



Faculty Lunches with the Dean (No. 11) (Jessie Smith)

Author : Mike Smith

Categories : [Faculty Lunches](#)

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I recently blogged about what Jill Moore shared during the latest session of Faculty Lunches with the Dean. This post summarizes the information shared at that lunch by Jessie Smith. I will post in the coming days about the interesting work shared by Shea Denning and Leisha DeHart-Davis

Jessie talked about her work for the North Carolina Commission on the Administration of Law and Justice appointed by Chief Justice Mark Martin. She has done lots of work for the Commission over a nearly two-year period, and her lunch discussion focused on the Juvenile Reinvestment report. This has been a major effort. The report is an evidence-based proposal to increase North Carolina's juvenile age. We are one of only two states that send 16- and 17-year old defendants to adult criminal court rather than to juvenile court.



Jessie Smith

As a Reporter for the Commission, Jessie identified and secured state and national experts to make presentations to the Commissioners. She also worked extensively with organizations, such as the NC Sentencing Policy and Advisory Commission, to develop data and statistics to inform the analysis. The evidence showed clearly that raising the juvenile age reduces recidivism and saves money, which has been the experience in other states.

In addition to preparing briefing papers for the Commissioners, Jessie also presented the Commission's work at many stakeholder meetings. She spent hundreds of hours working with stakeholders, listening carefully to their concerns, dispelling misconceptions about data, and helping to craft proposed solutions for the Commissioners to address issues that were identified. In many ways this may have been Jessie's greatest impact, and it also presented a challenge for her. How could she present the evidence and represent the Commission's recommendation to stakeholders without being identified personally as endorsing the proposed policy change? Jessie said that she struggled with the issue and worked hard to always be clear that neither she nor the School was making any recommendation. I think the video linked below shows that she walked that line as effectively as possible.

Jessie drafted the final report for the Commission. In addition to a recommendation to raise the juvenile age, the report included a number of other recommendations designed to address important issues raised by stakeholders. Because the process that Jessie facilitated was cooperative and collaborative, the Commission's proposal enjoys historic support, including



support from groups that have opposed all prior efforts to increase the juvenile age. The Commission's formal work has concluded, but Jessie continues to be involved in making presentations and answering questions as the recommendation moves towards legislation.



In many ways Jessie's work for the Commission reminds me of work that we used to do for legislative study commissions around major policy changes. It was an opportunity to have a major impact that is different from the cumulative and equally important impact that we have with our regular, ongoing work. I'm delighted that Jessie was willing to take on the extra work required to help address this major policy issue, and that her colleagues in the courts field supported her in doing it. I hope we can do more of this type of policy work partly through the initiative being led by Anita Brown-Graham. Jessie did most of her work for a committee chaired by Judge Bill Webb, a member of the UNC Board of Governors, who was over the moon in his praise about the excellent quality of her work. I feel the same way.

[Here is a link](#) to a recent video that Jessie prepared to explain the basis for the Commission's recommendation.