

# SEPCHE

## Nurturing Student Scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences

### Faculty-Student Undergraduate Research Project

**Research Project: CREATING THE JUVENILE VIOLENCE EPIDEMIC**

**Discipline: CRIMINAL JUSTICE/CRIMINOLOGY**

**Faculty Mentor: LEANNE OWEN, Ph.D., Holy Family University ([lowen@holyfamily.edu](mailto:lowen@holyfamily.edu))**

**Project Description:** This project would take a social constructionist perspective to assessing the problem of juvenile violence by examining the nature and frequency of newspaper and magazine reports of the phenomenon since the early 1990s. Phrases such as “the juvenile violence epidemic” and epithets describing the “new breed of juvenile superpredator” are often bandied about quite readily, and the public and academics alike are often quick to respond by looking for solutions to the “problem” without ascertaining whether, in fact, the “problem” exists to the extent that it is portrayed. Influenced by the work of Howard Becker and Stanley Cohen on labeling and the social and political creation of moral panics, the proposed project would attempt to understand the process by which a social problem is constructed by claims-makers and moral entrepreneurs in the media. Consequently, the tone of reports in the print media will be analyzed, and predetermined keywords and phrases counted, in order to assess whether there appears to be a concerted effort to project and perpetuate the belief that juvenile violence is increasing in its frequency and severity.

**Student Task(s):** Establishing criteria for the inclusion of newspaper reports, which will ensure that the study can be replicated by others; determining and following methodically a classification and coding scheme; and statistically analyzing the results for both manifest and latent content.

**Student Time Commitment:** 8-10 hours per week, approximately 10 weeks.

**Student Learning Outcome:** Upon completion of this research project, the student will be able to:

- Describe the process by which data sources for content analysis are selected;
- Distinguish between manifest and latent content analysis;
- Explain how specific terms and phrases may be utilized to construct a social problem, such as juvenile violence; and
- Hypothesize some of the reasons behind the particular construction of a social problem, such as juvenile violence.

**Expected Student Product:** The student will produce a report demonstrating the specific findings of the content analysis within the larger contextual framework of a social constructionist approach to sociology and criminology.

**Other Expected Outcomes:** The student will become familiar with both the *methodology* involved in doing content analysis research, as well as with the *theories* behind the social constructionist perspective of sociology and criminology.