



Dr. Jonathan Kremser | Criminal Justice Faculty Highlight

Dr. Jonathan Kremser's time with Kutztown University began over two decades ago when he studied criminal justice here as an undergraduate student. He quickly found his place in the field through the academic study of crime and criminology and has since put the research into practice and implements it in every aspect of his career, such as in research projects, conference presentations, and private consulting. Now, he has found his way back to KU and the department that began his career all those years ago to mentor students and help them find their own passion within the diverse field of criminal justice.

Before he began his studies, Dr. Kremser was a member of the United States Navy. "I always wanted to do that, growing up," he said. "I liked the aspect of travel." From New Zealand and the Middle East to Egypt and Antarctica, Dr. Kremser saw the world while he worked as a Gunner's Mate, which, in the Navy, includes weapon training. In this position, Dr. Kremser focused on firearms and tactics instruction for selected Navy personnel as well as Department of Defense police officers. The discipline, leadership, and his many other experiences in the Navy sparked his interest in the criminal justice field.

Dr. Kremser's area of research specifically focuses on school-based crime and violence. He began by studying zero-tolerance policies. He focused on how these policies were being applied and implemented in both the American and Canadian school systems as he attended graduate school at the University of Ottawa. From there, he expanded his area of study into school security where he investigates the school environment to better understand how safety measures can affect school violence, crimes, and bullying.

"My focus is not just on individuals that commit violent acts but on how we can prevent them by changing the environment and making it more secure," said Dr. Kremser. "Trying to figure out what would drive students to commit an act of violence: how can we explain it, how can we prevent it, and how can we also change that built environment to influence individuals' behavior and reduce it. I really like studying specific attributes of the environment that create opportunities for crime and then developing approaches

to prevent criminal activity and increase the perception of safety."

One project that Dr. Kremser has been working on, entitled "The Fear of Being Bullied on the School Bus: Perceptions, Correlations, and Sex Differences," evaluates bullying in a relatively unsupervised area in many school systems: the bus. The main question of the project was to understand whether the rates of bullying were higher during the morning or afternoon commute. Dr. Kremser surveyed middle school aged children, asking them directly to explain what was happening to them on the bus and whether the bullying was verbal, physical, or over social media. "One thing that I did with my research on bullying is that I didn't use the word 'bullying' because my definition might not be the same as the children's definition,"

he said. "I actually call it what it is. Is it hitting? Is it name calling? Things that are

repeated, we can establish as bullying, but bullying can take many forms." Through the surveys, he found that, despite all of the news that focuses on school shootings, that students actually reported feeling safer in school than during their daily commute. Dr. Kremser is still conducting research in this area, and he has many more questions to explore to fully understand this issue.

To engage with and receive feedback from other criminal justice professionals on his work, Dr. Kremser frequently presents research he is actively working on at conferences. In 2018, Dr. Kremser presented information about the impact of Pennsylvania's initiative to address the commonwealth's heroin epidemic at the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime Conference in Austria. He discussed the correlated effort between police departments and healthcare professionals to help individuals suffering from addiction instead of jailing them without treatment. The information was received well, but Dr. Kremser found that while there is opioid use in other countries, the epidemic is mainly focused in the United States.

Dr. Kremser also uses his expertise to put his research into practice as a consultant

for Forensic Security & Protections, LLC. Certified through the National Association of School Resource Officers, he works with public school districts in the surrounding area to complete risk assessments on the physical security of their buildings, including reviewing the effectiveness of their design to enhance safety and security.

"My focus is not just on individuals that commit violent acts but on how we can prevent them by changing the environment and making it more secure."

Dr. Kremser has been the chair of the criminal justice department for the last four years, and in this position, he has assisted in launching many initiatives for the department, such as improving student outreach and the department's social media, working with the KU Foundation, and implementing new collaborative programs, including the Master's in Public Administration with a concentration in Criminal Justice. He took on the responsibility of the position to make a change. "I know there are a lot of changes occurring in higher education, and I wanted the challenge of building upon the department that was already here to improve it to make it one of the best," he said.

One of the main pieces of advice he instills in his students is that learning does not end after graduation, especially in criminal justice. It is important to be a lifelong learner. The field is constantly changing to better assist the public as new information and protocols are being discovered. As the research and practices evolve, Dr. Kremser believes students at KU have many opportunities to find the right path that will set them up to be ready and excited for their careers that lie ahead.



Kirsten Bell | Environmental Science: Geography Student Highlight

Kirsten Bell had no idea what she wanted to do when she graduated high school. Her path was even less clear when she put her education on hold at Elizabethtown College to work full-time as a barista. It was not until her father pushed her to go back to school that her direction started to take form through science courses at community college. Now, as a senior at Kutztown University, she is on the cusp of attaining a bachelor's degree in environmental science with a focus in geography, and she feels incredibly lucky to have discovered a career path she never knew she wanted and to have gained invaluable work experience in a position she loves.

Kirsten was an environmental science major at Northampton Community College, but she was unsure about exactly what she wanted to do after graduation. "I was hoping that whatever I ended up doing, I would get to work outside," she said. She never previously considered herself an outdoorsy person, but every time one of her classes went *outside* to learn about the environment, she realized she enjoyed the experience. When she decided to further her education after her associate's degree, she continued on the environmental science path because she knew the degree would allow her to work outdoors instead of in an office cubical all day long.

However, before Kirsten even began courses at KU, she had a conversation with Dr. Richard Courtney, KU's geography

department chair, and she decided to alter her path just a little to add a specialization in geography. "I picked geography because you can really study anything. It's the physical aspect of the environment, but it's also people and how being in a certain place makes people a certain way, how people and the environment interact together as influenced by their physical surroundings," she said. "It's important to understand the science behind what makes the environment function and how to take care of and maintain that. But we are also people living in this environment, and you can't ignore that part."

Since Kirsten seemed to have finally found exactly what she wanted, she jumped at the opportunity to intern at Blue Marsh Lake. Maintained by the Philadelphia District of United States Army Corps of Engineers, Blue Marsh Lake, located outside of Reading, is a multi-use project that provides flood control for the Schuylkill River and has become

a popular recreation destination in Berks County.

In one of Kirsten's geography courses during fall 2019, park rangers from Blue Marsh Lake visited the class to give a presentation about flood risk management. When they mentioned there were summer internship positions available, Kirsten knew she needed to apply. "This was everything I ever wanted to do without previously knowing that I wanted to do it," she said. After their presentation, she emailed the ranger staff about her interest in the program, and they invited her to the lake to talk about the job, what it was like, and how to apply. Kirsten applied and was accepted to begin interning in June 2020.

Over the summer, during the park's peak recreation season, Kirsten worked outside every day performing environmental stewardship work. She cleared brush from the hiking trails for maintenance and easy access, picked up trash and debris on project lands, and made sure

the park was a place of enjoyment for every visitor. On the weekends, when visitation was high, she interacted with people from the community, patrolled the beach, and assisted with traffic control.

Kirsten continued with her position into the fall, and with the recreation season coming to an end, she had new responsibilities. She became involved in ongoing habitat management projects, such as the bluebird program. This involved surveying bluebird boxes around the lake for usage and maintenance needs. She also operated a tractor for field mowing, which maintains habitats, and trail mowing, which maintains the recreational features of the park. At first, some of the maintenance she was conducting shocked her. "From sitting in the classroom, I was like, wouldn't you want to let the environment take care of itself, but no," she said. "If we want a specific type of environment, like a certain habitat for a specific animal, we have to maintain that sometimes. Otherwise, that habitat might disappear and turn into something else."

"It's important to understand the science behind what makes the environment function [...] but we are also people living in this environment, and you can't ignore that part."

Kirsten took this opportunity because she knew it would get her to the next stage of life. "Seven years ago, I wouldn't have pictured myself doing this. I didn't know this was something that people did, and I didn't know that this was a job that I wanted to do," she said. "I am doing this internship because this is what I want to do, and I feel so lucky that these circumstances happened to me and have led me to where I'm at. I wouldn't be the person that I am, with the goals that I have, without everything that has led me here, and I hope that this leads to more of the same."

For Kirsten, the main goal of the internship was to gain job experience in a field she could potentially work in for the rest of her life and to understand how the principles that she learned within classes were applied in real-life settings. And she achieved that goal. She hopes to continue in this career field after she graduates from KU this May.

Caelan Brooks Wins 2021 Syed R. Ali-Zaidi Award for Academic Excellence

Caelan Brooks is the 2021 winner of the PASSHE Syed R. Ali-Zaidi Award for Academic Excellence. Created in 2000, this prestigious award is conferred each year upon a graduating senior from one of the State System universities. It was founded by Dr. Syed R. Ali-Zaidi, a charter member of the Board of Governors, who wishes to inspire and honor State System students who exhibit excellence in their pursuit of knowledge. Caelan is a senior physics major with a dual minor in mathematics and Spanish. In January 2021, she published a research paper in *Empirical Review* on ultra-cold atoms in ring lattices. She has been a research assistant for Dr. Das for the past three years, researching AMO Physics (Atomic, Molecular, and Optical Physics). She has participated in many physics Research Experiences for Undergraduate Students (REU) programs, including at Boston University where she virtually conducted research on bacterial biofilms. Her Boston University research is ongoing. After graduation, Caelan will be attending graduate school for a PhD in physics.