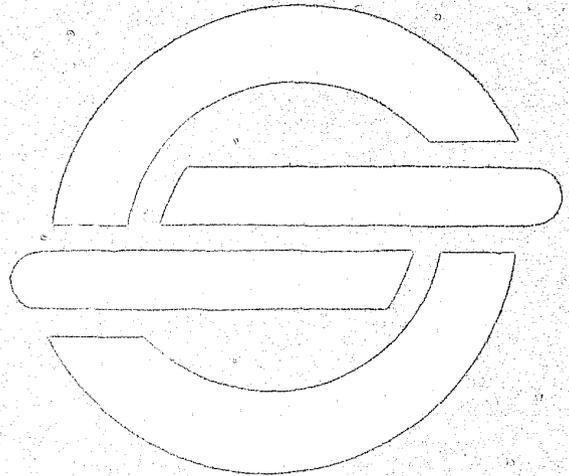


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# Addressing the Program Needs of Long-Term Inmates\*

*Ernest L. Cowles and Michael J. Sabath\*\**

For the convicted offender sentenced to spend a major portion, if not the entire remainder, of his or her adult life in a prison, the mechanisms of "doing time" become part of a permanent lifestyle. The imprisonment becomes a total life experience rather than simply an interruption in the offender's life, or as Unger and Buchanan (1985:9) succinctly put it, "The essence of this position is that long-term inmates are not tourists in prison; that is, they are not 'just passing through'." This notion requires an examination of the suitability of traditional correctional management strategies and programs for this long-term inmate population. Over a decade ago, Toch (1977) pointed out that programs offered for short-term inmates facing only a few years of confinement before their return to society were not appropriate for those facing decades of imprisonment. More recently, Flanagan (1985) argued in a similar vein that long-term incarceration requires more than just prison "program planning" for the long-termers, rather it needs "sentence planning." Our research on problem identification by long-termers reported in our companion article in this Journal reveals that as a group these individuals are more concerned with quality of life issues in areas such as the quality and availability of medical care, noise and crowding, food quality, staff-inmate communication, than with more traditional treatment program issues. These results echo the need to address the totality of extended prison existence for long-termers through integrated approaches, rather than simply plugging them into traditional correctional programs.

The exploratory programs discussed in this article were developed as part of our larger project on "Handling Long-term Offenders" in Missouri (hereafter referred to as the Missouri Project, Cowles et al., 1989). The Missouri Project was initiated with an exercise in which we attempted to identify problematic situations associated with long-term incarceration in the correctional system using a multiple perspectives approach (see the accompanying article in this Journal for a detailed review of the methodology and results). This work resulted in the identification of 32 problems which we collapsed into six general areas:

- inmate-staff relationships/communication
- institutional careers
- institutional services
- programs and activities
- physical environment
- family/community relationships

In considering potential program approaches, we attempted to address problems highlighted in our problem identification study within the context described above. The following discussion focuses on our attempts to design long-termer programs addressing specific problem areas identified in the information we collected. The first exploratory approach deals with the concept of institutional work careers which provide the long-term inmates with a meaningful occupation while simultaneously benefitting the correctional agency. The second describes a similar endeavor to provide long-termer career opportunities while enhancing institutional services. The third presents an attempt to

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TABLE 1

Summary of Program Activity in Missouri Project

Programs	Problem Categories Addressed	# LTOs Involved	Consensus Level	Expected Outcomes	Evaluation Results
Software Development	Institutional careers Programs & activities	6-40	moderate/high	Meaningful LTO work Better LTO management Manpower resources for Dept.	No inmate dropouts/ dismissals Improved inmate behavior Production of 4 major software applications with measurable cost savings to Dept.
Jefftown Productions	Institutional careers Institutional services	6-12 (benefits entire pop.)	moderate	Meaningful LTO work Improve Dept. media capabilities Better access to information/education	Wired entire prison with cable Production of 4 videos @ substantial cost savings Supplied information on topics such as AIDS for LTOs
Inmate Forum	Inmate-staff communication/relationships	6	low	Establish communication linkages between Project & LTOs Provide informal avenue for communication between LTOs & administration	Not formally evaluated
Potosi Plan	Attempted to address all categories	all long-termers	varied	Development of integrated strategy to address iden-problem areas	Not implemented during Project

deal with the issue of communications/relationships between staff and long-termers on which the two groups appear to hold very different perceptions. These particular programs are reviewed as they illustrate the strategies which were employed during the Missouri Project within an existing facility. Another group of integrated programs intended to address some of the other problem areas were prepared during the Project for the Department's new maximum security institution which was under construction during most of the Project (Cowles et al., 1989). Table 1 presents a summary overview of these programs.

### *Developing Long-Termer Programs*

Philosophically, we believed that three key elements—security, control and quality of life—needed to be considered in developing long-termer programs. The first two elements, security and control, are traditionally identified with the mission and operation of prisons. The first of these, security, refers to the prevention of the offender's escaping the confines of the institutions. The second, control, identifies the processes and mechanisms employed to establish internal order within the facility. Unfortunately, the distinction between the two frequently becomes clouded promoting the development of very high security institutions with extremely restrictive internal environments into which all "security" problems are dumped. The third element encompasses an area perhaps a bit more difficult to define, involving the humane treatment, the allowance for basic human dignity, and preservation of hope for the future for a long-term inmate.<sup>1</sup> We assumed that the best chances for successful long-termer programs rested with those which simultaneously addressed the concerns of each area, for they variously reflect the concerns of key actor or stakeholder groups whose participation is vital to the successful operation of the program. For example, a program which improves the quality of life for long-term inmates but ignores security concerns might be acceptable to the long-termers but not to the correctional officers. Therefore, a critical aspect of this program design strategy was to identify the perceptions held by the different groups as reported in our companion article included in this *Journal*.

### *Institutional Environment*

The programs discussed in this article were conceptualized as part of the larger Missouri Project. Although four of the State's ten "closed" correctional institutions existing at the time of the project held some long-termers, the vast majority, and in particular those serving very long determinant sentences, were housed in the State's single maximum security facility, the Missouri State Penitentiary.<sup>2</sup> At the time of the project this institution held approximately 1,900 inmates, of whom approximately 55% were expected to serve at least six years of actual imprisonment before their release, and about 11% were very long-termers, who had no parole or other release possibilities for at least 30 years. Because the Missouri State Penitentiary was located in close proximity to the Department's Central Office which housed the Project staff and as it did hold the majority of very long-term inmates, much of the Project's program effort was located at this site.

The Missouri State Penitentiary, which in fact is the oldest prison west of the Mississippi River, suffered most of the ailments that trouble many of the Nation's old, maximum security prisons. It was a mosaic of old and new construction and required extensive ongoing maintenance and repair just to remain operational. Because it lacked most of the sophisticated technology found in modern prisons, its operations were very staff intensive, particularly regarding security. The inmate population had grown far beyond the institution's original capacity both in terms of living space and support facilities such as recreational and dining areas. Complicating the overcrowding problem was the fact

that, as the State's only male maximum security prison, it held not only those with very long terms, but also housed the State's death row population, a "super max" facility for severe disciplinary problems, and also most of the inmates with serious medical needs as it contained the prison system's hospital. This hospital facility was over 50 years old, and had been chronically under funded in terms of both equipment and medical staff to the point that it could in no way meet acceptable accreditation standards and was the subject of many inmate complaints. In terms of education and vocational programs, the prison did house a sizeable prison industry complex; however, it was concentrated in metal working and furniture manufacturing, and consequently most of the long-termers were ineligible to work there due to their security status. The institution did have a fairly new school, but had difficulty providing education programs in the traditional classroom setting because many of the inmates were in some type of "restricted" movement status. With the exception of the prison industry, vocational programs were virtually nonexistent, and for a period of time during the project, the vocational-technical building had to be converted to an inmate dormitory. This compounding lack of space and meaningful activities to fill the inmates' time created problems for both the inmates and staff.

The problems relating to the daily living environment of long-term inmates highlighted above are not intended to provide a complete picture of the prison, rather they represent areas perceived as problematic by a large percentage of the long-termers (see the companion article in this Journal), and are likely encountered by long-termers in similar facilities in other parts of the country.

### *Meaningful Institutional Careers*

One of the major philosophical differences in program planning we see between short-term and long-term inmates is in the skill/vocational training and institutional work assignment areas. For individuals who will be spending decades, and perhaps the remainder of their lives in a correctional institution, many of the traditional job preparation programs, particularly in rapidly changing technological skill areas, have little meaning relative to their long sentences. Long-termers frequently feel frustrated that although they complete training courses, they achieve no recognition for their efforts, and are provided little opportunity to utilize these skills productively in a prison career. The comments provided by a long-term inmate responding to one of the surveys conducted in our research exemplifies this feeling:

I have 18 hours of college credit and have been certified for being a G.E.D. facilitator. I also have taken typing I, II and III and I have just completed the paralegal course. I have also been through the two food preparation courses which the institution used to offer . . . so can anyone tell me why I've been assigned to work in the laundry?

The problematic nature of "unproductive time" seems to be a preception shared by staff (85% of the correctional officers and 95% of the treatment staff saw this as a moderate or severe problem) and long-termers (53% saw this as a moderate or severe problem). Similarly, over half of both staff (52% of correctional officers and 64% of treatment personnel) and long-termers (59%) saw "vocational programs providing useful skills" as a moderate or severe problem. There is a tremendous potential resource in the time long-term inmates are mandated to serve. For example an institution containing 500 long-termers working only six hours a day, five days per week, 52 weeks per year for 20 years would generate over 15,600,000 hours! This time could be applied to activities worthwhile to both the inmates and the administration. The following discussion briefly describes the two experimental approaches we attempted to illustrate the benefits of moving from traditional institutional "jobs" for long-termers toward the idea of institutional "careers" within an existing facility structure.

## *The Software Development Program*

The Software Development Program module was conceived as an experimental effort that would enable us to learn more about the possibilities for meaningful job programming in prisons and the effects on long-termers. This kind of program is particularly suited for long-term inmates as the acquisition of programming skills requires extended study and involvement. Additionally, the career is one which offers a continuing challenge and progression to higher skill levels.

The most important goal of this effort was to increase the ability of correctional personnel to manage the long-term segment of the prison population by reducing some of the debilitating effects of extended incarceration (e.g., the boredom arising from monotonous make-work jobs) that can lead to unrest and disorder and by offering incentives (i.e., better than average inmate pay and the opportunity to spend time pursuing a meaningful productive career) that can influence long-termers' attitudes and behaviors. The basic assumption underlying the Software Development Program (hereafter referred to as SDP) was that improvements in the quality and nature of work for long-termers would improve their behavior and likewise the correctional personnel's ability to influence and manage it.

Inmates selected for the SDP were trained to work with software packages commonly used in government and private industry. They were also taught programming knowledge and skills that enabled them to develop operational software applications such as accounting and inventory systems. Emphasis was placed on having the program resemble, as closely as possible, an organization in the civilian population by maintaining set work hours, lines of authority, standards for work quality, performance evaluation, and procedures for managing work flow. Inmate workers were also given an opportunity to have input into operations and provide training to new workers, thus giving them a feeling of ownership.

The SDP was initiated by enlisting the support of "key" Department administrators, long-termers, security personnel, educators, and information systems staff who would be interacting with the program and its participants. In this way, issues concerning security (of workers, equipment and computer transactions), physical location of the program, training of the workers, supervision of work, and other concerns could be dealt with in a manner acceptable to all.

The actual operation of the SDP was begun with the employment of six long-termers and the purchase of six stand-alone personnel computers. Common software packages were also acquired as well as emulation software so that the inmates would have no direct connection to computer networks outside the prison, yet would be able to produce programs usable by systems outside "the walls." Participation in the program was made very attractive to the inmates as the lead workers were paid \$100 per month and those in training received \$30 per month, which was far above the typical prison wage of \$7.50 to \$12 per month. Additionally, they had relatively pleasant surroundings including an air conditioned work place, which was a rare privilege within this prison. The SDP was highly structured in terms of both work and behavioral expectations for the inmates, but it shortly became evident the inmates had assumed a professional orientation toward their work and were maintaining a self-disciplined control over their behavior surprising to many in the institution.

Within the year-and-a-half remaining of the Missouri Project, the experimental SDP demonstrated that such a program could operate effectively in a prison environment and have a positive impact on the participating inmates. During this time, there was no damage or destruction to any of the equipment and none of the long-termers participating in the program received any misconduct reports on the job and only a few

minor ones off the job (a violation rate significantly below that of the general population). The participants in the program received not only financial incentives for working, but also seemed to derive a great deal of personal satisfaction from their work. This was exemplified by the fact that most of the workers preferred to stay and continue working after the official work day had ended and even spent much of their leisure time reading computer magazines and working on programs. The following comments offered by one long-term inmate programmer are fairly typical of statements the long-termers made about their work situation:

...After being treated like nothing ...to work with someone (i.e., civilian staff) that you ask your opinion ...and utilized it ...makes you feel good.

Within the first year of its operation, the program produced three major software systems for the Department including the information system for the Long-term Offender Project, an inmate education tracking system and a maintenance management system. Bolstered by these early successes, the SDP was integrated into the Department's Information System section, and the State Legislature authorized a spending appropriation of \$260,473 to expand the SDP's personnel and equipment. The inmate staff was increased to twelve, and a new "stand alone" mainframe was purchased so that the program could take on larger applications.

At the completion of the Missouri Project, the SDP not only served as a viable production unit of the Department's computer section, but did so at about a 27:1 cost savings ratio. Additionally, the program began contracting with several other state agencies to provide programming services. The Information Systems Director estimated that the program would be generating about a million dollars worth of revenue within three years of its inception and planned to increase the long-termer staff to 40 inmates.

### *Jefftown Productions*

This experimental program was also envisioned as an alternative to traditional prison occupations, which are generally characterized by low skilled, repetitious work, or are problematic for long-termers because of their potential security risks. The primary goal of this approach was to explore the feasibility of developing a video production studio inside a maximum security prison which could provide a viable institutional career for long-termers. It was hoped that if such a career would interest long-termers, they could develop the necessary expertise to operate an institutional cable system and allow the Department a practical way to operate its own video production facility to produce and edit education and informational programs. Such a program would permit the Department to increase services to the entire inmate population.

Similar to the Software Development Program, incentives for the Jefftown Productions program included a higher inmate wage, pleasant working conditions, and involving work which supplied considerable status within the prison because of its technical and professional nature. Again, the idea being that this positive work environment would provide incentives for constructive behavior both on and off the job.

The Jefftown Productions approach originated differently from the Software Development Program in that it grew from an existing operation. The Missouri State Penitentiary had a cable TV system designed to provide educational, religious and entertainment programming to the inmate population which was known as Jefftown Cable Network and was manned by five long-term inmates. During the Missouri Project the Jefftown station was relocated to the prison's school building to provide it with more space and with the idea of starting an inmate vocational training program while simultaneously providing cable services to the institution. The institutional admini-

stration was particularly interested in the possibilities of using a cable network to provide educational services to the prison's "lockdown" population areas such as death row and certain segregation units, where the inmates were not permitted to mix with the general population and therefore could not attend traditional classes in the prison school.

Again, in keeping with our belief in the need to involve the group of key actors who would impact or be impacted by the activities of the Jefftown project, a committee reflecting the various groups perspectives was formed to provide the project with direction. A video media instructor was hired and the training of the long-terms begun. With the support of the institution's administration, the Department's education section, and the inmate canteen, equipment was slowly acquired to provide the Jefftown project with true video production capabilities. As the long-term crew developed skills, they began to experiment with video production, taping various institution events and messages from the administration. After several short productions were completed, including one on the Long-term Offender Project that was taken to an American Correctional Association meeting, production requests from throughout the Department and beyond began to flood the project. It was decided that the scope of the activities for the Jefftown Project should be broadened to include the needs of the entire Department. The oversight committee was transformed to include representatives from throughout the Department and was given the tasks of establishing guidelines for productions.

In the year of operation before the completion of the Missouri Project, the Jefftown Productions unit successfully completed several production efforts. These focused on topics such as information on AIDS that was disseminated as part of an AIDS education and training package provided to inmates and staff throughout the correctional system, a staff training video on proper search procedures, a public relations video produced for a nonprofit organization which operated an inmate parent and child visitation program, and a video on the system's death row operations produced for use by the general television media. Again, all of these efforts were completed at a fraction of the cost that would have been incurred had the Jefftown Productions project not existed, allowing the Department to provide services not otherwise possible. Regrettably, no other evaluation of the Jefftown project was initiated, although the same type of intensity and professional orientation was seen in the work of the long-termers in this program as had been observed in the Software Development Program.

### *Inmate-staff Relationships/Communication*

The area of inmate-staff relationships/communication is inherently problematic due to the fundamental nature of incarceration and the roles of the keepers and the kept. Our problem identification efforts revealed a considerable difference in perceptions between long-termers and staff regarding this area. There was a very widespread perception (77% among the long-termers that "staff ignoring inmate complaints and suggestions" was a moderate or severe problem, whereas less than a third (27% of the correctional officers, 35% of the treatment personnel) of the staff held the view that this was a moderate or severe problem. Similarly, 60% of the long-termers held the perception that the "attitude of the staff" posed a moderate or severe problem, while staff perceptions differed markedly in that 24% of the correctional officers and 39% of the treatment staff held the view that this was a moderate or severe problem. Since the relationships and communication between staff and inmates form the cornerstone for building other problem solving efforts, we believe this area is worthy of special attention. The information presented below briefly reviews our attempt to improve the flow of information and communication linkages between the two groups.

## *Inmate Forum*

The Inmate Forum was designed as a mechanism to ensure that the perspectives of a primary group of stakeholders, namely the long-term inmates, were included in the activities of the Missouri Project. We believed that by establishing a relationship with influential long-termers, the Project stood a better chance of gaining acceptance by the inmate population, and that Forum members would serve to represent the larger population in providing feedback on various aspects of the Project. It was also hoped that if the Forum gained acceptance, it might continue to provide an ongoing communication links between the long-termers and staff.

Much of the communication effort within the correctional bureaucracy has become so formalized, to the point of ritual, that the medium of the communication frequently becomes the primary emphasis rather than the content of the message. Statements such as, "If you want to get their (the administration) attention, you file a lawsuit!", or, "We always provide a written response to an inmate's grievance within fifteen working days," reflect this orientation. For this reason, it was decided that the atmosphere of the Inmate Forum should be kept as informal as possible, where the participants would feel at ease and constraints would not be placed upon the level or direction of the discussion.

The Forum was initiated by asking the institution's administrative staff to identify long-termers who they believed would interact in such a program, and could articulate the long-termers position. In general, the Project staff was interested in having Forum members who were knowledgeable about the institution and long-term inmates' concerns, could articulate the viewpoints, opinions and concerns of the larger population, and who reflected the diversity within the long-term population. From the input the administrators provided, the Project staff interviewed prospective members to determine their interest. All those selected for the Forum accepted the invitation to become a member. While the Missouri Project was operating, the Project staff was responsible for coordinating the activities of the Forum including establishing meeting times and arranging for space, maintaining contact with Forum members, and contacting staff members who might need to attend a particular meeting to address an issue. Some meetings focused on a particular topic or aspect of the Project, others were simply unstructured discussions, i.e. "bull sessions," on various topics.

No formal evaluation was planned nor conducted on the Forum as it was originally intended as a mechanism to help the Project develop programs, rather than to stand as a program itself. However, it did prove to be very helpful in establishing a relationship between Project staff and the long-termers. The Forum members became a sounding board for ideas, a way to get feedback from the long-termer population on issues and programs, and as a means of establishing linkages to the long-term population. The assistance of the Forum members also was invaluable in collecting information and improving survey response rates. Further, over the length of the Project, the Forum concept appears to have gained acceptance by both administration, staff and inmates. Perhaps the most significant reflection of this is the fact that the administration at the new long-termer facility, constructed while the Project was occurring, was interested in importing the Forum concept from the Missouri State Penitentiary at the point the long-termers were transferred to the new facility

### *Integrated Long-Term Inmate Strategies*

At best, the experimental approaches reviewed in this discussion represent very modest attempts to move away from more traditional prison programs toward ways to better address the needs seen in the long-term inmate population and were provided

primarily to illustrate the techniques that were employed in the Missouri Project. A more central concept in the process of addressing the needs and problems of long-term sentences is the development of a methodology to identify these needs and problems within the context of the environment in which they must be faced. This process must involve the key actors or stakeholders who affect or are affected by both the problems and the potential solutions. For this reason, we stress a utilization of the techniques we employed, rather than a simple adaptation of the program approaches.

Another aspect which should be considered in the development of long-term programs is the totality of extended incarceration. The creation of singular program approaches will likely not improve the management of long-term sentences unless these approaches are integrated into the various facets of the offender's long-term prison career. We believe that concentrating long-term offenders within specialized and hopefully specifically designed institutions offers the most promising opportunity for such an integrated system.<sup>3</sup> This approach allows for the concentration of resources for specialized programs and services designed to the needs of this inmate population rather than attempting to force-fit these offenders into existing program and services targeted at relative short-term confinement.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>For an excellent discussion of these elements see Bottoms and Light, 1987.

<sup>2</sup>A separate women's prison housed all security classifications of female inmates including the long-termers. Although the women were included in the project, the assessment and programs involving these individuals is not reported in this piece.

<sup>3</sup>For a more in-depth discussion of these ideas see our discussion of the Potosi Plan in the Final Handling Long-Term Offenders Report (Cowles et al., 1989).

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