

My program of research and my passion for law focus on the intersections of criminal justice and culture with particular emphasis on policing policies in underserved communities. Specifically, I am interested in pursuing a PhD/JD to continue exploring evidenced-based models that address at-risk youth and racial discrepancies in drug offenses and charges. With this research I hope to be a part of a larger criminal justice and drug policy reform movement at the local, state and national levels. With a JD, I wish to represent clients at the appellate level for ineffective assistance of counsel representation, habeas and civil rights cases. My future goals include advocacy for neighborhoods and communities impacted by unjust policing actions, as well as university teaching.

My research interests are informed by my own experiences growing up in crime and drug-ridden neighborhoods, which ultimately resulted in my placement in the foster care system for over a decade. I am a natural advocate and have worked on equity issues for undergraduate transfer students and senior citizens. I currently work as a professional staff member coordinating a Guardian Scholars program, which helps to ensure that former foster youth are successful in their university studies.

As an undergraduate political science major with a concentration in Law and Society, I wrote two senior honors theses. My first thesis was a cross-sectional study of transfer students' on-time graduation and level of campus engagement. This was accomplished by working under the guidance of a faculty member. During this study, I learned to work with the Internal Review Board on our campus and the requirements needed to study human subjects. After data was collected, I was able to work in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to run a statistical analysis. In doing so, I learned that, contrary to my hypothesis, levels of school engagement had no bearing on on-time graduation for transfer students. Through this work, I documented the critical importance of culture (ethnoracial, collegiate, community) in affecting student success and I presented these findings at the Undergraduate Research Symposium on our campus.

For my second honors thesis, I applied Rawlsian theory to our current criminal justice system. In this work, I considered the complexities of mass incarceration from a political theory standpoint grounded in an advocacy agenda. After reviewing extant laws and policies with language permitting racial and residential profiling or sanctioning, I uncovered many references to the stop-and-frisk policy supported by the *Terry v. Ohio* (1968) ruling wherein police were allowed to stop and search someone whom they a) *suspected* of being involved in criminal activity and b) *perceived* as dangerous. This ruling functionally codified racial and residential profiling to a degree that Justice Douglas warned about it in his dissent. I argued that under the guidelines given in John Rawls' theories of justice, these types of laws would not continue to stand. As a graduate student, I hope to expand this research to work with communities hit hardest by the complexities of mass incarceration, and look at alternative methods for drug-related charges that may be more beneficial for individuals, our communities, and the state.

Your program is my top choice for graduate school for several reasons, but my primary interest is the research focus of the faculty. Dr. Mona Lynch's work focusing on how crimes and culpability are defined and sentencing structures are created, aligns with my research interests.¹ I admire the work she has done with outside organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union in order to put her research in practice. Dr. Keramet Reiter's work on the impact of prison on the individual also speaks to my research interests.² Dr. Reiter's examination of the impact of supermax prisons on individuals and whether or not the prisons have reduced crime is a great example of putting research to work. Her letters to the U.S. Senate Committees addressing her findings regarding human rights and prisoner's rights is the kind of work I hope will result from my future research. In short, it is my research experience, the research expertise of the faculty, and the ability to pursue a PhD/JD that makes your program my top choice.

¹ Lynch, Mona. "Theorizing the role of the 'war on drugs' in US punishment." *Theoretical Criminology* 16 (2012): 175-199.

² Reiter, Keramet A. "From the hyper-local to the supra-global: review of the globalization of supermax prisons." *Crime, Law and Social Change* (2014) 61: 359-364.