

RESEARCH TEAM UPDATE: TOPICS BEING PURSUED

MSGC Meeting

April 11, 2024



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Recap and Goals

February 8 Meeting

- Provided broad **overview** of research partnership
- Sketched “**menu**” of possible projects
- UMN team met, did preliminary inquiries, and discussed degree of difficulty

March 7 Meeting

- Presented more detailed research areas and approaches for 2024-2025 and longer-term
- Prioritized commission's interests

This Meeting:

- Provide an overview of the topics we plan to pursue.

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Considerations for Establishing a Research Agenda

Main consideration: interest to the commission

Other considerations:

- Feasibility – time, data access
- Interest to the Research Team – expertise, experience
- Actionability –
 - Can the commission act on the information gathered from this research?

Goal:

- Produce research that supports the commission's decision making.

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Big, Open Questions and More Focused Questions

1. Why is the presumptive prison rate increasing over time?

To what extent are do these factors contribute to this trend?

- Mandatory minimum sentences
- Creation of new felony offenses
- Increases in criminal history score
 - Why has the criminal history score gone up over time?
 - Are criminal history scores “pushing” low or mid level offense severity cases across the dispositional line?

2. How to choose the right sentence for the right offender?

- How do guideline values set by the commission affect outcomes?
- What have been the effects of specific policy changes (e.g. large duration increases for higher severity levels, adoption of new grids)?
 - What were the intended effects?
- What are the consequences of moving the dispositional line?
- What is the effect of departures on public safety?

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Research Topics: Big, Open Questions -> Focused Questions

3. Why do specific offenses have high departure rates?

- How large are departures?
- What offense-, case-, and individual-, level factors lead to departures?
- How are decisions around departures made?
 - Prosecutorial and judicial attitudes toward guidelines

4. How do the commission's policies, statutes and guidelines compare to other sentencing commissions?

- How do commissions define the purpose of sentencing?
- How do commissions define public safety?
- How does MN's use of prisons, jails, and probation compare to other states?

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Research Approach



Quantitative Data Analysis

Administrative sentencing commission and courts data
ID trends and patterns, establish quant relationships, evaluate impact



Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis of interview data with main decision makers
Develop a process model of how judges arrive at a sentence



Legal and Policy Analysis

Legal and policy roadmap to establish how policies have evolved over time

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Deliverables

Short-term
deliverables:
research and policy
briefs, presentations

Long-term
deliverables:
Research reports

Continuous updates
on research
progress; response
to timely questions