

The Role of Local Colleges  
In Training Correctional Officers

Theodore A. Rottman  
Henry Holstege  
Anne Schreuder

An Evaluation of  
One Facet of Project Intercept  
A Grant Given to Calvin College  
And Grand Rapids Junior College  
Under Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965

Social Research Center  
Calvin College  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
49506

Phone: (616) 949-4000 Ext. 241

October, 1978

54864

MAR 3 1977

## I. Introduction

This article is an attempt to share our recent experiences in setting up, conducting, and evaluating an intensive in-service training course for correctional officers in a large mid-western jail.<sup>1</sup> The following factors may be helpful in judging the potential applicability of this course to other penal settings.

- a. The jail serves a metropolitan area of 500,000 residents whose religious and political orientations are generally conservative.
- b. The jail is a secure facility housing over 400 inmates, a sizeable percentage of whom are misdemeanants or alleged misdemeanants.
- c. An outside evaluation (1976) was critical of the jail for not meeting the standards of a true correctional facility, particularly citing the absence of an adequate rehabilitation program. According to the evaluation the existing program was characterized by animosity and lack of coordinated efforts between a large (N=63) custody staff and a smaller (N=10) rehabilitation staff. The report was critical of a prior administration for receiving "millions of (federal) dollars under the pretense of establishing and operating a rehabilitation program." It also identified a number of places where it was in legal violation, particularly in matters of inmate rights and services.
- d. The above-mentioned public report, together with state and national ferment (including legal suits) on the issue of inmate rights provided an atmosphere in which local politicians were not only willing to listen but apparently ready to be in the forefront of changes which, even without their initiation, appeared to be legally unavoidable.

---

<sup>1</sup>Funds for this project were made possible by Title I of the Higher Education Act through the State of Michigan Department of Education.

- e. Most strategically, following the resignation of his predecessor, a new sheriff was appointed who is accessible to the public, open to criticism, and willing to make and encourage necessary changes (which might convert the jail to a correctional facility in fact as well as in name).
- f. Prior relationships between the sponsoring colleges (a Christian liberal arts institution and a public community college) were not intense though cooperative. The structured efforts of the community college to relate its program meaningfully to the community were more numerous, visible, and publicized than was true for the private college.
- g. Prior to relevant community involvement and the generally positive image project-related staff personnel from both colleges held in the eyes of strategically placed political and criminal justice personnel made it possible to build a solid foundation for the program by providing input as equals already at the proposal writing stage.
- h. Several of the program speakers were already known to the jail administrators and correctional officers. One of the speakers was a local attorney who represented the county in various legal matters relating to the jail, another was a local criminal justice system consultant, and a third was the author of the outside jail evaluation mentioned above.

## II. Launching the Project

Soon after assuming office, the new sheriff had one of his lieutenants approach personnel from the two colleges to determine whether any governmental funding might be available for correctional officer training. This was consistent with the new sher-

iff's priority of upgrading the county facility, and with his knowledge that the two local colleges had recently completed a consortium project dealing with another community concern (consumer education for senior citizens). Until then, the formal training for guards consisted of law enforcement preparation (with any security or correctional orientation relegated to on-the-job observation) and a scattering of lectures and training films.

From the outset, all major jail administrators including the sheriff, undersheriff, lieutenant in charge of custody, lieutenant in charge of rehabilitation services, and the captain in charge of the correctional facility were actively involved in such project activities as refining the initial concept, planning program content, and resolving mechanical problems of scheduling. Later, all correctional officers were surveyed in regard to what they considered areas of highest educational need. Simultaneously, State Department of Corrections personnel were contacted. Consistent with their philosophy to upgrade correctional personnel, consultants from their Office of Jail Services were regular participants of our planning sessions. They provided encouragement, advice, and access to their resources. Together with educational specialists from both colleges who had expertise in the area of criminal justice and community education, a proposal was written requesting the State Department of Education Title I support for an experimental educational program for all guards. The request was granted. However, funds were not requested for the released time necessary for the entire custody staff to attend the proposed in-service sessions. Therefore, representatives from the

jail administration and the project staff jointly went to the County Board of Commissioners requesting sixteen hours of paid time per officer for these educational programs. The request was granted. This represented a \$12,000 commitment by the County to the program. Additional supplemental funds necessary to pay the tuition for those who wanted a unit of community service credit for successfully completing the course were obtained through the Law Enforcement Education Program.

Before reviewing the specific components of the sixteen hour educational program, it may be useful to review the 1976 jail evaluation of prevailing personnel conditions as related to the envisioned goal of our program. Excerpts from the evaluation add up to a rather negative picture:

...the Correctional Facility is staffed with personnel who see employment in the Facility as transitional until such time as they have an opportunity to be transferred to the road patrol.

...As a result of past recruitment and personnel procedures, the Correctional Facility is staffed with individuals who, for the most part, have a minimal interest in corrections.... Correctional training, for the most part, has been "on-the-job" and conducted without goals, purpose or guidelines. As a consequence old techniques are taught to new guards and in the learning of technique there is a transference of old ideologies, concepts and prejudices.... Personnel who work in jails have been ignored, unwittingly... The consequences in this area are monumental. Guards are blamed for handling a volatile inmate abusively; they are blamed for enhancing inmate problems as a result of negative interaction in interpersonal relationships; and they are accused of lacking empathy for inmates with personality disorders and emotional problems. The fact that the guard is placed in the Correctional Facility with no training is often overlooked.

The original program proposal sought to relate to these needs as follows:

The crux of this facet is to enable correctional officers to become increasingly sensitive to 1) the basic

human needs shared by inmates and 2) their own role demands and dilemmas and to accomplish this in a supportive manner which recognizes not only staff limitations but also positive resources the staff is already bringing to bear on an admittedly difficult situation... Thus, it is the person given the weighty responsibility of simultaneously keeping the community safe and meeting the inmates daily needs who has the best institutionally based opportunity to be a positive role model.

### III. Program Design

Over a period of months, concepts and suggestion as to how best to achieve our educational goals were gradually distilled into a course outline. Continuity in planning and implementation was the responsibility of personnel from the two local colleges. Since we were dealing with three rotating shifts it was decided to have the training sessions occur in the two hours prior to the second shift going on duty. The second shift went on duty at 3 PM and hence the sessions were held from 12:50 to 2:50 PM. Because these were rotating shifts and eight, two hour sessions were planned, we needed a total of twenty-four such time blocks.

Each session was led by someone who was judged to have both expertise in the content area to be covered and also some experience in the area of corrections. While many of the presentors were familiar to us, there were some whom we knew by reputation only. Since this was the first attempt to present an educational program within the Correctional Facility to correctional officers, the success of the presentors within this type of setting could not be predetermined. Therefore some programs were used only once or twice. In addition some presentors who were judged competent were not available for all of the sessions.

#### Session I: What's a Correctional Officer Like?

This session was led by a training officer for the State

Department of Corrections and focused on the various interpretations or definitions of the role of the jail guard, including the strains of the job and conflicting role expectations. It was thought that the State Department of Corrections would give a credibility to the programs that academicians could not. Since it was thought desirable to have the first program emphasize security and the role of the correctional officer, indicating that we understood their conflicting role demands and concern for security, a film on security was shown. The emphasis of the speaker was on the changing role of a correctional officer from that of a custodian of deviants to a professional with his own set of skills. The speaker emphasized how most correctional officers in the past have been very defensive about their role and prefer to identify with the macho image of the law enforcement officer.

Session II: Guard-Inmate Communication

This session was led by a clinical psychologist who had considerable experience in the criminal justice system. His presentation dealt with the need to know the social psychological background of the inmates, the importance of understanding the inmates' psychological needs, and how incarceration inevitably leads to increased frustration and rage. Discussion centered around how to control hostility and more generally, effective methods of relating to inmates.

Session III: Who's Really Doing Time?

This session was led by a second clinical psychologist who had considerable experience in working as a consultant in the

local criminal justice system and thereby came with credibility and established rapport from the outset. He gave an analysis of correctional officer frustration and anger and emphasized that they should not let the inmate "get to them." He also acknowledged the occupationally related hazards of burn-out with accompanying feelings of powerlessness and alienation from society, family, and self.

Session IV: Legal Information: Its Importance in Jail Operation

In this session, a local attorney experienced in the criminal justice system presented both the inmate's and the correctional officer's legal rights and responsibilities. The correctional officers indicated a very high interest in knowing where and why they would be legally culpable for their behavior in the correctional facility. The attorney's brief presentation produced an intensive question and answer period. Clearly there is a major need for clarification of the legal ramifications of being a correctional officer, especially as landmark decisions are being made on such matters in the courts.

Session V: Impact of Authority on Guard-Inmate Interaction

Our first serious tension in the program came with the presentation of the Zimbardo video-tapes (on the psychological power and pathology of imprisonment) by a Chairman of a University Department of Corrections. After a short lecture on the powerful and sometimes negative impact that social forces can have on individual behavior, the video-taped college-based experiment of a simulated prison setting was shown. It depicted how "the mere act of assigning labels to people, such as 'prisoners' and 'guards,'

and putting them into a situation where those labels require validity and meaning is sufficient to elicit pathological behavior that is, authoritarian cruelty on the part of those randomly chosen to be 'guards.'" Following the film, the discussion was negative and intense. The criminologist was told by the correctional officers that they did not believe the tapes were relevant because the scenes depicted in the tapes did not accurately describe the situation or a local correctional facility and thus were neither true to life or relevant to their situation. In his second presentation eight weeks later, the penologist carefully prepared the correctional officers by explaining that although the tapes consisted of role playing, the underlying psychological dynamics were the same, and that the situational context in which some persons are powerless and others powerful inevitably leads to the types of dynamics depicted in the tapes. With that type of introduction the officers were more receptive.

Because this presenter was unable to attend a third time, we replaced this session with one which was led by a staff member of the State Department of Corrections who presented a film and commentary on the Attica riot. We believe that such a presentation can be educationally productive if it is emphasized how officer-inmate interaction can foster frustrations and antagonisms that can lead to riots. The speaker emphasized how correctional officers should be able to judge the state of tension and frustration in the facility and thereby be able to warn the administration of potential danger. He also emphasized the importance of contingency planning for riots and other emergencies such as fire. We did find that some officers resisted the com-

parison of a county correctional facility with that of a large penitentiary. The film though clearly captured their attention and was an excellent source for discussion and dialogue.

Session VI: Specific Problems the Inmates Bring to the Jail

For one of these sessions, we had two administrators from the local drug rehabilitation clinic discuss their program, its underlying philosophy, and the current research on drug use. There was considerable resistance to this presentation because correctional officers claimed on one hand that they did not have a drug problem in the facility, and secondly that they knew all about drugs anyway. Those who are aware of the prevalence of drug use and experimentation within our society might be puzzled by this reaction and by the officers claim of being so well informed about the effects of street drugs.

A replacement session featured a local consulting psychologist who was to enlighten the group on the psychological dynamics of suicide, depression, mania, and related forms of behavioral pathology. However, he had virtually no structured presentation. His attempted question and answer format did not work. Whether it would have worked if he had asked for written questions a week or two prior to the sessions is not known. Clearly our experience was that the officers were looking for a structured presentation to which they could respond.

A third such attempt to get at aggravated inmate problems focused on suicide and was led by the psychiatric social worker employed by the State Department of Corrections to investigate all institutionally based suicides in the state. The session focused mainly on what guards could do not only to protect the

person in their custody from harm but to protect themselves legally from culpability if a suicide occurred.

Session VII: Specific Problems the Guards Bring to the Jail

In an attempt to highlight how one's previous life experiences shape one's current behavior, a video-taped lecture by a prominent social psychologist, Prof. Massey, was shown. The Massey tapes do not relate directly to prison or a correctional facility setting, but describe generational differences and how generations have a difficult time understanding each other because of their significantly different life experiences during their formative years. The application to a correctional facility setting is that for correctional officers to understand inmates they must take into consideration not only the inmate's life experiences but also their own. That emphasis is a fundamental axiom in behavioral science. That is, to understand a person's behavior you have to put that behavior into the cultural and situational context from which it comes. We learned that before being used in a correctional facility type setting there must be adequate preparation and discussion as to the meaning of the tapes.

Session VIII: Resources for Correctional Officers

In an attempt to lend insight into the negative consequences of distrust and suspicion in an atmosphere which fosters it, we asked the guards to participate in some simulation games.

Gad J. Bensinger reports in Federal Probation, Training for Criminal Justice Personnel: A Case Study (September 1977) that simulation techniques were well received. With that in mind,

we had a skilled Professor of Education devise and supervise games to communicate the importance within groups of cooperation and trust. Though dialogue was animated we doubt much positive transfer occurred. Whether the failure was due to the particular simulation games used or to the attitudes of the correctional officers are not clear. Most officers did not resist the games as much as they indicated a confusion as to the purpose of the games. Since they were on county time they would play for pay any game we wanted them to participate in, but they thought the matter rather funny and devoid of serious content, or at least any content that was relevant to their employment situation.

Because we were getting feedback that the officers wanted specifics on how to handle their stress we obtained the services of the newly appointed psychological consultant to the Michigan State Police who was experienced in stress management training. He came well prepared to discuss anxiety release, tension control and stress management and hypnotized one of the correctional officers in a demonstration of one technique of stress management. Although his presentation was relatively theoretical and highly structured, he was well received. There clearly is a need for educational programs in the areas of stress management.

Near the end of each session, we invited feedback from the officers. As intended, it provided an opportunity for officers to indicate their feelings as to where the course fell short of expectations, how it might be improved, etc. This will provide a benchmark and foundation for a more intensive but optional credit course we envision for those who are committed to a profession in corrections.

#### IV. Evaluation

##### A. The Insitutional Context

1. While the new sheriff has a stated policy that correctional officers will no longer be "graduated" into road patrol, in our particular facility there is considerable frustration because many of the correctional officers had been hired earlier with the promise of becoming road patrol officers. That promise is very slow in being kept because of a slow turnover in existing patrol officers. This has produced intense anger and frustration since the correctional officer position has generally been regarded as inferior to that of patrol officer. It is often seen as no more than a waiting station for those planning to move to the patrol officer role and is thereby devastating to morale. The current Sheriff has wisely changed the hiring practices so that only persons committed to being full-time correctional officers will be hired.
2. Correctional officers at a county correctional facility see the same inmates come back again and again. They therefore have a deeply rooted cynicism based on their experiences and are very leary of outsiders coming with any type of liberal orientation which sees the inmates simply as victims of circumstance. That cynicism has to be understood and respected rather than directly attacked. They constantly face a type of behavior that most academicians probably could not handle as well, or at least any better. It is at that point that discussions of burn-out, tension management and stress become a bridge to communication and acceptance between social

scientists and correctional officers.

3. There is a tension between presenting to correctional officers what they want to hear (e.g., how to handle their burn-out, tensions, marital problems, and status concerns) and other valid program goals which predictively officers are not enthused about (e.g., the social background of the inmate population, the situational context that leads to inmate and officer frustration, and their role in the rehabilitative process). It is our experience that an initial emphasis on the former will lead to a greater acceptance of the latter.
4. There are inevitable tensions between security-oriented officers and more rehabilitative-oriented officers. An excellent approach is to emphasize that an understanding of inmate needs will lead to better security.
5. It became progressively clearer to both the jail administrators and ourselves that when supervisors (Sergeants, Lieutenants, and the Captain) were present in the classes, discussion was thereby less open. If the intent is to have open discussion it is clear that it should be attempted without supervisory personnel present. It might be wise to give the supervisors the first opportunity to take the course themselves before making it available to the correctional staff.
6. We found that presenting the program at the correctional facility or in their "turf" had the advantage of being in the environment in which the officers work and were theoretically more comfortable. However the disadvantage was that the physical environment was not educationally ideal in regard to classroom size, accoustics, and room temperature.

B. Course Related Hazards

1. We found that any of this type of program which seriously attempts to make correctional officers out of jail guards, will raise questions from the staff about current administrative procedures. This can be used by the administration for an open and honest dialogue or it can lead to an increase in hidden tension between the staff and the administration. It is also an area in which presentors should move cautiously lest they become unduly embroiled in matters that can best be resolved by union representatives and supervisors.
2. We found that frequently questions were raised to which there are no easy answers, e.g., questions on how guards should respond to verbal abuse from inmates and/or to physical assault. There is a danger that presentors may give facile and simplistic answers to such terribly frustrating and difficult questions.
3. Several questions cluster around the matter of the inter-relationship of presentation and presenter. It is apparent that quality content and an attractive style of presentation are educationally effective. Are they equally strategic? We have the suspicion that some presentors succumbed to perceived group pressures to be entertaining at the expense of quality content. In fact, one of the presenters appeared so intent on generating and sustaining a discussion that he agreed with everyone's opinion — even when contrary to available evidence. This is not to minimize

the importance of establishing good rapport as a minimum pedagogical condition, nor to condone the timidity, nervousness, or defensiveness which was evident in some presenters. Rather, it is to sensitize ourselves to the interrelationship between medium and message. For instance, a few of the presenters came with expensive three-piece suits, which may have been seen by the officers as pretentious and made it more difficult to communicate (as might the too casual, unkempt look). Again, several speakers used sexually oriented jokes and materials to gain rapport. Several also used profanity and obscenities to indicate that they were tuned into the "macho gang" image presented by correctional officers. The authors cannot agree as to the effectiveness of the above. It obviously enabled the speakers to gain rapport with most of the officers at the cost of alienating a minority. And going contrary to the role specifications set forth by the administration ("If you let the guards grovel in obscenities and profanities how can they be positive role models?") Clearly some of the presenters gained rapport without either the use of sexually oriented jokes or obscenities. There is consensus that when either are used in an artificial way it is probably counter-productive.

4. As a means of raising the stature of the course and increasing student motivation, we arranged with the State Department of Corrections to award both state and federal certificates acknowledging successful completion of the course to all who faithfully attended. No doubt the fact that course attendance was mandatory (by directive of the

Sheriff), combined with the absence of bona fide testing and grading, our awards were looked upon as no more than paper tokens. Further courses might give more attention to academically and psychologically meaningful incentives for active student participation.

5. As the course progressed, it became increasingly clear that guards were impatient to move beyond a diagnosis or analysis of the problems they faced to the practical matter of how to successfully meet those problems. Whether one can satisfactorily achieve both in a single course is debatable.

#### C. Positive Outcomes

1. The guards were presented not only with new insights and fresh challenges, but some much needed recognition of their difficult and socially strategic role. That is, the attention the course gave to both the needs and resources of correction personnel provided overdue psychological support for those working in a thankless task.
2. The joint efforts by politicians, criminal justice personnel, and educators to plan and implement a program that was both theoretically based and relevant to the community lends encouragement for drawing together seemingly diverse community resources for community good.
3. Community and institutionally based projects such as this yield rich dividends to academia. Specifically, the program increased our sensitivity to both the needs and resources that correctional personnel possess. They have enriched our knowledge and our perspective.
4. Specifically, our experience in this program underscores

the need to develop or adopt precise screening procedures for hiring new correctional officers.

D. Suggestions for Replication

1. Rigorous and broader based program evaluation procedures should be employed. The evaluation forms filled out by guards after each session did not clearly distinguish between the educational and the entertainment value of the presentation. Furthermore, although after-the-fact personal evaluations have value, they are no substitute for behavioral indicators, or before/after testing.
2. Although much time was profitably spent in program design by educators and criminal justice personnel, the presenters were not recruited or informed of their classroom role until after the course outline was set. This increased the possibilities for discontinuity and duplication. Our suggestion now is to draw potential speakers into the planning sessions and let them have a hand in assigning a division of labor. It might also enrich the course to have fewer speakers who handle more than one session and thereby provide more continuity from week to week.
3. Based on our experiences, we would recommend the following as a model program sequence:
  - a. Security and correctional role definition.
  - b. Correctional Officer burn-out.
  - c. Correctional Officer stress management.
  - d. Inmate social psychological orientations.
  - e. A well prepared introduction to, and the showing of the Zimbardo Tapes.
  - f. A well prepared introduction to, and the showing of the Attica film.

- g. Inmate and correctional officer legal rights.
- h. A final well structured session in which correctional staff can dialogue and vent their feelings and give each other support.



**END**