

Robinson, Matthew B. (2004). A Snapshot of SCJA Members: An Analysis of Paper Presentations at the 1998-2003 SCJA Meetings, American Journal of Criminal Justice Volume 29, Number 1 / September, 2004 DOI: 10.1007/BF02885708

The published version of this article may be accessed at www.springerlink.com.

**A SNAPSHOT OF SCJA MEMBERS:
An Analysis of Paper Presentations at the
1998-2003 SCJA Annual Meetings**

MATTHEW B. ROBINSON
Appalachian State University

ABSTRACT: *This paper contains an analysis of papers scheduled for presentation at the annual meetings of the Southern Criminal Justice Association during a six-year period (1998-2003). The goal is to discover which research topics are most popular and which are least popular in order to develop a clearer picture of what the SCJA is, what its members value, what they stand for, and what they think is important.*

INTRODUCTION

Rarely do scholars examine their own works or those of others, with the regular exception of conducting literature reviews to ground their work in the knowledge base of the larger field. More specifically, we infrequently attempt to understand what it is we as a group are accomplishing through our research and other activities. One example proves the point. There have been only a handful of examinations of conference activities of criminologists and "criminal justicians" (Bennett, 2004; Hale, Austin, Firey, & Smykla, 1999). Robinson (2002) reviewed all papers

presented at the 2002 annual meeting of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) in an effort to find out what members were focusing on in their research and what they were ignoring or neglecting. The goal was not only to discover which research topics were most popular and which were least popular, but more importantly to develop a clearer picture of what the ACJS was, what its members valued, what they stood for, and what they thought was important. Simultaneously, the review showed what issues its members failed to pursue, despite their relevance and importance. Robinson asked, "How can we know what our organization is really about if we do not have a complete understanding of the research and teaching interests of our members?" (p. 1).

The Southern Criminal Justice Association (SCJA), with a rich history and vibrant tradition, offers a similar, perhaps richer opportunity for review. SCJA annual meetings typically offer numerous educational opportunities to learn about the latest innovations in criminal justice and findings in criminological research. The conference is small enough to permit examination of conference participation over a longer period of time than might be possible with national meetings that are attended by thousands.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a glimpse into the SCJA annual meetings through conference activity over a six year period. In this paper, trends in conference participation through papers, roundtables, plenary sessions, workshops, and poster sessions between 1998 and 2003 are illustrated. Brief concluding remarks with regard to future conferences are also included.

METHODOLOGY

This analysis grew out of a careful review of the annual program books for the SCJA meetings from 1998-2003. Originally, the analysis included five years of scheduled presentations at the SCJA (1998-2002).

That study was presented at the 2003 annual meeting of the SCJA as part of a special panel pertaining to the state of the SCJA. The current analysis includes the 2003 conference as well.

For the current paper, the title of each paper scheduled to be presented and the abstract (if needed to clarify the main subject of the paper) were read. Abstracts were not included in 2002 or 2003 program books. Papers were grouped into nine main categories based on the main topic examined in the paper. The categories included (in order of most popular topics to least popular) policing, corrections, crimes, criminal justice education, race/class/gender, criminological theory, courts, and juvenile justice. An additional category called "other" was the second largest category behind policing.

Most of the papers were easily classified into one single category, but as one might expect, several papers were related to more than one area. For example, papers dealing with police profiling were grouped into the race/class/gender category rather than the policing category. Similarly, papers on disproportionate minority confinement were placed into the same category rather than the corrections category. The reason is that the main theme of such papers dealt with race rather than policing or corrections. Similarly, papers concerning juveniles and the death penalty were included in the corrections category rather than the juvenile justice category because they dealt with themes mostly related to the issue of capital punishment. All papers were placed into only one category based on the main theme of the paper.

It is certain that another scholar might classify individual papers into slightly different categories. This may be problematic in terms of the validity of the classification system. Yet, the goal is simply to provide members with a general picture of the types of papers scheduled for presentation at the annual conferences of the SCJA. More problematic is the undeniable fact that some of the papers

counted and grouped into the categories were not actually presented at the conference. There is no way to know how many of the 490 total papers, roundtables, workshops, plenary sessions, and posters were actually presented. No-shows to conferences, at least in criminal justice and criminology, seem to be common occurrences. This itself is a problem worthy of future research.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that between 1998 and 2003, 490 total presentations were scheduled for the annual SCJA meetings. This includes paper presentations, roundtables, workshops, and plenary sessions. Thus, for the past six years, SCJA attendees have made an average of 81.7 presentations per year. The year with the most scheduled presentations was 2003, with 103 presentations. As shown in the table, presentations for the SCJA annual meetings increased between 1998 and 2000 and then declined between 2000 and 2002. Scheduled presentations increased again in 2003.

TABLE 1
Total Appearances Scheduled for Presentation at SCJA Meetings, 1998-2003

	n	%
1998	66	13
1999	73	15
2000	101	21
2001	81	17
2002	66	13
2003	103	21
Total	490	100

Between 1998 and 2003, the most common type of presentation was paper presentations (n = 426), accounting for 87% of all scheduled presentations (n = 490) during the

conferences. SCJA annual conferences average 71 papers per year, plus an additional five workshops/ plenaries and five roundtables. Workshops and plenaries are counted together because the term has been used interchangeably by program chairpersons of the annual meetings. A total of 31 workshops/plenaries were scheduled for the six-year period. Each roundtable typically hosts about four participants, so approximately 116 people were scheduled to participate in roundtables between 1998 and 2003. A total of 29 roundtables were scheduled during this six-year period. Finally, four posters were scheduled to be presented in 2003, the first year that this option was available.

During these conferences, the most common topic was policing, accounting for 18% of the total, followed by corrections at 14%, crimes at 12%, and criminal justice education at 10%. No other topic areas accounted for as much as 10% of the total, including presentations about race/class/gender (8%), criminological theory (7%), courts (7%), and juvenile justice (6%). The "other" category was the second largest category with 18% of the total.

The most common policing topic scheduled for presentation at the 1998-2003 SCJA annual meetings was participation related to community-oriented policing (approximately 20% of the policing total). A large number of presentations on a wide variety of policing topics were scheduled to be presented during the annual conferences, averaging 15 presentations per year. Scheduled presentations on policing topics declined from 1998 to 2001, but then increased in 2002 and 2003.

The most common corrections topic scheduled for presentation at the 1998-2003 SCJA annual meetings was participation related to capital punishment (approximately 20% of the corrections total). A large number of presentations on a wide variety of corrections topics were scheduled to be presented during the annual conferences, averaging 12 presentations per year. Scheduled

presentations on corrections topics have remained relatively constant throughout 1998-2003.

The most common crimes topic scheduled for presentation at the 1998-2003 SCJA annual meetings was participation related to terrorism (approximately 17% of the crimes total). A large number of presentations on a wide variety of crimes topics were scheduled to be presented during the annual conferences, averaging 10 presentations per year. Scheduled presentations on crime topics were relatively constant throughout except for a surge in presentations for the year 2000 and a high of 19 in 2003.

The most common criminal justice education topic scheduled for presentation at the 1998-2003 SCJA annual meetings was participation related to ethics/integrity (approximately 12% of the criminal justice education total). This was closely followed by presentations related to on-line courses and criminal justice learning and teaching (each with 10% of the criminal justice education total). A relatively small number of presentations on a small variety of criminal justice education topics were scheduled to be presented during the annual conferences, averaging eight presentations per year. Scheduled presentations on criminal justice education topics increased between 1998 and 2000 and have declined significantly since.

The most common race/class/gender topic scheduled for presentation at the 1998-2003 SCJA annual meetings was participation related to racial profiling (22% of the race/class/gender total). Presentations on gender and policing and race and crime totaled almost 10% of scheduled presentations on race/class/gender. A relatively small number of presentations on race/class/gender topics were scheduled to be presented during the annual conferences, averaging only seven presentations per year. Scheduled presentations on race/class/gender showed a significant increase each year between 1998 and 2002 and remained relatively stable in 2003.

The most common criminological theory topic scheduled for presentation at the 1998-2003 SCJA annual meetings was participation related to routine activities and social disorganization, two theoretical perspectives that have been integrated in analyses such as those scheduled for presentation at the SCJA meetings (approximately 21% of the criminological theory total). Presentations on biological perspectives totaled about 13% of scheduled presentations on criminological theory. A relatively small number of presentations on criminological theory topics were scheduled to be presented during the annual conferences, averaging only 5.5 presentations per year. Scheduled presentations on criminological theory topics showed a general increase from 1998 to 2003.

The most common courts topic scheduled for presentation at the 1998-2003 SCJA annual meetings was participation related to reviews of individual cases or rules of law (approximately 41% of the courts total). A relatively small number of presentations on courts topics were scheduled to be presented during the annual conferences, averaging only five presentations per year. Scheduled presentations on courts topics showed no clear pattern and were relatively infrequent from 1998-2003.

The most common juvenile justice topic scheduled for presentation at the 1998-2003 SCJA annual meetings was participation related to juvenile drug courts (approximately 20% of the juvenile justice total). A relatively small number of presentations on a relatively small variety of juvenile justice topics were scheduled to be presented during the annual conferences, averaging only five presentations per year. Scheduled presentations on juvenile justice topics showed no clear pattern and were relatively infrequent from 1998-2003.

Sub-topics of scheduled presentations categorized into the "other" topic were numerous and widely variable. The most common topic in the "other" category dealt with topics related to beliefs and perceptions of various aspects

of crime and criminal justice (approximately 28% of the "other" total). A large number of presentations on a wide variety of other crime and criminal justice topics were presented during the annual conferences, averaging 15 presentations per year.

DISCUSSION

From this analysis, a few concluding remarks can be made. First and foremost, the SCJA annual meetings, at least between the years of study (1998-2003), have not established themselves as conferences where a large or consistent number of presentations are scheduled yearly. Scheduled presentations have widely fluctuated between 1998 and 2003. Scheduled presentations increased from a low of 66 in 1998 to 73 in 1999 to 101 in 2000, but then decreased to 81 in 2001 and 66 in 2002. Scheduled presentations increased again in 2003 to 103.

These fluctuations are likely due to factors mostly beyond the control of the SCJA leadership. For example, the declines of 2001 are partly attributable to the attacks of September 11th, 2001 (our 2001 conference occurred two weeks after the attacks so many people did not fly to Baton Rouge, Louisiana to attend). The declines in 2002 may be related to active hurricane season in the Gulf of Mexico (our 2002 conference was located in Clearwater Beach, Florida, and two hurricanes had recently passed through the Gulf).

The high of 103 scheduled presentations occurred in Nashville, Tennessee, followed by 101 scheduled presentations in Charleston, South Carolina. The annual survey of conference attendees (Nashville) showed a very high rate of satisfaction (West, 2003). We also know from the surveys that Charleston is a member favorite and can be expected to draw large numbers.

Conference site location likely plays a role in attracting conference-goers to some degree. Other analyses of SCJA conference attendance shows that most people drive to the annual conferences and the largest share of

attendees in any given year are the "regulars" who will come wherever the conference is located (Doerner, Hunter, & Dantzker, 2004). Yet, there is little doubt that location plays a role for some attendees, and recently, we have attracted new attendees as a result of advertising to local academic and professional criminal justice institutions when we are planning on holding a meeting nearby.

Second, the analysis shows that SCJA conference presenters are interested in a wide variety of topics related to crime and criminal justice. Diversity of topics assures that attendees will find many presentations of interest. We also appear to be very interested in continuing our own learning through our explorations of criminal justice education, which was the fourth largest topic of scheduled presentations between 1998 and 2003 (behind policing, corrections, and crimes). SCJA conference attendees were scheduled to present significant numbers of papers on important topics such as ethics and integrity, criminal justice learning and teaching, professional versus liberal arts models of criminal justice, active and collaborative learning, and on-line courses and distance education topics.

To some degree, then, we are a self-reflexive group, interested in figuring out where we fit into the larger academic world, what we are doing in terms of book publishing and article authorship, and how to help our students best learn. Yet, many of these topics ought to be far more popular as topics for presentations. Our teaching, research, and service should be more focused on topics about who we are, what we do, why we do it, where we fit into academia, what we ought to be doing with and for our students, and what we are and are not doing with our scholarship.

Third, as for specific topics of scheduled presentations, SCJA is an organization whose members are most interested in policing. Of all scheduled presentations between 1998 and 2003, those pertaining to policing accounted for the largest share of any topic, along with an

almost as large "other" category. As the component of criminal justice that Americans are most likely to encounter in their lives, policing is of fundamental importance. Yet, our interest in policing dwarfs the interest in the other components of criminal justice, including law-making and courts.

Law-making activities are under-represented among scheduled conference presentations in the SCJA. Scheduled conference presentations on issues related to courts are also under-represented at SCJA conferences. It is possible that we do not present papers about the law simply because most of us do not have law degrees. It is also possible that we do not present many papers about the courts because there is less funding to study them relative to police and corrections. There were also relatively few papers on criminological theory, as one might expect given that we are a criminal justice organization. Those that were scheduled to be presented represent historically significant theories such as routine activity theory, social disorganization, and similar theories.

Finally, the theme of the 2003 annual conference, "Justice in the Country: Big-Time Problems in Small-Town America," attracted an impressive response from scholars in and out of the SCJA region. More than one-fourth of the scheduled presentations (31 of 103) at the 2003 meeting were directly related to rural crime and justice. This may demonstrate a strategy for increasing our attendance by developing our conference themes in line with untapped interests of people in our region and advertising our conferences more effectively.

CONCLUSION

As for the future of the SCJA, we have a rich history and vibrant tradition. We offer tremendous educational opportunities to learn about findings pertaining to many areas of criminal justice. Although we are strong, we can do a better job of attracting conference presenters and

investigating the important areas that we have not investigated for the conferences of the past six years. The officers of the association, both present and future, must work to develop strategies to increase our conference attendance and to encourage our members to examine those issues which this analysis shows are being neglected.

REFERENCES

Bennett, R. (2004). Comparative criminology and criminal justice research: The state of our knowledge. *Justice Quarterly*, 21(1), 1-20.

Doerner, W., Hunter, R., & Dantzker, M. (2004). Participation patterns at the 1998-2002 SCJA annual meetings. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 28(2), 271-286.

Hale, D., Austin, T., Firey, C., & Smykla, J. (1999). Present and presenting: An exploratory analysis of panel attendance and participation at the 1997 annual meeting of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. *Criminal Justice Review*, 24(1), 1-26.

Robinson, M. (2002). An analysis of 2002 ACJS papers: What members presented about and what they ignored. *ACJS Today*, 27(2), 1, 4, 7.

West, A, (2003, September). 2003 SCJA conference attendee satisfaction survey. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Criminal Justice Association, Nashville, TN.