Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology and Criminal Justice

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An Examination of the Effects of Workgroup Characteristics
on Criminal Case Processing and Case Outcomes

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Time: 1:00 p.m.
Place: Jim Short, Lucas Hall

Abstract
The community courts and inhabited institution perspective posit that courts should be examined through a lens that considers the complex and collaborative process that court actors (e.g., judges, prosecutors, and defense counsels), collectively referred to as the courtroom workgroup, engage in during case processing. However, empirical research infrequently examines such intricacies and devotes little attention to how the characteristics of court actors influence interactions among workgroup members, the efficiency they process cases, and ultimately case decisions. This omission is notable because theory finds that the dynamics of the workgroup are at least in part driven by the characteristics of its members.

This dissertation attempts to bridge this disconnect between theory and theory testing by centering its attention on courtroom workgroups and courtroom processes. Using observational data on a sample of pre-trial detention hearing cases (N = 330) processed virtually in a New Jersey courtroom, I examine how race and gender similarities among workgroup members and defense counsel type (private versus public defender) influences courtroom efficiency. I focus on three components of efficiency: effective communication, cooperation, and coordination. Second, I examine how these workgroup characteristics as well as the gender and racial composition of the workgroup are related to whether a defendant is ordered detained. Finally, I explore the potential mediating effects of courtroom efficiency on the relationships between workgroup characteristics and case decisions.

Results show that although race and gender similarities do not significantly influence courtroom efficiency, defense counsel type plays a critical role — cases involving public defenders are more efficiently disposed of by the court. This study also finds that the characteristics of the workgroup examined do not directly or indirectly (through courtroom efficiency) influence case decisions. These results may better help to understand how the court process may be influenced by the characteristics of the workgroup members and collectively the workgroup, as well as how it may (or may not) affect judicial decision-making. It also provides important insights into case processing and outcomes in a new judicial landscape of bail reform and virtual courts. Implications and future research are also discussed.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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