



Research Article

The Recruitment Crisis in Policing: *The Downstream Effect of Exceptional Declines in Criminal Justice Student Enrollment*

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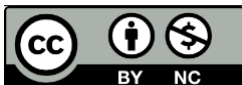
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Abstract:

The crisis in police recruitment and retention of applicants is one of the most significant issues facing law enforcement in the 2020s. A key and growing recruitment site for policing agencies of qualified applicants has been two- and four-year colleges, where criminal justice (CRJ) programs have flourished over the past 20 years. The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on college enrollment, including in these CRJ programs. In addition to the pandemic, it has been conjectured that CRJ undergraduate programs faced another challenge: the climate of social unrest following George Floyd's death from the inappropriate use of police force. This study aimed to investigate whether the declines in CRJ major enrollment were greater than those of other majors, which might speak to similar socio-political variables affecting the policing recruitment challenges and a potential downstream effect on recruiting. Using descriptive analyses through a series of ANOVA and t-test comparisons across the top dozen programs at the City University of New York, the fourth largest university system in the U.S., from 2019-2022, this study finds that criminal justice programs lost a larger proportion of students than other comparable majors. These losses were more substantial in community college associate degrees than in senior college bachelor's degrees. Furthermore, within the CJ major, the study finds minimal demographic differences in declines across sex/gender and racial/ethnic lines. The findings are important because they aim to separate general pandemic effects from other social effects for criminal justice programs, which in turn can affect the pipeline for recruitment of college-educated officers for police downstream.

Keywords: Criminal Justice, Enrollment, COVID-19, George Floyd, Higher Education, Police Recruitment



The Recruitment Crisis in Policing: Downstream Effect of Exceptional Declines in Criminal Justice Student Enrollment

The crisis in police recruitment and retention is one of the most significant issues facing law enforcement in the 2020s. A key and growing recruitment site for policing agencies of qualified applicants has been two- and four-year colleges, because college education has been associated with several perceived beneficial outcomes, such as lowered use of force, less misconduct, and fewer civilian complaints.¹ Indeed, the 2015 Task Force on 21st Century Policing suggested that to ameliorate the challenges of policing in diverse urban areas, departments should increase the number of college-educated officers.² Colleges have also been increasingly desirable recruitment sites for law enforcement because criminal justice programs have flourished over the past 20 years as one of the top ten most awarded degrees in the U.S., thus providing what Santos et al.³ describe as a “natural recruiting pool for police agencies,” of potential applicants who are self-identifying as interested in policing jobs.

Affecting the size of this pool, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on enrollment in higher education, including these criminal justice programs. And, in the aftermath of the 2020 social unrest and 'reckoning' around race and policing impelled by the murder of George Floyd by Officer Derek Chauvin, higher education organizations and popular media began to call attention to a seemingly correlated phenomenon: the decline in students seeking a criminal justice (CRJ) major. In 2023, the American Association of Community Colleges ran the article, "Shrinking Enrollments lead to rethinking of criminal justice programs," that pointed to a possible nationwide trend and highlighted the struggles of programs located across different states. Community Colleges of Spokane, Washington, made the decision to end their criminal justice programs entirely due to declining enrollments.⁴ When queried about the drop-off, the chancellor suggested that it was due to multiple factors, but possibly included "the scrutiny of law enforcement since the racial reckoning of 2020." The *MinnPost* called attention to the same problem, noting that Alexandria Technical &

Community College, which housed one of the largest law enforcement programs in Minnesota, had seen steady decreases in those earning law enforcement degrees and certificates. It cited a CRJ instructor at St. Cloud University, who offered his thoughts on the reasons for this decrease: “The cost of higher education, lackluster recruitment and, of course, the civil unrest spawned by police killings, most notably that of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020... Plain and simple, I think some families are scared away from public service.”⁵ Similarly, Middlesex Community College in Massachusetts, to stop the “bleeding” of their students from CRJ, decided to “recast that program two years ago as ‘criminal and social justice’ to attract a more diverse pool of students *during the period of racial unrest...* incorporating social justice [concepts] into every single class.” This change was also premised on the idea of a “George Floyd” effect on CRJ programs particularly, with the corresponding view that to rectify student loss, one would need to counter the negative attention brought to policing as a profession by shifting the curriculum to focus on racial justice.⁶

Despite these anecdotal observations of CRJ major declines, and conjectures that such declines are linked to an unwillingness to enter policing due to either perceptions of hostility towards these professionals or racial animus within those careers, no empirical data exists examining the central question of whether the loss of CRJ majors was in fact greater than other majors. We became interested in the question of the potential exceptionalism of losses within CRJ majors after witnessing sharp enrollment declines in CRJ programs at our own institutions. We would hear program directors experiencing the same phenomenon at other colleges argue these declines were at least partially attributable to the negative cast given to policing in the wake of that racially charged instance of unjustified homicide by a White officer against a Black man. This type of conjecture fits with other anecdotal arguments from police recruiters about a "George Floyd" effect on staffing. However, there are large pandemic-related declines in enrollment in other disciplines as well as other social factors, such as higher wages in other professions, a belief decline in the value of college, and a move away from government jobs more broadly, that could play a part in the declines. We acknowledge these

overall factors and investigate the primary question of whether, in fact, during the pandemic years, CRJ was affected more – e.g., lost more students – than comparable majors, as this can present valuable information about some of the influences on the crisis in recruitment.

Literature Review

This study relies on intersecting literatures focused on legitimacy crises in law enforcement recruitment and CRJ and higher education. Most studies on CRJ students have explored the varied *motivations* that draw or keep them in the major. Research has demonstrated students are attracted to the CRJ major because of job availability and security⁷; job fit, where personal skills match job demands⁸; media influence, primarily crime-related TV shows⁹; commitment to public service¹⁰; the desire to help people¹¹; and aspirations of making a difference.¹² Some studies have gone further by exploring the factors that influence these motivations, with experiences and demographic indicators playing pivotal roles. With respect to personal experiences, research has shown that victimization, arrest, or knowing someone (family or friend) in a criminal justice occupation affects the motivations of students in the major.¹³

Furthermore, research demonstrates motivations and attitudes map along demographic lines. Compared to non-Whites, Whites in law enforcement careers are more likely to value wearing a uniform, ‘arresting bad guys,’ and protecting the Constitution.¹⁴ Blacks at HBCUs tend to show more limited interest in the profession, perhaps due to historical racism. Those who were interested showed more concern with altruistic factors such as protecting people from oppression.¹⁵ Hispanic students were shown to resemble Whites in being more devoted to policing careers and favorable to the law enforcement profession.¹⁶ Similar to racial and ethnic differences, research indicates that females interested in law enforcement careers display higher predispositions of empathy than men,¹⁷ show a higher desire to ‘help solve problems,’ and place less emphasis on punitive attitudes, arresting bad guys, or wanting to wear uniforms than males.¹⁸

As valuable as research on student attitudes is, it tells us little about declines in enrollment.

Sometimes, even the best motives are not enough to keep students in the major and may not shield them from seismic events like a pandemic or nationwide attention of innocent lives lost to police brutality. Large, culturally relevant, triggering events can change existing trajectories. The COVID-19 pandemic put a lot of strain on higher education, exacerbating preexisting downward enrollment trends largely related to tuition hikes and overall college devaluation.¹⁹ Many colleges, like Presentation College in South Dakota or the College of Saint Rose and Cazenovia College in New York, closed as a consequence of pandemic-related financial strains.²⁰ Entire programs, CRJ among them, were forced to reconsider their position in order to bring back the students they lost, often unsuccessfully.

In addition to the pandemic, CRJ programs had to deal with the racial reckoning and social unrest around law enforcement that followed from George Floyd's death in May 2020. Floyd's homicide was seen as the last straw in a successive line of fateful events where the end result is the loss of minority lives from the unnecessary force of law enforcement. His death was followed by widespread protests asking for justice and accountability from the institutions that are expected to adhere precisely to those principles. These protests, some of which included calls to "defund" or "abolish" the police, challenged the legitimacy, practices, and values of the CRJ system.

The perceived impact of a legitimacy crisis and negative attitudes towards the police on CRJ outcomes has been discussed in the media and academic literature as the "Ferguson Effect" (referring to the 2014 shooting of the unarmed Black teen Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri). One of these presumed effects has been to create difficulties in recruitment and retention of police, as law enforcement in the U.S. and elsewhere has been struggling to recruit sufficient pools of qualified candidates.²¹ Trappen and Cruz note,²² "Pipelines into the profession have been tempered by high-profile police brutality cases, such as that of George Floyd, which created a considerable public backlash against perceived police actions. Consequently, despite evidence of trends that support the

increasing demand for trained law enforcement officers, emergent cultural factors might attenuate decades-long growth, resulting in waning interest in law enforcement careers."

Potential recruits, according to this argument, feel deterred from pursuing a path that is either the subject of animosity from the public or seen as an institutional purveyor of racism. Most studies on the Ferguson effect rely on perceptual data from the police. They generally agree on its presence but reach mixed conclusions about its impact on recruitment. Copeland, del Carmen, and Semukhina,²³ looking at police chiefs' perceptions of retention and recruitment, find no Ferguson effect on retention and a minimal impact on recruitment, with variables like funding and lack of a competitive job market playing a more significant role. Wojslawowicz,²⁴ in her study of a state police academy, reports that awareness of the "Ferguson effect" does not weigh in on the recruits' decision to become police officers, implying the phenomenon is not a deterrent but simply a negative aspect of the job. The work of Rhodes and Tyler,²⁵ rather than rely on attitudinal data, uses a time series analysis to probe whether the Dallas Police Department lost a significant number of recruit applications following the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson. They determined that there were no significant changes to the number of applicants over time and no significant differences in applications among racial groups or between men and women, thus contradicting the notion of a widespread Ferguson effect on police agencies.

The theory of a "Ferguson effect" has made its way downstream in explaining the enrollment and motivations of CRJ majors. Racial reckoning and negative attitudes toward the police, it is hypothesized, make future participants in systems of justice reconsider their career track. Policing, after all, is a profession that has been considered attractive in part because it provides a socially desirable public service.²⁶ That service, however, has become shrouded with doubt and skepticism, given high-profile instances of wrongful conduct toward minority communities. The profession may have lost its shine and the prestige that draws students in. As calls against the unreasonable use of

force, police immunity, or police defunding mount, the profession increasingly appears “more compromised and unstable... too risky as a career choice.”²⁷

With a few exceptions, research on how high-profile instances of racial reckoning around law enforcement (such as in Ferguson and with George Floyd) affect CRJ college majors is confined to a handful of articles. The first by Morrow et al.²⁸ examines how the social climate that developed from the 2014 police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson affects criminal justice students' motivations toward becoming police officers. The study concludes that negative publicity and perceived risks are discouraging factors that make them apprehensive towards the profession. A second by White and Ferrandino²⁹ considers the "George Floyd" effect on CRJ majors. However, the study is set up to measure changes in CRJ students' attitudes towards the profession in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and simply discusses the possibility their attitudes could be affected by George Floyd, given the event occurred in the middle of their two survey points. A final article by Todak³⁰ samples 42 undergraduates who plan to become police officers after police legitimacy crises. The findings indicate the participants think they would encounter hostile anti-police attitudes on a daily basis, be afraid of making mistakes, and face a host of challenges. Nevertheless, they still want to counter negative stereotypes of police work and lend credibility to a profession that is undergoing a legitimacy crisis.

Study Rationale and Questions/Hypotheses

As discussed until this point, most research on CRJ students and law enforcement has focused on their attitudes, how these attitudes may change during legitimacy crises, and how these changes may affect enrollment or future recruitment in CRJ fields of work. We depart from these types of studies by *actually measuring* enrollment trends during the COVID-19 pandemic years and in the pre- and post-George Floyd era. In doing so, we tease out whether CRJ was more affected by its enrollment declines in this era, which would affect law enforcement recruitment among these populations. It would also point to potential socio-political variables affecting the desirability of this

major and law enforcement careers that must be contended with if the CRJ student pool and law enforcement recruitment pool is to be expanded.

We consider the COVID-19 pandemic a contextual factor affecting all institutions and all programs similarly. Under COVID-19, we expect many programs to lose students at similar rates. The George Floyd event, which overlapped with this period, is more relevant to CRJ students. It might make them rethink their educational and future employment careers in lines of work that have come under intense social scrutiny and lost the lofty appeals of justice, safety, and overall public good. Even after pandemic restrictions were lifted, the CRJ major may continue to experience significant student loss as a result of program devaluation from the negative social climate surrounding justice fields. Given these arguments, we examine the following questions.

1. Did CRJ lose more students than comparable majors?
2. Did CRJ lose more students in community or in senior colleges?
3. If CRJ lost more students, what types of students did it lose?
 - a. Did CRJ lose more men than women?
 - b. Did CRJ lose more minorities than Whites?

Overall, we predicted that CRJ would lose more students than other majors, and these losses would be more pronounced in the community than in senior colleges. Furthermore, given the propensity of males and Whites towards law enforcement careers where they can arrest the bad guys, we expected to find differences across demographic indicators; we expected CRJ would lose more males than females and more Whites than Black, Hispanic, or Asian students.

Methods

After completing the Institutional Review Board (IRB) training certifications from our respective institutions, we aimed to obtain data on student loss from CRJ programs for the entire New York State (which would include close to one hundred colleges). We found this impossible due to

low response rates and disparate rules around access.ⁱ Eventually, we were successful in obtaining enrollment data from a large, centralized database from the City University of New York (CUNY) school system, the fourth largest public university system in the U.S. In this section, we describe the data sample, the variables of interest, and the descriptive statistical approach.

Sample

The City University of New York (CUNY) has 25 colleges and universities³¹ including seven community colleges, 12 senior colleges, and 6 graduate/professional schools. It is one of the largest public university systems in the United States. All the colleges are in the five boroughs of New York City, making them an ideal representation of student trends for large city urban colleges.

CUNY holds a central database of student enrollment for all its colleges.ⁱⁱ At our request, they provided student enrollment data for four years, from Fall 2019 to Fall 2022. The data contains the total number of students per year broken down by the 2-digit Classifications of Instructional Programs (CIP codes) from the National Center of Education Statistics,³² a community and senior college indicator, the type of degrees conferred (i.e., associate's, bachelor's, etc.), each individual college,ⁱⁱⁱ and demographic indicators along sex/gender and racial/ethnic lines.

Variables of Interest

The main variables of interest are student loss and type of program. We are interested in finding whether CRJ programs on average lost more students than other top comparable programs in the CUNY system. To that end, our dependent variable is the average percent student loss per year. The variable is generated by dividing the difference in student numbers by the total number of

ⁱ We initially sought to obtain a random sample of criminal justice programs across New York State public and private colleges and universities. It turned out to be an unfeasible approach. Many schools did not respond to our request (the State University of New York, SUNY, for example, does not have a central office so the schools in its system that decided to respond did it independently). Some of the schools, either public or private, that responded provided incomplete data sets (i.e., no demographic indicators or no data for all the years 2019-2022 we were interested in). Others were requiring us to complete IRBs at their own institutions first. Due to these impractical hurdles, we relied only on the CUNY system for our research.

ⁱⁱ We are grateful to the CUNY Central Office for providing the data we requested.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bound by contract agreements, we are unable to provide or discuss trends of college enrollment for each individual college in the CUNY system.

students in the initial year (2019 – 2020) / 2019, (2020 – 2021) / 2020, and (2021 – 2022) / 2021. For the most part, we run our analyses using the average proportional student loss.^{iv}

During the four-year period, 2019-2022, we decided to compare student loss in enrollment in CRJ programs to student loss in enrollment in the top eleven programs at CUNY. We chose the programs based on the 2-digit CIP codes^v and the overall number of students enrolled during the four-year period. The programs and the number of enrollees are presented in Table 1. The table also highlights the change/difference from 2019-2022, where we notice that, except for Liberal Arts and Business/Management/Marketing, Criminal Justice/Criminology has the largest student decline, with close to 5,000 students lost.

Table 1: Total and Change in the Number of Students by Type of Major, by Year, 2019-2022.

Program	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total	Difference (2019-2022)
Computer/Information Science	16,737	17,506	17,361	17,452	69,056	+715
Psychology	18,054	18,902	18,829	17,523	73,308	-531
Biological/Medical Sciences	8,473	9,116	8,883	7,785	34,257	-688
Health Professions	22,203	22,913	22,349	21,168	88,633	-1,035
Visual/Performing Arts	9,979	9,445	9,001	8,781	37,206	-1,198
Public Administration	6,436	6,337	5,840	5,115	23,728	-1,321
Education	14,792	15,013	14,693	13,405	57,903	-1,387
Social Sciences	11,268	11,128	10,372	9,180	41,948	-2,088
Physical Sciences	7,481	6,628	5,415	4,275	23,799	-3,206
<i>Criminal Justice/Criminology</i>	<i>15,039</i>	<i>14,023</i>	<i>12,073</i>	<i>10,337</i>	<i>51,472</i>	<i>-4,702</i>
Business/Management/Marketing	37,979	37,428	35,283	32,429	143,119	-5,550
Liberal Arts	25,329	20,176	15,407	12,219	73,131	-13,110

In addition to student loss by program, we wanted to find whether student change over the pandemic years depended on the type of college, degree, and student demographics. In the data we obtained, the schools offering at least a bachelor's degree are considered senior colleges. The schools that offer the maximum of an associate degree are considered community colleges. To make the distinctions more meaningful, we present the various categorizations in Table 2.

^{iv} For comparative purposes, we have run our analyses on "raw" differences, as well. The findings from "raw" differences are similar to the proportional differences we present in the paper. For those who are interested, the analyses on "raw" differences are available upon request.

^v We chose the 2-digit instead of the 4-digit CIP codes because the first ones provide more comprehensive "umbrella" programs that are more closely aligned with our intent. For instance, the 2-digit CIP codes encompass "Criminal Justice/Criminology" not just the more specific "Criminal Justice and Corrections" designation that appears in the 4-digit CIP codes. Because we were interested in how student enrollment changed in any criminal justice/criminology program, we decided the 2-digit CIP codes were better suited as an independent variable.

The table highlights the types of degrees conferred by each type of college. Community colleges award only certificates and associate degrees. Senior colleges also grant certificates and associate degrees, but they also offer bachelor's, advanced certificates, master's, professional, and doctorate degrees. As noticed from the table, the sharpest decline over the four-year period is in community college associate degrees (close to 25,000 students from 2019-2022) and senior college bachelor's degrees (about 12,000 during the same period). For analytic simplicity, with respect to the type of college and degree, we limit the comparisons of student loss in enrollment only to these two categories: community college associate's degrees and senior college bachelor's degrees.

Table 2: The Number of Students by Type of College, Type of Degree, by Year, 2019-2022.

Year	Community Colleges		Senior Colleges						
	Certificate	Associate	Certificate	Associate	Bachelor	Advanced Certificate	Master	Professional	Doctorate
2019	573	74,891	214	11,961	113,721	1,381	23,370	874	3,528
2020	571	66,653	184	10,980	115,686	1,484	24,241	967	3,447
2021	661	57,373	190	9,647	111,036	1,484	23,946	996	3,360
2022	677	50,837	206	8,095	101,779	1,405	22,447	956	3,279
Total	2,482	249,754	794	40,683	442,222	5,754	94,004	3,793	13,614

Aside from the type of college and degree, we were interested in the types of students by sex/gender and race/ethnicity – that were more likely to drop from the program (if any). Table 3 presents the number of students per year along with demographic indicators of sex/gender and racial/ethnic groups. Sex/gender has two categories: males and females. Race/ethnicity has five categories: Native American, Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White. Note that our analyses are based only on four racial/ethnic categorizations. We exclude Native Americans.^{vi}

Table 3: The Change in the Number of Students by Sex/Gender and Race/Ethnicity, by Year, 2019-2022.

Year	Sex/Gender		Race/Ethnicity				
	Male	Female	American Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White
2019	96,937	133,576	768	48,032	58,607	70,305	52,801
2020	90,159	134,054	735	48,324	55,820	66,567	52,767
2021	83,244	125,449	703	46,206	51,980	60,056	49,748
2022	76,624	113,057	619	43,344	47,812	53,536	44,370
Total Change	20,313	20,519	149	4,688	10,795	16,769	8,431

^{vi} Many of the programs under study (i.e., public administration or physical sciences) have few or no Native Americans. Under F-test or t-test statistical analyses, it is recommended to avoid cells/groups of low counts. To avoid miscalculations, we eliminate Native Americans from our analyses. Analyses, including all racial/ethnic groups, are available upon request.

Statistical Approach

Our main dependent variable – proportional student loss in enrollment – is normally distributed (see Appendix A). The variable represents the average proportional student loss from 2019-2022. We compare whether the average proportional student loss in CRJ programs is significantly different from the same type of loss in other top majors. The proper statistical method for examining differences between the means of categorical variables on a normally distributed dependent variable is the analysis of variance (ANOVA). Unlike the t-tests which generate a coefficient that determines the difference between two means, ANOVAs provide a statistical coefficient (F-value) that assesses the difference between more than two sample means.³³

The ANOVA procedures are repeated three times. First, we examine whether CRJ programs on average lost more (proportions of) students than other programs. Second, we assess whether the differences hold for community college associate degrees and senior college bachelor's degrees. Third, we focus on the CRJ major and test which demographic groups – male vs. female and Hispanic vs. Black vs. Asian vs. White – lost more students.^{vii} All the ANOVA procedures are followed by post-hoc comparisons. The F-value indicates a potentially significant difference in means across all groups, without specifying which groups are different. To capture the difference between specific groups, we run a series of pairwise post-hoc regression analyses (t-tests using the Bonferroni correction) that identify the significantly different groups.

Results

Because we are unable to include other variables – such as the number of sections, the number of faculty members, the student's age, or the type of students (first-generation college students or adult students) – that could allow us to make more robust inferences, our findings remain largely descriptive in nature. In the results section, we present the findings along three dimensions:

^{vii} Since sex/gender only has two categories, we run a t-test that compares the difference between two sample means. We use ANOVA for sample mean differences across racial/ethnic categories.

CRJ student loss compared to other majors, CRJ student loss in community versus senior colleges, and CRJ student loss along sex/gender and racial/ethnic lines.

Did CRJ lose more students than other majors?

CRJ lost a larger proportion of students than other top majors across CUNY schools. The results from one-way ANOVA ($F(11, 564) = 8.69, p < .001$) established a statistically significant difference between groups (Table 4).

The pairwise post-hoc t-test comparisons showed CRJ lost a larger proportion of students than computer science ($t = -5.15, p < .001$), biological/medical sciences ($t = -3.46, p < .01$), psychology ($t = -3.76, p < .001$), social sciences ($t = -2.12, p < .05$), visual/performing arts ($t = -2.89, p < .01$), and health professions ($t = -2.76, p < .01$). These results indicate that during the COVID-19 pandemic years, CRJ lost more proportions of students than over half (6) of the top CUNY programs.

Table 4: Proportion of Student Loss across the Top Twelve Programs at CUNY Schools, 2019-2022.

One Way ANOVA Source of Variation	SS	DF	MS	F-Value
Model	1.327	11	0.121	8.69***
Residual	7.837	564	0.014	
Total	9.165	575	0.016	
Pairwise (Post Hoc t-Test) Comparison	Mean	S. D.	Mean Difference	t-Value
Criminal Justice/Criminology	0.115	0.102	ref.	
Computer Science	-0.009	0.078	-0.124	-5.15***
Education	0.042	0.138	-0.073	-3.02
Liberal Arts	0.151	0.130	0.036	1.49
Biological/Medical Sciences	0.032	0.131	-0.083	-3.46**
Physical Sciences	0.154	0.122	-0.039	1.63
Psychology	-0.025	0.098	-0.090	-3.76***
Public Administration	0.090	0.178	-0.025	-1.04
Social Sciences	0.064	0.164	-0.051	-2.12*
Visual/Performing Arts	0.045	0.071	-0.070	-2.89**
Health Professions	0.049	0.072	-0.066	-2.76**
Business/Management/Marketing	0.069	0.061	-0.046	-1.91

Note: * - $p < .05$; ** - $p < .01$; *** - $p < .001$

Was CRJ student loss more noticeable in community or in senior colleges?

Table 5 shows CRJ proportional student loss was more evident in community than in senior colleges. The one-way ANOVA ($F(11, 276) = 4.00, p < .001$) in senior colleges showed a significant difference in program means. The post-hoc regression analysis, however, points out the difference was largely due to the computer science program ($t = -3.73, p < .001$).

Table 5: Proportion of Student Loss among the Top Twelve Programs across CUNY Community and Senior Colleges, 2019-2022.

One Way ANOVA	Community College		Senior College	
	DF	F-Value	DF	F-Value
12 Group/Major Comparison	11, 276	7.57***	11, 276	4.00***
Pairwise (Post Hoc t-Test) Comparison	Coefficient	t-Value	Coefficient	t-Value
Criminal Justice/Criminology	ref.		ref.	
Computer Science	-0.152	-3.98***	-0.096	-3.73***
Education	-0.149	-3.91***	0.004	0.14
Liberal Arts	0.043	1.13	0.028	1.11
Biological/Medical Sciences	-0.129	-3.39**	-0.038	-1.46
Physical Sciences	0.051	1.33	0.028	1.09
Psychology	-0.138	-3.61***	-0.043	-1.68
Public Administration	-0.055	-1.44	0.005	0.18
Social Sciences	-0.120	-3.15**	-0.018	0.71
Visual/Performing Arts	-0.102	-2.67**	-0.037	-1.45
Health Professions	-0.138	-3.62***	0.005	0.21
Business/Management/Marketing	-0.071	-1.86	0.021	0.82

Note: * - $p < .05$; ** - $p < .01$; *** - $p < .001$

The ANOVA results for community colleges are also indicative of statistically significant program means ($F(11, 276) = 7.57, p < .001$). Unlike senior colleges, post-hoc comparisons in community colleges point out CRJ lost a higher proportion of students than computer science ($t = -3.98, p < .001$), education ($t = -3.91, p < .001$), biological/medical sciences ($t = -3.39, p < .01$), psychology ($t = -3.61, p < .001$), social sciences ($t = -3.15, p < .01$), visual/performing arts ($t = -2.67, p < .01$), and health professions ($t = -3.62, p < .001$).

What types of students was CRJ more likely to lose?

In this section, we present two types of analytic strategies. First, we compare proportional student loss from each demographic category in CRJ to the same category in other programs (i.e., male student loss in CRJ vs. male student loss in other programs, Hispanic student loss in CRJ vs. Hispanic student loss in other programs). Second, we compare proportional student loss across different demographic categories within the CRJ program.

The findings from the male and female student loss *across* programs are shown in Table 6. The first one-way ANOVA indicates a significant difference for male student loss across programs ($F(11, 276) = 4.94, p < .001$). Except for liberal arts and physical sciences, CRJ lost a larger proportion of male students than nearly all the other top majors at CUNY schools. Similarly, the

second ANOVA reports a significant difference for female student loss across programs ($F(11, 276) = 5.64, p < .001$). The differences, however, are restricted to fewer programs than the male category. The CRJ experienced a larger proportional female student loss than only three top majors; computer science ($t = -3.35, p < .01$), physical sciences ($t = -2.36, p < .05$), and psychology ($t = -2.29, p < .05$). We infer that, across programs, CRJ experienced a more dramatic male than female student loss.

Table 6: Racial/Ethnic Student Loss among the Top Twelve Programs across CUNY Colleges, 2019-2022.

One Way ANOVA	Sex/Gender				Race/Ethnicity			
	Male Student		Female Student		Black Student		Hispanic Student	
12 Group/Major Comparison	DF	F-Value	DF	F-Value	DF	F-Value	DF	F-Value
	11, 276	4.94***	11, 132	5.64***	11, 132	3.90***	11, 132	4.18***
Pairwise (Post Hoc t-Test) Comparison	Coeff.	t-Value	Coeff.	t-Value	Coeff.	t-Value	Coeff.	t-Value
Criminal Justice/Criminology	ref.		ref.		ref.		ref.	
Computer Science	-0.138	-3.97***	-0.126	-3.35**	-0.126	-3.35**	-0.141	-3.60***
Education	-0.104	-2.97**	-0.051	-1.28	-0.051	-1.35	-0.085	-2.18*
Liberal Arts	0.032	0.91	0.045	1.23	0.045	1.19	0.034	0.87
Biological/Medical Sciences	-0.108	-3.10**	-0.064	-1.80	-0.064	-1.69	-0.101	-2.57*
Physical Sciences	0.002	0.05	0.043	2.36*	0.043	1.16	-0.019	-0.47
Psychology	-0.106	-3.05**	-0.098	-2.29*	-0.098	-2.60*	-0.092	-2.34*
Public Administration	-0.093	-2.66**	0.007	1.30	0.007	0.18	0.010	0.26
Social Sciences	-0.123	-3.52**	-0.051	0.65	-0.051	-1.37	-0.040	-1.02
Visual/Performing Arts	-0.094	-2.70**	-0.064	-1.38	-0.064	-1.70	-0.094	-2.40*
Health Professions	-0.089	-2.56*	-0.056	-1.33	-0.056	-1.50	-0.065	-1.67
Business/Management/Market.	-0.077	-2.19*	-0.044	-0.47	-0.044	-1.18	-0.088	-2.24*

Note: * - $p < .05$; ** - $p < .01$; *** - $p < .001$

The findings on student loss across racial/ethnic categories are also presented in Table 6.^{viii} The table shows significant differences for Black ($F(11, 132) = 3.90, p < .001$) and Hispanic ($F(11, 132) = 4.18, p < .001$) student loss across programs. CRJ had a higher proportion of Black student loss than computer science ($t = -3.35, p < .01$) and psychology ($t = -2.60, p < .05$). It also had a higher proportion of Hispanic student loss than half a dozen top programs, including computer science, education, biological/medical sciences, psychology, visual/performing arts, and business/management/marketing. Like with sex/gender differences, the results imply CRJ encountered a minimal drop in its Black student body but a more drastic decline in its Hispanic student population than most top majors at CUNY institutions.

^{viii} There are no significant differences for White or Asian students, hence the lack of reports for those two categories.

When focusing on demographic characteristics *within* the CRJ major, we discover sex/gender differences (Table 7) in student loss but no significant racial/ethnic differences. The t-test comparisons in Table 7 reveal a larger male than female student loss ($t = 2.67, p < .01$). These differences do not exist for community colleges, but they hold for senior colleges ($t = 3.51, p < .01$).

Table 7: Male and Female Student Loss in Criminal Justice/Criminology Programs across CUNY Community and Senior Colleges, 2019-2022.

Independent Sample Means (t-Test) Comparison	Mean	S. D.	Mean Difference (S. E.)	t-Value
CUNY Colleges				
Male Students	0.152	0.080	0.074 (0.028)	2.67**
Female Students	0.078	0.109		
CUNY Community Colleges				
Male Students	0.201	0.067	0.054 (0.034)	1.58
Female Students	0.147	0.089		
CUNY Senior Colleges				
Male Students	0.102	0.059	0.094 (0.027)	3.51**
Female Students	0.009	0.078		

Note: * - $p < .05$; ** - $p < .01$; *** - $p < .001$

Overall, CRJ lost more male and Hispanic students than comparable majors across CUNY. The CRJ program itself lost more male than female students during the pandemic years. However, the program lost equal proportions of male and female students in community colleges and equal proportions of students across racial/ethnic categories.

Discussion

This is the first study to document how CRJ student enrollment declined during the pandemic years compared to enrollment changes in other programs at a large urban school system like that of CUNY, which serves as a valuable pool for police recruiters during a time of crisis in obtaining qualified officers. During these pandemic years, from 2019-2022, many programs experienced sharp enrollment declines. At CUNY, programs like business or liberal arts saw their numbers drop by more than 5,000 and 10,000 students respectively over the four-year span. CRJ was not immune to these trends, facing more than a 4,700 student drop in enrollment during the same time.

This significant decline, we argue, largely aligns with a “George Floyd” effect and is in part responsible for the recruitment crisis facing many law enforcement agencies. CRJ lost a larger proportion of students than the other top majors during the pandemic and experienced sharper

declines than programs in STEM fields, like computer and medical sciences, or more closely aligned majors in social studies, like psychology and social sciences. While many majors had to deal with pandemic effects, CRJ experienced another layer of problems stemming from social unrest, a derivative of fatal encounters between the police and the Black community.

While it is impossible to state conclusively that a “George Floyd” effect was the sole cause – as we would have to account for a myriad of other intervening variables – in line with previous research that points to the influence of a “Ferguson” effect,³⁴ it is suggestive that some of these declines were due to the social climate of antipathy towards law enforcement and anger about racial injustice that dissuaded many students from pursuing CRJ studies once the pandemic desisted. The fact that these losses were sharper in community than in senior colleges could lend more credence to such interpretation. Students pursuing CRJ programs in community colleges are more likely to fill the ranks of the police force, become probation/parole officers, and other first responders to citizen concerns with crime than students in senior colleges who may be more likely to pursue advanced degrees or work positions where they do not have to deal with civilian-police interactions. Perhaps to avoid the scrutiny that would be invariably present in their future line of work during tensioned police-citizen encounters, or out of distaste for what the police has come to represent, students in community colleges were more inclined to eschew CRJ studies.

If the findings on CRJ student loss are consistent with our expectations of a “George Floyd” effect, the results on demographic indicators are more nuanced. On the one hand, when comparing demographic indicators *between* programs, we find that CRJ lost a higher proportion of male and Hispanic students than most comparable majors. We also find evidence that CRJ lost more female and Black students, but the difference was restricted to only a few majors. On the other hand, when comparing student loss across demographic indicators *within* the CRJ program, male-female differences in senior colleges notwithstanding, we notice student loss is equally distributed across sex/gender and racial/ethnic groups. That is, at CUNY in general, and CUNY community colleges in

particular, males and females, Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, and Whites dropped from the program at equal rates.

We went into this research expecting to find racial/ethnic differences (which could very well exist should the study include more variables that could be subjected to the scrutiny of more robust inferential analyses). Through program meetings and informal discussions with colleagues, we were encouraged to do something to stem a potential exodus and bolster the low tide of minority enrollments into the program. The fact that there is no more Black or Hispanic than Asian or White student loss is indicative of an instance where the lack of significance becomes significantly meaningful. We think the fateful event of George Floyd's death at the hands of police affected all groups in their decisions to (not) enroll. Perhaps, as Jean Baker Miller³⁵ would argue on domination and subordination, the mechanisms may operate differently for each group. We can only suggest that minorities would probably not want to be part of an institution that systematically discriminates and uses violence against them whereas majority group members would probably be discouraged from pursuing studies in a field of work where guilt, assumptions of racism, and scrutiny of thoughts, actions, and internalized biases become regularly confronted during daily activities. If true, the racially charged fatal events of May 2020 may have served as a catalyst for distancing – for different reasons – *all* types of students from CRJ programs above and beyond the pandemic declines of other study majors.

Of course, this study and this line of argument has limitations. For instance, we do not have a specific measure of how a social event directly affects a scholarly program and are, therefore, acutely aware a direct causal mechanism is impossible to establish. Perhaps students became less enthusiastic about CRJ programs due to better incentives in other types of occupations, like dental hygienists and radiology therapists in healthcare programs or computer networking specialists in information technologies. Even though we doubt consideration for other lines of work is a reason for dropping out

or changing tracks, given that CRJ degrees offer competitive pay, job stability, and early retirement – elements that did not vanish during the pandemic – we cannot completely exclude the possibility.

Furthermore, the findings from this study could be difficult to generalize to other settings. We are confident the study outcomes could be replicated at other university systems in large urban areas but less assured they would hold for school systems in smaller communities.

Last, we think the study could have benefitted from the inclusion of more variables that would help create a better tableau of the types of students at higher risk of discontinuing studies in CRJ programs. Data on student age, status (freshmen or senior), or more importantly, socioeconomic status would make the researchers better positioned in uncovering the reasons behind the unusual CRJ student drop during the pandemic years. Qualitative data, such as surveys or interviews with CRJ students about their perception of career choices pre-and post-George Floyd would also be useful in establishing the primacy of a George Floyd effect.

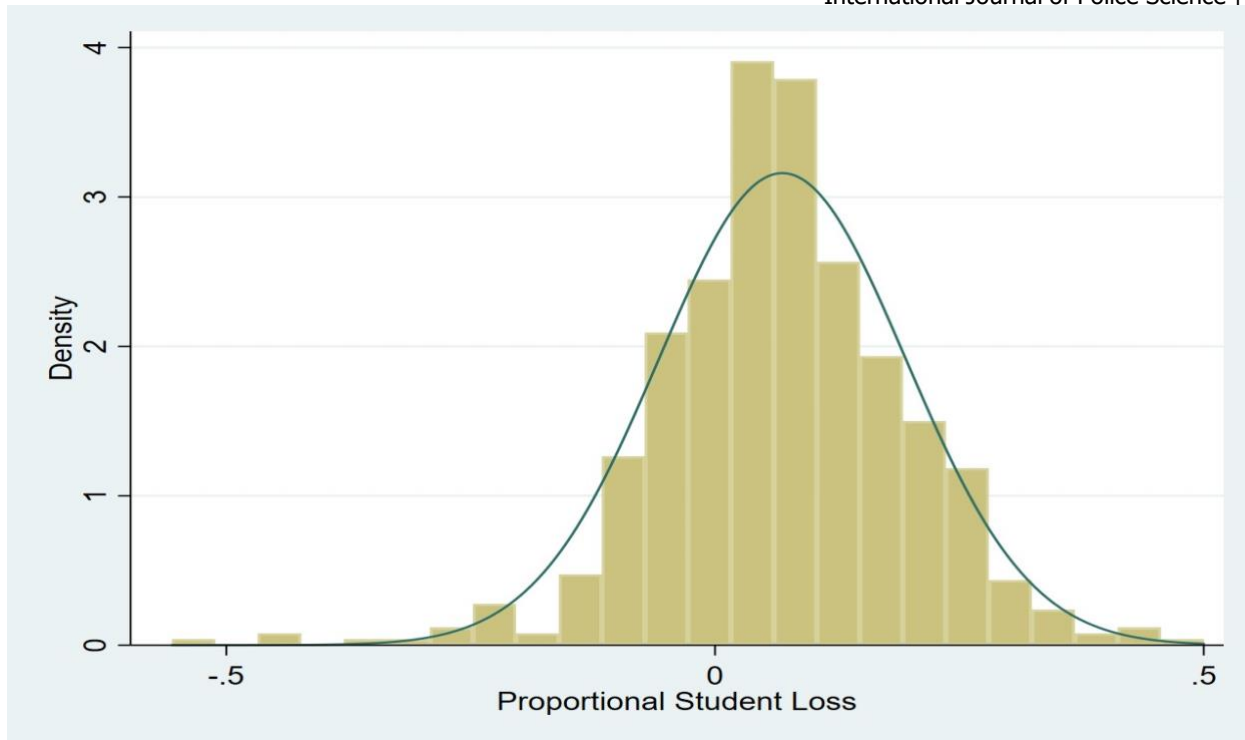
Conclusion

Despite limitations, this is the first study to compare the enrollment decline of CRJ students to enrollment changes in other similar programs during the pandemic and George Floyd's aftermath. CRJ majors lost more students than other programs, in part, we think, due to high profile triggering events of police abuse that bring to the forefront the fractured relations between law enforcement and minority communities. These events affect CRJ students more than other majors because, once in the workforce, they are the individuals who are expected to be part of these intimidating interactions. This study can give a better understanding to hiring staff in policing agencies who are trying to understand the reasons that are negatively influencing the recruitment of qualified, college-educated personnel into the profession, even as they consider other evidence-based ways of enticing students to join, such as through financial and legal incentives.³⁶ This is of paramount importance as research has indicated that sudden decreases in law enforcement are linked to increases in both violent and property crime.³⁷ We hope the study alerts authorities and community activists alike that a traumatic

police-citizen event, let alone a succession of them, has long-term repercussions. They could dissuade swaths of students from joining justice-related occupations, ultimately hampering recruitment for a profession that takes pride in providing safety for all.

Appendices

Appendix A: Histogram – Distribution of Proportional Student Loss, 2019-2022.



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