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Assessing Inmate Receptivity to a Voluntary Shock Incarceration Program

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This paper describes an assessment of inmate interest in a voluntary "Boot Camp" shock incarceration program in Massachusetts. After describing relevant parameters of the Boot Camp we present data from a survey conducted at the correctional facilities housing inmates eligible for the program. In this survey we presented inmates with a description of the program and asked whether they would volunteer. We also assessed whether a variety of the program's components (e.g., program features such as rigorous work details and educational programs, and incentives to volunteer such as reducing the length of their sentence) made the program more or less attractive to the inmates. The implications of the survey results on the Boot Camp design and implementation are discussed.

Introduction

On September 24, 1991 an executive order from Governor William Weld established a joint State and county Advisory Committee on the Establishment of Discipline and Rehabilitation Institutes (hereafter referred to as Boot Camps) in Massachusetts. The executive order charged the Advisory Committee with developing "correctional facilities and programs for youthful offenders which further the goals of minimizing their recidivism and maximizing their rehabilitation and reintegration into the community" (p. 1, Appendix A). The premise underlying the Boot Camp design is that criminal behavior is the result of poor self-esteem and a lack of self-discipline. To correct these individual deficiencies the Advisory Committee developed a program blending strict military discipline, education, and therapy. Modeled after New York's Boot Camps, the Massachusetts program requires that inmates engage in work details and daily physical exercise, participate in various educational and counseling programs, maintain military bearing, and adhere to military protocol.

On February 28, 1992 the Advisory Committee produced a document outlining the program in which it was stated that participation in the Boot Camp was to be voluntary. From this provision it follows that inmate interest is essential for the program's success. In March of 1992 the Advisory Committee charged the Research Division of the Massachusetts Department of Correction with assessing inmate interest in the Boot Camp. This paper describes a survey we conducted in an effort to do so.

Research Design and Data Collection

Our research design was driven by the following considerations. First, the initial plans for the Boot Camp called for inmates to be drawn from the county houses of correction and not from the state prisons. At the time of the survey the state hoped to build at least three Boot Camps, each intended to draw inmates from its surrounding county correctional facilities. Thus, we surveyed just those inmates in county facilities nearest the Boot Camp.

Second, the eligibility criteria were not finalized at the time of the survey. Initially, the executive order called for Boot Camp participants to be less than thirty years of age, to have no violent or sex offenses in their criminal history or as their governing offense, to have no prior incarcerations over ninety days in length or escapes from custody, and to be within 18 months of eligibility for release. However, analyses of the county inmate population suggested that few inmates would meet the criteria and that some of the criteria would need expanding to obtain sufficient number of inmates. Given this we decided not to restrict our survey to those meeting eligibility requirements but surveyed inmates of any age, offense type, etc.

Third, many of the specific program features were not finalized at the time of the survey. Since the volunteer rate would depend somewhat on the program's content, we decided to assess inmate approval of certain program features to help us estimate its impact on volunteerism.

The survey consisted of a verbal description of the program in which the main features and potential incentives for volunteering were outlined. Immediately after the verbal description single-page questionnaires were distributed in which the first question asked, "Would you volunteer for such a program?" Inmates were also asked to indicate how much they felt certain features of the program or incentives for volunteering would improve the program. The

questionnaire contained a list of eleven potential Boot Camp features and incentives. Inmates were instructed to indicate whether they felt the feature or incentive would make the program better. Opinions were registered on a ten-point scale with one end labeled "no better," the mid-point labeled "somewhat better," and the other end labeled "much better." We would like to have used a bi-polar scale ranging from "much better" to "much worse" with a neutral mid-point, but on the advise of corrections officers familiar with the inmates we concluded that a bipolar scale would be troublesome for those with limited reading or English language skills.

Surveys were administered at Barnstable, Bristol, and Plymouth county houses of correction from March 26 to April 6, 1992. We received completed or partially completed questionnaires from a total of 373 inmates at the three facilities.

While a random sample would be ideal it was not feasible with resource and time limitations. The conditions under which the survey was conducted varied from facility to facility. To maximize cooperation, we wanted to avoid intruding upon the inmates' preferred activities. For example, inmates place a high value on meals and exercise and resent intrusions at these times. We also wished not to disrupt the routines and movements of the correction officers or inmates, preferring to fit the survey into their schedules as much as possible. Given the conditions of overcrowding, frequent inmate movements. We described these parameters to the staff at each facility, and let them decide when and where to do the survey.

We administered the survey first to inmates at Barnstable. Due to the small size of the inmate population, the physical structure, and the schedule at Barnstable, the survey was administered in a variety of contexts: One group was interrupted in gym, some inmates were

brought from their cells to small conference rooms, some groups were surveyed in common areas of cell blocks, and others inmates were met while involved in kitchen or laundry work details. Group sizes ranged from one to about thirty.

At both Bristol and Plymouth inmates were called from their cells into common areas. Groups ranged in size from about twenty to seventy inmates. At these two facilities the survey took place under much better conditions, i.e. we did not interrupt gym and we did not question inmates while they were working.

Survey Results

Estimating Proportion of Volunteers

To the central question of the survey, "Would you volunteer for such a program?" 88 percent of the inmates across the three county facilities said "Yes." As seen in Table 1, the proportion saying they would volunteer was relatively consistent across the three facilities, ranging from 84 percent at Plymouth to 94 percent at Barnstable.

The response to this question clearly indicated interest in the Boot Camp. However, we suggest several reasons for caution in interpreting this finding. First, not all of the inmates received identical information about the Boot Camp. After describing the program we were usually barraged by questions. The inmates' overwhelming concern was with the exact details of the potential incentives (particularly the potential for earning "good time," sentence reduction, guaranteed parole after completing program, and the possibility of having their record of incarceration altered or expunged) and eligibility criteria (especially age, prior record, and governing offense). We stressed that many aspects of the program were flexible and that we could not be certain of exact details. However, the discussion of the possibilities by us and

among the inmates themselves were not identical for all the groups and may have given different groups different impressions of the program. We do not know if or in what way this biased responses.

Second, some inmates chose not fill out the questionnaire. From their comments we believe that most of the non-respondents disliked or were indifferent to the program: Some of them ignored us, some said that the Boot Camp was a terrible idea (or words to that effect), and others believed they were ineligible and that the program would not affect them, so they declined to participate. If we are correct in assuming that most non-respondents would not volunteer, our respondents do not represent the range of opinion but overestimate the proportion who would volunteer. We were unable to obtain precise counts, but we estimate that about 10 percent of those who heard our description of the Boot Camp declined to participate in the survey. Thus, we believe that the proportion of inmates who might volunteer is closer to 75 percent.

Third, since our respondents were not randomly selected we do not know if they were systematically different from non-respondents in ways affecting their responses. For example, some of the inmates we missed were out on work details, and we have no way of knowing how their responses might have differed from those of the men in our sample.

Fourth, the inmates appeared to understand that they were responding to a hypothetical situation, not to an actual offer to volunteer for an existing program. We have no way of knowing what proportion of those saying they would volunteer for a vaguely defined, proposed Boot Camp would make an actual decision to volunteer for a clearly defined, existing program.

Fifth, we have no idea how the variety of contexts in which the survey was administered might affect responses. For example, inmates surveyed in the gym probably gave less careful

consideration to this question than those lounging in their cells. We cannot be sure in what direction this may have biased responses.

While there are reasons to warn against taking the response to this question at face value, the solid majority saying they would volunteer indicated significant interest in the program.

Assessment of Potential Program Features

Table 2 shows mean responses to the questions about program features and incentives. As seen here, most of the program features and incentives were rated positively. The mean response to ten of the eleven items ranged from 7.3 to 8.7 on a 10-point scale where 10 represents the positive extreme of the scale. The most highly rated items were potential incentives for volunteering: (1) Returning to their families sooner (which is not specifically a program feature but is a benefit of having a sentence reduction in exchange for volunteering), (2) having parole guaranteed for those completing the program, and (3) having the record of their current incarceration erased upon successfully completing the program. Most of the program features such as drug and alcohol programs and required exercise were also rated highly by the inmates.

The striking exception to this pattern of positive response was the rating of the prohibition of smoking in the Boot Camp. The mean response was 4.0 on the 10-point scale. Those surveyed were sharply divided in opinion, with 55 percent (n=196) marking the two points on the scale indicating the most negative response and 29 percent (n=103) marking the two most positive points.

We compared inmates who said they would volunteer to those who would not to see if approval of program features distinguished potential volunteers from non-volunteers. Presented

in Table 3 are the mean responses to the questions about program features and incentives among inmates who said they would volunteer, and among those who said they would not. Not surprisingly, inmates who said they would volunteer rated most of the program features and incentives more positively than those who said they would not.

Table 4 presents a comparison of the characteristics of inmates who said they would volunteer to those who would not. Inmates saying they would volunteer had significantly fewer incarcerations than those saying they would not volunteer. The other characteristics studied did not distinguish potential volunteers from non-volunteers.

We presented a report describing these results to the Advisory Committee on April 15 (Shively and Tenaglia, 1992a). We stressed that while most of the inmates said they would volunteer the proportion who actually would depends on the incentives offered to them and on the final characteristics of the program. We also suggested that the low overall approval of a ban on smoking might be a deterrent to some inmates who might otherwise volunteer, although the approval of potential volunteers was not significantly higher than that of the non-volunteers.

Estimating the Supply of Eligible Volunteers

The impetus behind the Advisory Committee's request for our survey was to determine whether the county facilities contained sufficient numbers of eligible volunteers to operate the Boot Camp at capacity¹. The survey provided us with an estimate of the proportion of inmates who would volunteer for the program: The survey suggested that, if the program offered to the

¹ The Boot Camp has a designed capacity of 256 inmates. The plan calls for groups of 32 to be admitted every two weeks, and inmates remain in the program for 16 weeks.

inmates was similar to what we described in the survey, about three fourths would volunteer. This was a critical piece of information for estimating the potential supply of Boot Camp inmates (Shively and Tenaglia, 1992b). In addition to the survey we used data on annual commitments to the county houses of correction, and data from a study of criminal histories of county inmates.

Since the eligibility criteria were not finalized we produced estimates based on two different sets of criteria. First, we used the original criteria of age (17-30 years), governing offense (no violent or sex offenders), prior record of incarceration (no prior incarcerations), and time remaining before release (4-18 months). Second, we used a set of criteria expanded to include offenders up to 40 years of age, with any sentence over 4 months, and with a prior incarceration of any length.

At this time it was also unclear whether the inmates would be drawn from the state-wide population housed in county facilities, or whether they will be drawn just from the counties nearest the Boot Camp. We produced estimates of the number of eligible volunteers from the four counties and from the entire state.

We estimated that every two weeks there would be 35 eligible potential volunteers from the entire state population of inmates in county houses of correction using the eligibility criteria originally intended for the Boot Camp. Second, we estimated a bi-weekly supply of 94 inmates from the same population using expanded eligibility criteria. Third, we estimated that 49 potential volunteers would be available bi-weekly from the four adjacent counties using the original eligibility criteria. Fourth, we produced a bi-weekly estimate of 24 potential volunteers from these four counties using expanded criteria.

In our report we stressed that these were rough estimates with a substantial margin of error; significant changes in any of the figures used to produce the estimates could drastic change final figures. For example, we assumed that 75% of the eligible inmates would volunteer. However, the proportion who would actually volunteer is dependent upon what is offered in exchange for volunteering and upon the final program characteristics. If significant sentence reductions or earned good time are not offered, for example, the proportion who would volunteer could possibly be halved.

Impact of Survey Results on Program Design and Implementation

The survey results and the inmate supply estimates impacted the Boot Camp in several ways. First, our finding that the majority of the inmates said they would volunteer attested to the viability of a voluntary program. In March of 1992 when we were conducting the survey there was a great deal of apprehension about the chances of filling the Boot Camp with volunteers. Most of the Corrections Officers we interviewed in estimated that 0 to 10 percent of their inmates would volunteer. The most common belief was that the inmates would rather watch television for one or two years than work hard for four months. Our results came as a pleasant surprise to those implementing the program and suggested to them that they could proceed with their plans and that they could expect some inmates to volunteer.

Second, our estimates of the supply of eligible volunteers led the Advisory Committee to expand the eligibility criteria. In our report released in mid April of 1992 we suggested that they would be lucky to find nine eligible inmates from the adjacent counties who met the eligible criteria, and 24 state-wide meeting the criteria. They decided to lift the restrictions on the

number of prior incarcerations, to raise the age limit from 30 to 40 years, and to draw from the entire state's county population instead of just the neighboring counties (Appendix B).

Third, our results led the Advisory Committee to lift the ban on smoking. Our estimates suggesting problems finding sufficient numbers of inmates for the Boot Camp made the Committee reluctant to risk losing potential eligible volunteers due simply to the smoking ban. The program was changed to allow smoking under very limited conditions: Inmates are given one cigarette at a time, can smoke at only certain times of the day, and can smoke only in one small designated room. A goal of the program is now to have smokers quit by the time they graduate, and inmates are given counseling and other assistance to help them do so.

Fourth, our results suggested to the Committee that if the state continues with its plans to open two additional Boot Camps they will probably have to target another population of inmates, or to implement more reliable means of screening and recruiting county inmates. It is unlikely that with present screening and recruitment methods sufficient numbers of county inmates meeting the present eligibility criteria will be obtained to populate more than one Boot Camp in this state.

References

- Shively, M., Tenaglia, R., and Knight, J. W. (1992a). Estimating Inmate Interest in a Voluntary Shock Incarceration Program: Preliminary Results of a Survey at Barnstable, Bristol, and Plymouth County Houses of Correction. Unpublished manuscript, Massachusetts Department of Correction, Boston, MA.
- Shively, M., Tenaglia, R., and Knight, J.W. (1992b). Estimating Supply of Eligible Volunteers for Massachusetts Shock Incarceration Program. Unpublished manuscript, Massachusetts Department of Correction, Boston, MA.

APPENDIX A



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

STATE HOUSE • BOSTON 02133

WILLIAM F. WELD
GOVERNOR

ARGEO PAUL CELLUCCI
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

BY HIS EXCELLENCY

WILLIAM F. WELD
GOVERNOR

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 316

ESTABLISHING A JOINT STATE AND COUNTY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE REGARDING THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF BOOT CAMP CORRECTIONAL
FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS WITHIN THE COMMONWEALTH

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, by and through its Department of Correction, and the Sheriffs of the 14 Massachusetts' counties share a common interest in the establishment of effective correctional facilities and programs for youthful offenders which further the goals of minimizing their recidivism and maximizing their rehabilitation and reintegration into the community;

WHEREAS, the Department of Correction and the Sheriffs of Massachusetts agree that the successful establishment, maintenance and operation of Discipline and Rehabilitation Institutes ("Institutes"), also known as Boot Camps, with Regimented Inmate Discipline Programs ("Programs") will further these important goals without subjecting the citizens of the Commonwealth to the increased risk of criminality; and

WHEREAS, the successful establishment of such Institutes and the development of such programs, will require the close cooperation, resources, and shared expertise of the Sheriffs, the Department of Correction, and other agencies within the Executive Branch;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, William F. Weld, Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, by virtue of the authority vested in me as Supreme Executive Magistrate, do hereby order as follows:

Section 1. A joint State and County Advisory Committee on the Establishment of Discipline and Rehabilitation Institutes within the Commonwealth is hereby established. It shall be the responsibility of the Committee to make recommendations to the Governor on the following matters:

- a. The number, siting and operation of boot camp facilities within the Commonwealth;
- b. The proper distribution of operational and program responsibilities between the sheriffs and the Department of Correction;
- c. The appropriate elements of a Regimented Inmate Discipline Program to be utilized at such facilities; and
- d. Criteria for inmate classification and participation in such facilities and programs, an equitable selection process, and appropriate program incentives.

Section 2. It shall also be the responsibility of the Advisory Committee to oversee the establishment of boot camp facilities, the implementation of Regimented Discipline Programs and the evaluation of such facilities and programs. In this regard the Committee shall prepare and submit to the Governor an annual report which:

- a. Sets forth the status of all such facilities and programs in operation, under construction or under consideration;
- b. Identifies and analyzes the per inmate cost and the successes and the failures of the facilities and programs during the year;
- c. Identifies and describes programs and experiences in other jurisdictions which are appropriate models for further study by the Advisory Committee;
- d. Makes recommendations for improvements to current Massachusetts programs and facilities, including expansion; and
- e. Examines and analyzes the recidivism rate for graduates of the Program.

Section 3. The initial composition of the Advisory Committee shall be as follows:

- a. The Secretary of Public Safety who shall serve as chair of the Committee;
- b. Three sheriffs elected by the Sheriff's Association, every two years, one of whom shall serve as co-chair of the Committee;
- c. The Chairman of the Parole Board or his designee from the Parole Board;
- d. The Commissioner of Corrections and an additional designee from the Department of Correction whose responsibilities include boot camp operations or development;
- e. The Commissioner of the Division of Capital and Planning Operations or his designee; and
- f. Such other members possessing other expertise as the Advisory Committee may from time to time recommend to the Governor and as the Governor may thereupon determine to appoint.

Section 4. Recommendations of the Committee shall be those receiving the endorsement of a majority of the Committee. Minority Committee reports or recommendations may accompany any recommendations or reports made by the full Committee.

Section 5. In carrying out its responsibilities, the Committee is to be guided by the following principles and considerations:

a. Participation and Classification

The facilities and programs should be made available through a classification process agreed to by the Advisory Committee, which makes limited categories of state and county inmates eligible who are: under the age of 30; have not been previously incarcerated for more than 90 days in a state, county or federal adult correctional facility; would be eligible for release under current law after serving no more than 18 months of their sentence; and do not have a history of violent criminal activity. In no case shall offenders be permitted to participate if they are serving mandatory sentences for violations of the controlled substance laws or are serving sentences for crimes of violence against the person under any section of chapter 265 of the General Laws, except Section 13A.

b. Nature of the Program

The Program shall provide for a period of incarceration at a boot camp facility of not less than 90 days and shall at a minimum include an intensive regimen of work, exercise, military-type discipline, basic education and substance abuse treatment. The Program should also include a post boot camp component in order to minimize recidivism and maximize reintegration and supervision.

c. Operation

The Committee is encouraged to develop alternative operational models - including models structured as primarily managed and run with Department of Correction resources, those primarily managed and run with the resources of the Sheriffs' Departments and those run jointly by both departments. Further, the Committee is encouraged and directed to actively pursue in cooperation with the Division of Capital Planning and Operations, the siting of and funding for at least two boot camp facilities within the Commonwealth during the next two years.

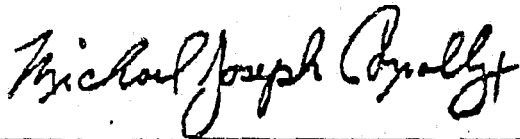
d. Existing Laws and Regulations

In order to promote the timely operation of boot camp facilities and Regimented Discipline Programs on a trial or pilot basis, the Committee should limit its initial recommendations so that they can be implemented within existing executive authority and without need to resort to significant legislative action. However, the Committee is also encouraged to recommend to the Governor legislative action which will ensure the long-term success and expansion of the facilities and their programs.

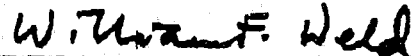
Section 6. It is the Governor's intention that this Advisory Committee act as the focal point for the development, improvement and expansion of boot camp facilities and Regimented Discipline Programs in the Commonwealth. It is further the intention of the Governor to exercise his authority and the authority of the Executive Branch over matters within the purview of the Advisory Committee consistently with the recommendations of that Committee, and not to proceed with an expansion of such facilities or programs without first seeking and considering its advice.

Section 7. The Committee shall meet at least monthly during its initial year, at a time and place to be set by the Chair. The Committee shall file an initial report as to its work with the Governor, on or before January 15, 1992 and at least annually thereafter.

Given at the Executive Chamber in Boston this 24th day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and ninety-one.



Michael Joseph Connolly
Secretary of the Commonwealth



William F. Weld, Governor
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

GOD SAVE THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS



Table 1: Proportion of Inmates Saying Whether They Would Volunteer for Boot Camp

Facility	% Yes	% No	# No Response	# Inmates Surveyed
Barnstable*	93.8	6.3	3	83
Bristol**	90.6	9.4	6	155
Plymouth***	84.2	15.8	2	135
Total	88.4	11.6	11	373

* We estimate that 20% of the inmates at Barnstable declined to participate in the survey.

** We estimate a refusal rate of about 10% at Bristol.

*** We estimate a refusal rate of less than 5% at Plymouth.

Table 2: Mean* Inmate Assessment of Potential Boot Camp Features and Incentives by Institution.

<u>Feature or Incentive</u>	Mean			
	Barnstable	Bristol	Plymouth	Combined
Required daily exercises	7.4	7.0	7.5	7.3
Back to family faster	8.6	8.8	8.6	8.7
1.5 hours of school daily	7.9	7.4	7.7	7.6
Guaranteed parole	8.4	8.7	8.5	8.6
Alcohol and drug programs	7.3	7.5	7.3	7.4
20 extra days good time	8.6	8.4	8.2	8.4
Minimum security	8.3	8.5	8.3	8.4
No Smoking**	5.7	3.4	3.5	4.0
Record of incarceration erased	8.5	8.7	8.6	8.6
Community work details	8.5	8.5	8.3	8.4
Self-improvement programs	8.5	8.2	8.5	8.4

* Average response on ten point scale, with 1 meaning feature or incentive would make the boot camp "no better" and 10 meaning "much better."

** The distribution of responses to the question about the "no-smoking" feature of the boot camp was bimodal. At Bristol, for example, of the 155 inmates surveyed 91 marked the "0" point on the scale and 34 marked "9."

NIA

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Table 3. Comparing Assessments of Boot Camp Features and Incentives of Inmates Saying They Would Volunteer to Those Saying They Would Not

	Would Volunteer	Would Not Volunteer	
	mean ¹ (n)	mean (n)	difference
<u>Feature or Incentive:</u>			
Must do exercises every day.	7.6 (319)	5.6 (41)	2.0**
Get back to family faster.	8.8 (319)	8.2 (42)	.2**
Must go to 1-1/2 hours of school every day.	7.7 (316)	6.6 (42)	1.1**
Guaranteed parole after completing the program.	8.7 (318)	7.5 (42)	1.2**
Go to alcohol or drug programs.	7.4 (316)	6.9 (42)	.5
Earn 20 extra days of good time off sentence.	8.4 (320)	7.9 (41)	.5*
Be in a minimum security setting.	8.5 (320)	7.7 (42)	.8**
No smoking allowed for inmates and staff.	4.2 (306)	3.0 (41)	1.2
Record of incarceration would be erased after completing the program.	8.7 (306)	8.0 (40)	.7**
Go into community for work details.	8.5 (306)	8.0 (40)	.5**
Self-improvement programs.	8.4 (306)	7.9 (39)	.5*

* Difference statistically significant at $p \leq .01$.

** Difference statistically significant at $p \leq .001$.

1 Average response on ten point scale, with 1 meaning feature or incentive would make the boot camp "no better" and 10 meaning "much better."

Table 4. Comparing Characteristics of Inmates Saying They Would Volunteer to Those Saying They Would Not

	Would Volunteer	Would Not Volunteer	Difference
<u>Inmate Characteristic:</u>			
Mean number of Weekly visits.	1.5 (306)	1.2 (39)	.2
Mean number of times incarcerated.	1.9 (302)	3.0 (35)	1.1**
Mean age.	28.2 (306)	29.4 (38)	.8
% with previous military basic training.	20.5 (63)	20.0 (8)	.5
% saying they have a drug or alcohol problem.	62.3 (192)	57.9 (22)	4.4

** Difference statistically significant at $p \leq .001$.