Summary of the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program

The FBI's UCR Program is a nationwide, cooperative statistical effort of more than 18,000 city, university and college, county, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies voluntarily reporting data on crimes brought to their attention. Since 1930, the FBI has administered the UCR Program and has continued to assess and monitor the nature and type of crime in the nation. The program's primary objective is to generate reliable information for use in law enforcement administration, operation, and management; over the years, however, the data have become one of the country's leading social indicators. Criminologists, sociologists, legislators, municipal planners, the media, and other students of criminal justice use the data for varied research and planning purposes.

In 2013, law enforcement agencies active in the UCR Program represented more than 309 million United States inhabitants (98.0 percent of the total population). The coverage amounted to 98.8 percent of the population in Metropolitan Statistical Areas, 92.9 percent of the population in cities outside metropolitan areas, and 93.5 percent of the population in nonmetropolitan counties.

UCR advisory groups

The Criminal Justice Information Systems Committees of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) provide vital links between local law enforcement and the FBI in the oversight of the UCR Program. The IACP, representing the thousands of police departments nationwide, and the NSA, serving sheriffs throughout the country, encourage agencies to participate fully in the program. Both committees fulfill advisory capacities concerning the UCR Program's operation.

In 1988, a Data Providers' Advisory Policy Board was established to provide input for UCR matters. That Board operated until 1993 when it combined with the National Crime Information Center Advisory Policy Board to form a single Advisory Policy Board (APB) to address all issues regarding the FBI's criminal justice information services. The

current APB ensures a continued emphasis on UCR-related issues. In addition, the Association of State UCR Programs (ASUCRP) focuses on UCR issues within individual state law enforcement associations and promotes interest in the UCR Program. These organizations foster widespread and responsible use of uniform crime statistics and lend assistance to data contributors when needed.

Historical background of UCR

Recognizing a need for national crime statistics, the IACP formed the Committee on Uniform Crime Records in the 1920s to develop a system of uniform crime statistics. After studying state criminal codes and making an evaluation of the recordkeeping practices in use, the Committee completed a plan for crime reporting that became the foundation of the UCR Program in 1929. The plan included standardized offense definitions for seven main offense classifications known as Part I crimes to gauge fluctuations in the overall volume and rate of crime. Developers also instituted the Hierarchy Rule as the main reporting procedure for what is now known as the Summary Reporting System (SRS) of the UCR Program.

The seven Part I offense classifications included the violent crimes of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault as well as the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. By congressional mandate, arson was added as the eighth Part I offense category in 1979.

In January 1930, 400 cities representing 20 million inhabitants in 43 states began participating in the UCR Program. That same year, Congress enacted Title 28, Section 534, of the United States Code authorizing the Attorney General to gather crime information. The Attorney General, in turn, designated the FBI to serve as the national clearinghouse for the crime data collected. Every year since, data based on uniform classifications and procedures for reporting offenses and arrests have been obtained from the nation's law enforcement agencies.

Redesign of UCR

Although the data collected and disseminated by the UCR Program remained virtually unchanged throughout the years, in the 1980s, a broad utility had evolved for UCR. Recognizing the need for improved statistics, law enforcement called for a thorough evaluative study to modernize the UCR Program. The FBI concurred with the need for an

updated program and lent its complete support, formulating a comprehensive three-phase redesign effort. The first two phases of this effort, guided by input from representatives of the FBI, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the IACP, and the NSA, culminated with the release of a comprehensive report.

The final report, the *Blueprint for the Future of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program* (*Blueprint*), was released in May 1985. It specifically outlined three areas of enhancement to help the UCR Program meet future informational needs. First, agencies would use an incident-based system to report offenses and arrests. Second, the national UCR Program would collect data on two levels (i.e., limited and full participation), and third, the national UCR Program would introduce a quality assurance program.

In January 1986, the FBI began phase III of the redesign effort guided by the general recommendations set forth in the *Blueprint.* Contractors developed new data guidelines and system specifications while the FBI studied various state systems to select an experimental site to implement the redesigned program. Upon selecting the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED), which enlisted the cooperation of nine local law enforcement agencies, the FBI developed automated data capture specifications to adapt the SLED's state system to the national UCR Program's standards, and the BJS funded the revisions. The pilot demonstration ran from March 1–September 30, 1987, and resulted in further refinement of the guidelines and specifications.

March 1–3, 1988, the FBI held a National UCR Conference to present the new system to law enforcement and to obtain feedback on its acceptability. Attendees of the National UCR Conference passed three overall recommendations without dissent: first, that there be established a new, incident-based national crime reporting system; second, that the FBI manage this program; and third, that an APB composed of law enforcement executives be formed to assist in directing and implementing the new program. Furthermore, attendees recommended that the implementation of national incident-based reporting proceed at a pace commensurate with the resources and limitations of contributing law enforcement agencies.

Establishing the NIBRS

From March 1988 through January 1989, the FBI proceeded in developing and assuming management of the UCR Program's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS),

and by April 1989, the national UCR Program received the first test submission of NIBRS data. Over the course of the next few years, the national UCR Program published information about the redesigned program in five documents:

- *Data Collection Guidelines* (revised August 2000) contains a system overview and descriptions of the offense codes, reports, data elements, and data values used in the system.

- *Data Submission Specifications* (May 1992) is for the use of local and state systems personnel who are responsible for preparing magnetic media for submission to the FBI.

- *Approaches to Implementing an Incident-Based System* (July 1992) is a guide for system designers.

- *Error Message Manual* (revised December 1999) contains designations of mandatory and optional data elements, data element edits, and error messages.

- *Uniform Crime Reporting Handbook*, NIBRS Edition (1992) provides a non-technical program overview that focuses on definitions, policies, and procedures of the NIBRS.

Since then, the national UCR Program staff has presented additional documents including the *National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) Technical Specification* (Version 1.0 dated April 16, 2012) and the *National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) User Manual* (Version 1.0 dated January 17, 2013).

Originally designed with 52 data elements, the NIBRS currently captures up to 58 data elements via six types of data segments: administrative, offense, victim, property, offender, and arrestee. Although, in the late 1980s, the FBI committed to hold all changes to the NIBRS in abeyance until a substantial amount of contributors implemented the system, modifications have been necessary. The system's flexibility has allowed for the collection of four additional pieces of information to be captured within an incident: bias-motivated offenses (1990), the presence of gang activity (1997), data for law enforcement officers killed and assaulted (2003), and data on cargo theft (2005). It has also permitted the addition of new codes to further specify location types and property types (2010).

The FBI began accepting NIBRS data from a handful of agencies in January 1989. As more contributing law enforcement agencies became educated about the rich data available through incident-based reporting and as resources permitted, more agencies implemented the NIBRS. Based on 2012 data submissions, 15 states submit all their data via the NIBRS, and 33 state UCR Programs are certified for NIBRS participation.

The FBI suspends the Crime Index and Modified Crime Index

In June 2004, the CJIS APB approved discontinuing the use of the Crime Index in the UCR Program and its publications, and it directed the FBI to publish a violent crime total and a property crime total. The Crime Index, first published in *Crime in the United States* in 1960, was the title used for a simple aggregation of the seven main offense classifications (Part I offenses) in the SRS. The Modified Crime Index was the number of Crime Index offenses plus arson.

For several years, the CJIS Division studied the appropriateness and usefulness of these indices and brought the matter before many advisory groups including the UCR Subcommittee of the CJIS APB, the ASUCRP, and a meeting of leading criminologists and sociologists hosted by the BJS. In short, the Crime Index and the Modified Crime Index were not true indicators of the degrees of criminality because they were always driven upward by the offense with the highest number, typically larceny-theft. The sheer volume of those offenses overshadowed more serious but less frequently committed offenses, creating a bias against a jurisdiction with a high number of larceny-thefts but a low number of other serious crimes such as murder and forcible rape.

Recent Developments in the UCR Program

At the fall 2011 CJIS APB meeting, the APB recommended, and then-FBI Director Robert Mueller III approved, changing the definition of rape. Since 1929, in the SRS, forcible rape had been defined as "the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will," (*UCR Handbook,* 2004, p. 19). Beginning with the 2013 data collection, the SRS definition for the violent crime of rape was modified to:

> "Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim."

This definition can be found in the *Summary Reporting System [SRS] User Manual*, Version 1.0 dated June 20, 2013.

The FBI developed reporting options for law enforcement agencies to meet this requirement which were built into the redeveloped data collection system.

In addition to approving the new definition of rape for the SRS, the APB and Director Mueller approved removing the word "forcible" from the name of the offense and also replacing the phrase "against the person's will" with "without the consent of the victim" in other sex-related offenses in the SRS, the NIBRS, the Hate Crime Statistics Program, and Cargo Theft.

In response to a directive by the U.S. Government's Office of Management and Budget, the national UCR Program has expanded its data collection categories for race from four (White, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Asian or Other Pacific Islander) to five (White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander). Also, the ethnicity categories have changed from "Hispanic" to "Hispanic or Latino" and from "Non-Hispanic" to "Not Hispanic or Latino." These changes are reflected in data presented for 2012.

The national UCR Program staff continues to develop data collection methods to comply with both the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 and the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crime Prevention Act of 2009. As a result, the FBI began accepting data on human trafficking as well as data on crimes motivated by "gender and gender identity" bias and "crimes committed by, and crimes directed against, juveniles" from contributors in January 2013.

UCR Redevelopment Project Update

The staff members of the UCR Redevelopment Project (UCRRP) are working to improve the efficiency, usability, and maintainability of the UCR Program's submission processes, databases, and quality control activities. Through the UCRRP, the UCR Program will improve customer service by decreasing the time it takes to analyze data and by decreasing the time needed to release and publish crime data. The program will also enhance its external data query tool so that the public can view and analyze more published UCR data from the Internet.

Another major goal of the UCRRP is to eliminate the exchange of printed materials between submitting agencies and the FBI. The UCR Program is no longer accepting paper submissions or the electronic submission of documents (i.e., Portable Document Format files). The UCR Program is working with agencies to help them adopt electronic submissions via the NIBRS, electronic SRS, or Extensible Markup Language (XML).