

Criminal justice researchers at UT analyze misdemeanor arrest numbers for Toledo

Two years ago, misdemeanors accounted for approximately 90 percent of total arrests by Toledo police officers. These crimes include anything from a low-level drug possession, loitering and much more.

Now, in an effort to understand the issue of low-level crimes and create smarter criminal justice policies to address their rise, the University of Toledo has been selected as one of six partners across the United States to join the first research network on misdemeanor justice.

Attorney and Executive Director of the Toledo-Lucas County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Holly Matthews initiated the city of Toledo's involvement in the research network run by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York.

"Toledo is perfect for this project," Matthews said. "The city is the largest in the jurisdiction. It would be great to take a deeper look at the misdemeanor crimes, which are driving our local jail population. To me, this seems to complement our ongoing work."

UT received a three-year, \$169,000 grant to analyze local police force data and work with research institutions throughout the country, according to the press release.

The John Jay College of Criminal Justice states that the selection criteria for the six cities includes the availability of high-quality administrative data, including at least ten years of reliable data on arrests for low-level offenses, summonses, pedestrian stops and case outcome data including pretrial detention.

Los Angeles, Seattle, St. Louis, Durham and Prince George's County in Maryland are also among the seven total jurisdictions to join the network and work in correspondence with one another.

Associates in UT's criminal justice program look forward to contributing their expertise to the research network.

"I am very excited to be a part of this project," wrote Kasey-Tucker Gail, principal investigator for the misdemeanor justice research project at UT. "It will yield valuable research on the very under-researched topic of misdemeanor. The impact it has on our field is profound."

Toledo Police Chief George Kral recognized the need for reform in the area of low-level crimes and plans on utilizing the intelligence provided by professionals at UT.

"We are always looking for ways of reducing rates of incarceration. We are going to take what we've been doing, let UT crunch the numbers. Then together we're going to come up with some new policies," Kral said.

The work being done will attempt to produce alternatives and constructive adjustments to the system.

"We are very lucky to work in a community where agencies are receptive to sharing in the research process and working towards positive change," Tucker-Gail wrote. "This is a groundbreaking project that puts UT at the forefront of research."

According to Tucker-Gail, the network will act as an academic opportunity for those enrolled in UT's criminal justice program.

"Students will be involved in this project," Tucker-Gail wrote. "We will hire a graduate student for this project for all three years and engage students at any level possible in

research and scholarly activity.”