



President's Welcome Letter to SWACJ Members

Southwestern Association of Criminal Justice (SWACJ)

2025 Annual Conference

Fort Worth, Texas

October 8-10, 2025



Dear Esteemed SWACJ Members, Colleagues, and Friends,

As the newly elected President of the Southwestern Association of Criminal Justice (SWACJ) for 2025, it is my profound honor to extend a warm welcome to each of you as we gather for our annual conference in the vibrant city of Fort Worth, Texas. This event represents not just a professional convocation but a cornerstone of our shared commitment to advancing criminal justice research, education, and practice across our region—spanning Arkansas, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Fort Worth's rich history and dynamic energy mirror the resilience and spirit of SWACJ, and I am thrilled to see us come together in person to exchange ideas, forge connections, and chart the future of our field.

In this spirit of unity and gratitude, I want to extend special thanks to the extraordinary individuals who have been the backbone of our organization through unprecedented challenges. First and foremost, my deepest appreciation goes to Dr. Gordon Crews for his tireless leadership in keeping SWACJ intact and ensuring a seamless transition from one president to the next. Gordon, your steady hand and unwavering dedication have been nothing short of inspirational.

I also extend heartfelt thanks to Dr. Howard Kurtz, who has served faithfully as our 1st Vice President. Beyond his vice presidential duties, Howard stepped up as interim journal editor and secured free hosting for our Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice & Criminology at Southwestern Oklahoma State University—a move that quite literally saved the journal from dissolution. Your foresight and commitment have preserved a vital platform for our scholarly voices.

Special recognition is due to Dr. James Hurst, whose meticulous stewardship of our financial accounts has been invaluable. James, last year's heroic efforts in catching us up on overdue taxes and paperwork not only stabilized our operations but also positioned us for sustainable growth. You have been a major contributor to the SWACJ team, and we are all the stronger for your expertise and generosity.

To Garrison Crews, Dr. Kate Wilds, and Dr. Shantol McIntosh, thank you for your outstanding contributions to our committee work. Your collaborative energy and practical insights have been essential in navigating our path forward.



On behalf of the entire executive board, I also wish to acknowledge the generous financial supporters who stepped in during our time of greatest need: the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS), Texas Christian University (TCU), Tarleton State University, The University of Texas at Tyler (UT Tyler), Sam Houston State University, Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU), Weber State University, North Richland Hills Police Department, the McCallum Family, and my wife, Mary Jo Watts. Your contributions have been lifelines, sustaining SWACJ at a moment when the organization teetered on the brink. I suspect many members may not fully realize how perilously close we came to no longer existing as the vibrant community we know today.

This past year, our executive board confronted challenges eerily similar to those of the previous one: difficult decisions around executive board composition, the creation of new branding and a revamped website, rebuilding our membership list from the ground up, relocating our journal to a secure home with a new editor, and undertaking a comprehensive overhaul of our Constitution and By-laws. All of this unfolded against a backdrop of dwindling organizational funding and tightening budgets at our colleges and universities. Yet, through sheer determination, innovative problem-solving, and collective hard work, we have not only endured but emerged stronger—ready to host this conference as a testament to our resilience.

For me personally, SWACJ holds a significance that runs deep, woven into the fabric of my professional journey. As a young assistant professor, this was the very first conference I attended—a welcoming gateway into the world of criminal justice scholarship. Even as a student, I was profoundly influenced by two of my professors who had served as SWACJ presidents: Dr. Bob Grant of Midwestern State University and Jim Alexander of Texas Woman's University. I looked up to them immensely, and learning of their leadership roles in this organization instilled in me a sense of aspiration and possibility. Today, as I stand before you as your president, that full-circle moment fills me with humility and gratitude.

The legacy of SWACJ's leadership has been a guiding light. Dr. Will Oliver was president during my early days, when I relied on his seminal policing text in my coursework. Dr. Camille Gibson, whom I have admired for years, brought grace and insight to the role. Dr. Chip Burns, ever the gentleman, once greeted me warmly at a conference—though he had no idea who I was—making me feel instantly included in this community. My colleague Dr. Jiletta Kubena exemplified collaborative excellence as president, while James Blair has that rare gift of making every member feel like family. And there are so many more—Beth, I see you and thank you for all the incredible photos that capture our spirit so vividly. The list is far too long to enumerate here, but know that each of you has



shaped SWACJ into a beacon of mentorship, camaraderie, and progress.

As we embark on this conference, let us carry forward that same sense of purpose. I invite you to engage fully in the sessions, network with old friends and new, and contribute your voices to the conversations that will define our next chapter. Together, we will continue to foster high standards in criminal justice education, promote innovative research, and build bridges between academia and practice.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for being SWACJ. I look forward to a memorable and productive few days in Fort Worth.

Warm regards,

President, Southwestern Association of Criminal Justice (SWACJ)
2025