create opportunities for institutions to connect and collaborate on implementing restorative approaches.
- Evaluate the relationship between interpersonal and systemic harm (especially structural racism) and the potential of restorative justice to meaningfully address each.
- Critique where restorative justice has fallen short in addressing broader structural inequities, where it has contributed to structural harms, and propose new approaches to address these harms.
- Identify the breadth and depth of trauma individually and systemically in society by recognizing behaviors and impacts of trauma; assess those behaviors and systems with a trauma-informed lens.

3. Legal Foundation and Literacy

- Compare and contrast restorative justice laws and policies with prevailing legal and regulatory systems.
- Assess harms caused by the current legal and regulatory systems in the United States and consider how change is possible. Evaluate and develop restorative approaches to replace or integrate into the legal and regulatory systems where possible, creating systemic change and growth.



Talking piece used in circles to determine revised PLOs

- Identify institutional and systemic policies and practices that exacerbate trauma and maintain discriminatory application.

4. Restorative Justice Practice and Facilitation

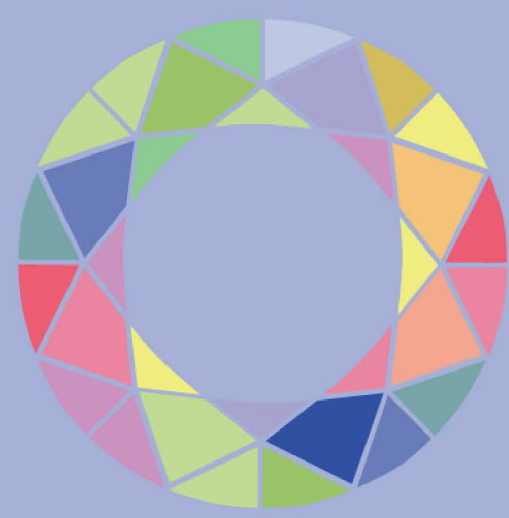
- Evaluate conflicts, issues, and harms through a restorative approach across contexts, and determine appropriate restorative responses.
- Formulate and facilitate a variety of restorative processes demonstrating a set of skills-based competencies
- Adapt practices based on an identification and understanding of trauma and adverse childhood experiences to support participants in a restorative process.

5. Restorative Justice Research and Evaluation

- Assess how restorative justice works and how to ensure successful processes with fidelity to restorative values while considering limitations and barriers to implementation.
- Evaluate the evidence-base for restorative justice, identify gaps, conduct and/or review research, and propose new restorative applications.
- Define measurable outcomes across restorative practices and evaluate those outcomes to inform future practice.

6. Communication, Advocacy, and Leadership

- Develop ways to deconstruct power imbalances, creating systems and situations that invite all voices and interests equally.
- Persuade orally, visually, and in writing as advocates, problem solvers, and catalysts for change.



KEY INSIGHTS FROM STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS BY PLO SECTION

1. Restorative Justice Literacy: History and Foundations

- Focus group participants noted the issue of cultural appropriation is not sufficiently covered, and recommended structured in-class discussions about cultural appropriation, ideally in an introductory course.
- Participants identified a need for additional learning about the range of restorative justice applications, both in setting and scale.

2. Restorative Justice at Different Levels: Internal, Interpersonal, Institutional, Systemic

- Participants noted this section is well-covered in a variety of existing courses.
- Participants suggested that offering specialties within the MARJ may be beneficial. For example: RJ in education or the criminal legal system, or in response to historical harms.
- Participants identified a need to learn more about the broader socio-political context in which restorative justice takes place, and specifically in the context of colonization, white supremacy, and systemic discrimination.

3. Legal Foundation and Literacy

- Participants mentioned an introduction to legal writing designed for masters students would be helpful.
- Participants expressed a desire to learn more about restorative justice policy. One suggestion is to do this by augmenting Legislation and Regulation.
- Participants expressed an interest in analyzing assumptions underlying existing legal frameworks, and specifically how those frameworks were established and shaped through patriarchy, white supremacy, and codified forms of discrimination.

4. Restorative Justice Practice and Facilitation

- This learning outcome was identified by participants as being most deficient. Participants expressed a desire for more opportunities in courses throughout the program to learn facilitation skills across types of restorative processes. One recommendation is to regularly offer a 1-credit weekend intensive restorative justice facilitator training, in addition to creating experiential opportunities outside of the classroom.

5. Restorative Justice Research and Evaluation

- Research and Evaluation is another area participants identified as needing significant improvement. One recommendation is to develop a “restorative research methods” course that would consider the values embedded in different approaches to research, and how and by what measures restorative justice is evaluated to determine success.
- Participants also expressed wanting to study and better understand existing restorative justice research.

6. Communication, Advocacy, and Leadership

- Participants want support in developing a quick and persuasive way to articulate what restorative justice is and why it is important, and opportunities to practice this delivery.
- Participants want support in developing narratives in response to common criticisms of restorative justice, and opportunities to practice this delivery.
- Participants want more opportunities to apply what they have learned in the community.
- Participants want to learn about activism in restorative justice leadership, with specific focus on attracting the interest of politicians and the media and learning how to effect policy change.

OTHER INSIGHTS

The Importance of Faculty and Approach

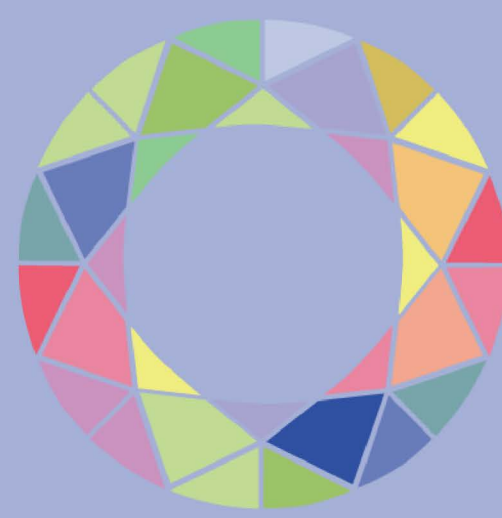
- Participants highlighted the importance of representation and racial diversity within the MARJ faculty in meeting the PLOs.
- Participants want MARJ faculty who understand restorative justice deeply and teach restoratively, and are not adapting a subject to make it fit within the program.
- Participants recommended a restorative pedagogical approach to create space for a truly transformative learning experience, exploring on a deep level not just the topic of restorative justice, but also students’ own experiences and relations to and within larger structures.

Supporting the Depth of Impact

- Participants expressed that restorative justice is a way of being, something they live. Because of the depth of learning, cultivating a caring and supportive student community is important.

General

- Participants also expressed concern about institutionalized education in the restorative justice field, and highlighted a need to increase access to the MARJ to avoid compounding racial and economic inequities.



ACTION STEPS INFORMED BY THE CURRICULUM MAPPING PROCESS

The result of the full process has led to a number of new course proposals to address needs in the MARJ program. Specifically, faculty and graduates noted a lack of practice-based experiential courses. The survey results and feedback from the faculty also identified a potential overlap in content in two foundational classes: **Principles of Restorative Justice** and **Origins, Evolution, and Critical Issues in Restorative Justice**. To fully understand this finding, the RJ Faculty is meeting in Spring 2022 to discuss the content of these classes to determine whether one serves better as the required foundational course and whether a change in the degree requirements is required.

Finally, the process employed is iterative and will be conducted systematically to generate ongoing assessment of the MARJ program.

As a result of the Course Mapping Process outlined above, the following action steps will be taken to improve the MARJ program.

Changes to Existing Courses:

Based on the feedback from the course mapping process, non-substantive adjustments to existing courses will be made to better align with the new Program Learning Outcomes, including:

- Pursuit of modality changes - exploring which courses may benefit from being offered in a synchronous but virtual format to broaden options and access for students, especially for practice-based courses.
- Principles/Origins overlap - a faculty dialogue is planned and will help determine if one of these two courses would better serve as the required foundational MARJ course.
- Redesigning Advanced Restorative Practices - shifting this class to a focus on designing RJ processes for different settings.
- Course scheduling structure - created a new method for selecting which courses are offered when, and mapping out a 2-3 year outline for both the online and residential classes.
- Revisiting how the Course Level Outcomes are achieved in Communication, Advocacy, and Leadership and Legislation and Regulation to include justice reform and restorative justice content to meet those Outcomes.
- Redesigning the “shell” of Global Restorative Justice to offer a comparative scope of RJ practices internationally, rather than always offering the class focused around one international example.

Developing New Courses:

In addition to the above adjustments, new courses will be developed to address gaps in the curriculum as identified through the new PLOs. New courses already identified (the majority of which have already been approved for development) include:

- Restorative Justice Facilitation (1 credit intensive)
- Teaching Restorative Justice (3 credits)
- Truth and Reconciliation (3 credits)
- Environmental Restorative Justice (3 credits)
- Reforming Criminal Justice (now available for online students, in addition to residential students)
- Restorative Justice in Practice (3 credits)
- Motivational Interviewing (1 credit Special Topic for Summer 2022, with course proposal submission anticipated in Fall 2022 to the Curriculum Committee for full approval)

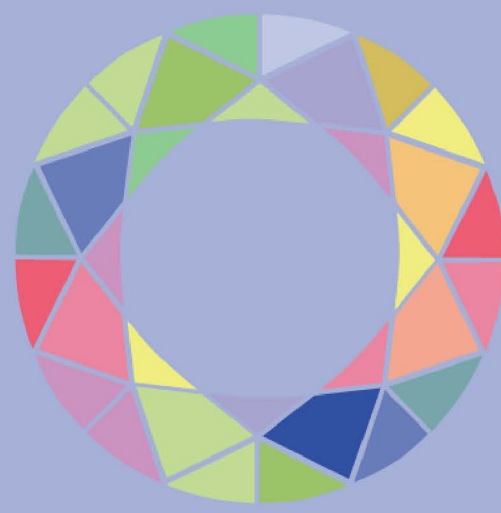
Through NCORJ institutional partner UVM, several Restorative Research Methods courses are being developed which will be available to both VLS and UVM students.

Faculty Training and Education:

- Several RJ faculty dialogues were held on the incorporation of anti-racist curriculum within all MARJ classes, as well as trauma-informed approaches to course delivery and student support.
- Restorative Pedagogy sessions have been held with an international community to broaden the scope of practice for RJ adjuncts to learn from and with other academics in the field.
- A winter 2021/2022 Faculty Dialogue session will focus on incorporating relevant PLOs into courses, and evaluating the need for other course revisions/updates in the context of identified PLO gaps.
- The PLOs will be used as a touchstone in new course design in assessing the structure and content of classes, as well as in faculty recruitment and onboarding.
- A new criminal law faculty will be hired, who will hold a designation in the Center for Justice Reform.

Other:

- The Sustained Dialogue provides opportunities for international collaboration as well as on-campus application of circle facilitation.
- The RJ Chat provides a feeling of community and support and is moving towards more opportunities for facilitation among students.
- RJ Chat Speakers provide insights from practitioners and others in the field. This may grow through combination with a speaker series in collaboration with the NCORJ.



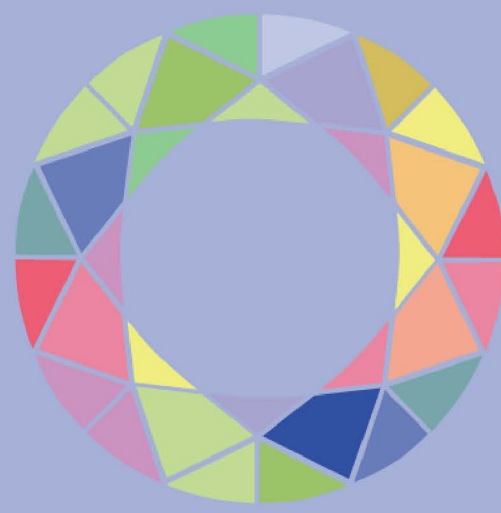
RESULTS OF MARJ FACULTY SURVEY

| | | Ethics and RJ RJ in Indigenous Communities New Approaches to DSV (2) RJ in Educational Institutions Applied Criminal Justice Principles of RJ (2) Advanced Restorative Practices Adversity, Trauma, and Victimization (3) Advanced Victim Rights Global RJ Race, Crimes, and RJ Origins, Evolution, and Critical Issues in RJ (3) Clemency, Pardon, Expungement Communications, Advocacy, and Leadership | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|----|---|---|----|---|-----|---|---|---|-----|---|---|
| I. | Restorative Justice Literacy: History and Foundations | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| a. | Identify and describe the core principles, philosophy, and theory of restorative justice. | R | I | RI | R | N | EI | E | RRI | N | R | I | EEE | N | I |
| b. | Explain the history of restorative justice, particularly its global indigenous roots. | N | I | RI | R | E | II | R | NRN | N | R | R | EEI | N | N |
| c. | Recognize the problem of cultural appropriation and various strategies for RJ practitioners to avoid or ameliorate it. | R | I | RN | I | N | IN | R | RRN | N | I | I | III | N | N |
| d. | Critique restorative justice to identify its limitations, barriers, and failings. | R | E | EE | I | E | EN | E | EII | R | I | E | RII | N | N |
| e. | Devise solutions and approaches to infuse restorative values and practices into existing systems and institutions. | E | E | IE | E | E | RI | E | EIE | E | I | E | EIR | R | N |
| f. | Formulate new restorative systems, policies, programs, or processes across contexts. | E | E | IE | R | F | RI | E | EIR | E | I | E | INR | I | N |

Restorative Justice Literacy: History and Foundations

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|-----|---|---|---|----|---|---|----|---|-----|---|---|---|-----|---|---|
| II. | Restorative Justice at Different Levels: Internal, Interpersonal, Institutional, Systemic | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| a. | Differentiate between restorative justice applications at micro and macro levels: internally, interpersonally, institutionally, and systemically; and be able to evaluate and assess situations and relationships across those dimensions and express the potential of restorative justice to address each meaningfully | I | R | EN | I | I | RN | R | EII | E | N | I | RNR | N | N |
| b. | Identify what it means to "live restoratively" and reflect on its relevance to one's own thinking patterns, values, biases, assumptions, and behaviors. | I | E | EN | E | N | RN | E | ERI | R | N | E | ERI | N | I |
| c. | Develop relational policies for institutions. Create opportunities for institutions to connect and collaborate on implementing restorative approaches. | I | E | EN | R | I | IN | E | EII | R | N | R | NNN | N | N |
| d. | Evaluate the relationship between interpersonal and systemic harm (especially structural racism) and the potential of restorative justice to meaningful address each. | R | E | EE | I | R | RI | E | EII | R | N | E | ERI | R | N |
| e. | Critique where restorative justice has fallen short in addressing broader structural inequities, where it has contributed to structural harms, and propose new approaches to address these harms. | E | E | EI | I | N | RN | R | EIR | R | I | E | III | N | N |
| f. | Identify the breadth and depth of trauma individually and systemically in society by recognizing behaviors and impacts of trauma; assess those behaviors and systems with a trauma-informed lens. | R | R | EE | I | I | IN | R | EEE | E | I | I | IIN | N | N |

Restorative Justice at Different Levels: Internal, Interpersonal, Institutional, Systemic



RESULTS OF MARJ FACULTY SURVEY, CONT.

III. Legal Foundation and Literacy

- a. Compare and contrast restorative justice laws and policies with prevailing legal and regulatory systems. Assess harms caused by the current legal and regulatory systems in the United States and consider how change is possible. Evaluate and develop restorative approaches to replace or integrate into the legal and regulatory systems where possible, creating systemic change and growth.
- b. Identify institutional and systemic policies and practices that exacerbate trauma and maintain discriminatory application.

| Ethics and RJ | RJ in Indigenous Communities | New Approaches to DSV (2) | RJ in Educational Institutions | Applied Criminal Justice | Principles of RJ (2) | Advanced Restorative Practices | Adversity, Trauma, and Victimization (3) | Advanced Victim Rights | Global RJ | Race, Crimes, and RJ | Origins, Evolution, and Critical Issues in RJ (3) | Clemency, Pardon, Expungement | Communications, Advocacy, and Leadership |
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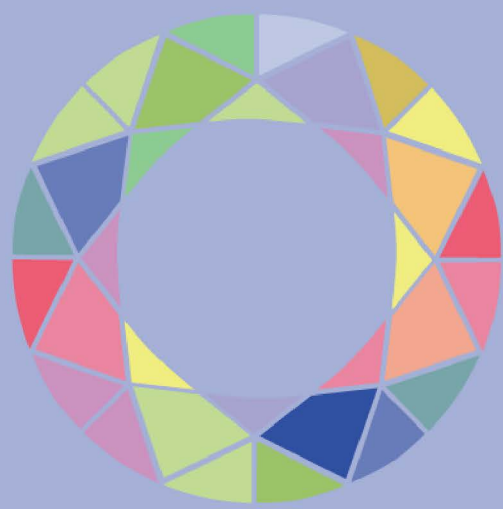
Legal Foundation and Literacy

IV. Restorative Justice Practice and Facilitation

- a. Evaluate conflicts, issues, and harms through a restorative approach across contexts, and determine appropriate restorative responses. Formulate and facilitate a variety of restorative processes demonstrating a set of skills-based competencies.
- b. Adapt practices based on an identification and understanding of trauma and adverse childhood experiences to support participants in a restorative process.

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Restorative Justice Practice and Facilitation



RESULTS OF MARJ FACULTY SURVEY, CONT.

v. Restorative Justice Research and Evaluation

- Assess how restorative justice works and how to ensure successful processes with fidelity to restorative values while considering limitations and barriers to implementation.
- Evaluate the evidence-base for restorative justice, identify gaps, conduct and/or review research, and propose new restorative applications.
- Define measurable outcomes across restorative practices and evaluate those outcomes to inform future practice.

| <div> <div>Ethics and RJ</div> <div>RJ in Indigenous Communities</div> <div>New Approaches to DSV (2)</div> <div>RJ in Educational Institutions</div> <div>Applied Criminal Justice</div> <div>Principles of RJ (2)</div> <div>Advanced Restorative Practices</div> <div>Adversity, Trauma, and Victimization (3)</div> <div>Advanced Victim Rights</div> <div>Global RJ</div> <div>Race, Crimes, and RJ</div> <div>Origins, Evolution, and Critical Issues in RJ (3)</div> <div>Clemency, Pardon, Expungement</div> <div>Communications, Advocacy, and Leadership</div> </div> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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Restorative Justice Research and Evaluation

vi. Communication, Advocacy and Leadership

- Develop ways to deconstruct power imbalances, creating systems and situations that invite all voices and interests equally.
- Persuade orally, visually, and in writing as advocates, problem solvers, and catalysts for change.

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Communication, Advocacy, and Leadership