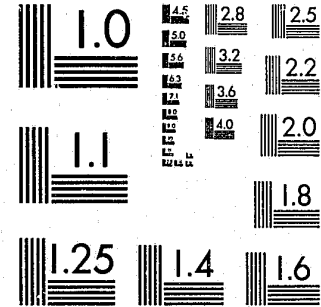


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Role of the Community College in Continuing Education for the Correctional Inmate

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MOST community colleges, indeed most institutions of higher education, create special programs to meet the needs of varied segments of the population. Summaries of special programs which have been created to meet the special needs of special students abound in the literature.¹ Each of these studies directs attention to what the college does for the special group. The purpose of this article is to describe a cir-

cumstance which offers a serious challenge to the colleges and universities of our Nation.²

In a period of international awareness of the problems of deprived people, and especially in the United States where it has been possible to develop opportunities for these groups, there has been consideration of the potential intellectual capabilities of these people. Educational programs have been developed from the elementary grades through college for the culturally deprived, gifted student. Society must also concern itself with another deprived minority, the parolee and prison inmate whose educational opportunities were prematurely curtailed.³

¹Gagnon, Gregory O., "Prison Education Network Impacts Total Program," *Community and Junior College Journal*, (Oct. 1977), pp. 26-28.

²McCabe, Patrick M., and Brian Driscoll, "College Admission Opportunities and the Public Offender," American Association of College Admission Counselors, (San Francisco: 9/30/71), mimeograph.

³Murphy, Melvin L., and Maribeth Murphy, "College as a Parole Plan," *FEDERAL PROBATION*, March 1971, pp. 45-48.

Correctional education and training has a special mission of upgrading the capacity of people found at varying points in the criminal justice system to cope more effectively, in legal and socially acceptable ways, with life's economic and social requirements. Some practitioners in the criminal justice field define this mission narrowly. To them, education and training means primarily achievement of a high school diploma or a General Education Development Certificate and the acquisition of entry-level job skills. Others increasingly define correctional education more broadly. This richer definition includes not only academic and career education, but also instruction and skills which stimulate and facilitate involvement in social, economic and cultural pursuits and the ability to seek entry into and take advantage of acceptable opportunity systems.⁴

Stated Problems

The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, in the *Challenge of Crime in a Free Society* (1967), emphasized that while imprisonment may not effectively rehabilitate nor deter, it may possess destructive potential: "life in many institutions is at best barren and futile, at worst unspeakably brutal and degrading . . . the conditions in which inmates live are the poorest preparation for their successful re-entry into society and often merely reinforce in them a pattern of manipulation and destructiveness." Based on comments like these and society's social conscience and the innate desire to be humane, various criminal justice agencies have initiated what is called "alternatives to incarceration."⁵

The National Task Force on Higher Education and Criminal Justice, in its "What Are the Alternatives to Incarceration," listed 16 different alternatives which include study release and other "forms of respites from being locked up and ways to get people out early as well as alternatives in the pure sense."⁶

These alternatives need some stable ground on which they can be compared. Given the belief traditional institutions are not doing the job of rehabilitating offenders, a less costly, less personally damaging alternative should be utilized,

⁴McCollum, Sylvia G., "New Designs for Correctional Education and Training Programs," *FEDERAL PROBATION* (June 1973), pp. 6-11.
⁵Nelson, Carl W., "Cost Benefit Analysis and Alternatives to Incarceration," *FEDERAL PROBATION*, (Dec. 1975), pp. 45-50.

⁶*Ibid.*
⁷McCollum, Sylvia G., "What Works," *FEDERAL PROBATION*, (June 1977), pp. 32-35.
⁸Adams, Stuart, "Higher Learning Behind Bars," *Change*, Vol. 5, No. 9 (Nov. 1975).

⁹*Ibid.*
¹⁰Herron, Rex D., John T. Muir and Dorsey Williams, "National Survey of Post-Secondary Education Programs for Incarcerated Offenders," National Council on Crime and Delinquency, (Hackensack, New Jersey: July 1973).

whenever it is at least as effective as prison.

However, each innovative and training program, which has been tried to make such a connection has been unable to do so. Some researchers and practitioners tried to justify the continuation of college-level (Newgate) programs supported by the Office of Economic Opportunity by alleging an impact in recidivism. The Marshal, Kaplan, Gans, and Kahn (1973) evaluation showed there was no such connection. Similarly, Manpower Development and Training Administration (MDTA) tried to justify their existence on recidivism impact. ABT Associates (1971) estimated that 5 percent fewer prisoners recidivated if they had benefit of MDTA training in prison. While some people regarded this 5 percent as significant, others did not.⁷

Despite these and similar findings, common sense prevails and few, if any, argue that we discontinue or even curtail education and training programs for prisoners. Quite the contrary, there is increasing pressure from all quarters for more varied and relevant programs. Any alternative that reduces cost and increases benefits while not adding public risk would certainly seem worthy of consideration and implementation.

History of Programs

Education programs in prison are not a new phenomenon. Adams (1973) pointed out that in 1876 Elmira Reformatory opened in New York with both a vocational training program and a "school of letters," and by the end of the 19th century both kinds of programs were common in the prisons in those states with the most progressive attitudes toward incarceration and rehabilitation.⁸

Many of the earliest programs were designed to provide high school diplomas or to prepare inmates to take the GED exam. By the 1950's, these programs produced numbers of inmates who wanted to continue their education via access to college-level courses. Concurrently, colleges and universities located near prisons began to compete with the correspondence schools by providing instructors who went into the prison and taught classes directly to the inmates.⁹

During the 1960's, the number of programs offered inside prisons by colleges and universities increased rapidly.¹⁰ With academic programs has come a growth in programs designed to provide occupational training. Although colleges are often hampered in their efforts to provide these courses to inmates inside prison because of the lack of money to set up shops and labs, participating colleges and prison administrators have worked

together to overcome these difficulties.¹¹ Colleges and universities are not alone in their efforts to educate inmates; corporations and unions have also become involved in these efforts.¹²

Study Release

The programs noted above have been primarily offered within the prisons. The growth of programs which allow inmates to attend classes on campus through study release has been much slower. The trend has been increasing since 1965; but, because the availability of study release for institution residents is determined by both state legislation and administrative discretion, the growth has been slow.¹³

Study release programs can be important in overcoming some of the problems inherent in higher education programs operated within prisons and, indeed, those problems inherent within the concept of imprisonment itself.

One problem overcome through use of study release is the lack of laboratory space which often circumscribes or prevents the inclusion of inmate courses in the physical sciences. While some of the higher education institutions which offer in-house programs have undertaken to raise funds to equip labs inside the prison, it is more economical for inmates to attend classes in existing and equipped laboratories on campus. Another problem is that of inmate access to adequate libraries. Use of the college library makes more sense than trying to augment the prison library. Finally, by allowing the inmates to study on campus means they are exposed to a much broader curriculum, particularly classes dealing with social education. Social education, as defined here, is an organized effort to furnish factual information to the individual in areas of social and emotional interaction to correct faulty attitudes.¹⁴

Study release provides the inmate contact with other students in the normal academic setting; this can be an important step in successful reintegration.¹⁵

Potential Enrollment

There is little data on the number of prisoners who continue their education upon release from

prison. This is unfortunate considering the amount of time and money expended by state, local, and Federal governments in providing academic and vocational programming for the inmate.

McCollum (1975) estimated that the daily prison population in the United States is 400,000. Of this number, approximately 150,000 are confined in local and county jails serving short sentences which make higher education programs difficult. There remain 250,000 inmates, 23,000 plus in Federal prisons and the rest in state penal institutions. While no precise figures exist on the number of inmates involved in higher education programs, surveys indicate that the number ranges between 1 and 5 percent.¹⁶

American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) Survey

In 1976, AACJC conducted an extensive survey on the number of correctional institutions offering postsecondary education programs, the number of inmates served, and the number of courses offered. The resultant Directory of Offender Programs includes information secured from state and Federal correctional education administrators but, for the most part, the information was collected directly from the postsecondary institutions operating the programs.¹⁷

Many of the colleges and universities surveyed include study release opportunities as part of their offender programs, but most of them reported fewer than 10 such students on their campuses. The survey did describe 13 study release programs, several of which were quite ambitious and involved significant numbers of offenders.¹⁸

Of particular interest to this writer was the program description listed for Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona. "The college operates an ex-offender program which served 282 people from Fall 1974 through July 1, 1975. The program has helped offenders in setting up parole plans and works to assist them upon their release. The program provides assistance with admission, employment, housing, food and other personal needs. Counseling is offered. Many of the services offered are made available to family members of persons still incarcerated."¹⁹

The ongoing program at Pima College is clearly the prototype of what this writer views as necessary to combat the current fatal flaw in most correctional education programs, that is, the assumption that people who happen to share a common address—a prison—share education aptitudes, interests and needs which can be served by programs which are limited to high school

¹¹Feldman, Sylvia, "Trends in Offender Vocational and Education Programs: A Literature Search with Program Development Guidelines," American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (Washington: 1/30/75).

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Herron, Muir, and Williams, loc. cit.

¹⁴Baker, J. E., "Social Education in a Penitentiary," *FEDERAL PROBATION*, (Dec. 1963), pp. 32-36.

¹⁵Emmert, Ellen B., "Offender Assistance Programs Operated by Post-Secondary Institutions of Education," report developed for American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (Washington: 1976), p. 3.

¹⁶McCollum, Sylvia G., "College for Prisoners," *Learner-Centered Reform*, ed. Dyckman W. Vermilye, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975).

¹⁷Emmert, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*

equivalency courses, skill training in four or five vocational areas, generally of low employability, and a few, often meaningless, college-level courses.²⁰

Suggested Alternatives: Use of Community Colleges

One obvious alternative is to take correctional education out of the institution and separate it sequentially from the confinement process. Rather, structure a system within which prisoners would be provided with *individual vouchers guaranteeing them access to community educational services upon completion of a specified time period and upon meeting specified standards of institutional conduct*. Some critics will react to this concept by insisting that it is unrealistic and creates management problems for prison administrators; or, it will discriminate against many "good people" who have never broken the law yet do not have corresponding opportunities.²¹ Cost-effective considerations support the educational voucher system. It already costs more per year to keep persons in prison than it would to provide them with realistic education and training opportunities. It is not uncommon for one offender alone to cost society over \$100,000 in obvious costs and an incalculable amount in hidden costs over the span of his/her prison career.²²

The nationwide chain of approximately 1,200 public and private community colleges offers a viable resource for relocating and redirecting correctional education efforts. Although few are currently programmed to specifically deal with public offenders, it is unquestionable that their inherent capabilities for such work are perhaps the greatest of all existing institutions.²³ Rehabilitation and reintegration of the offender involves much more than a one-pronged, problem-solving approach. The offender must be assisted in handling a variety of educational, emotional, and social problems. Some progress can be made prior to community

release, but without the continuity of effective release programming, the battle is lost.

Mensel (1972) has suggested that community colleges serve as diagnostic testing centers, developers of program plans for individual offenders, and effective referral agents to other community counseling, occupational, or educational institutions.²⁴ The American Association of Junior and Community Colleges previously has indicated an interest in seeking out jurisdictions which might be willing to use community colleges as precommitment diversionary centers. These colleges would serve as facilitators in the delivery of any services necessary to divert the first-time offender from commitment to a correctional institution.

Obviously, implementation will depend not only on acceptance of professionals in the criminal justice field and community and junior college systems, but also on acceptance of parents, students, inmates and the public at large.²⁵

Conclusion

Despite many impediments, the time may be right to make significant changes in our correctional education system. Traditional approaches can be replaced at no greater cost or community risk. Certainly the state of the art of education is such that professional educators can structure models, similar to those used to offer hope to other groups of students, for those students found in the prison population.

The unanswered question is whether or not the public and its elected officials are ready to encourage correctional administrators and educators to forge ahead. Community colleges and criminal justice agencies working together can provide the type of continuous, comprehensive treatment and supportive community programs which have, to date, been missing in the field of alternative offender reintegration. We can sit idly by while a growing number of bright, highly motivated individuals fester in their hatred of the system or jointly tap the potential reservoir of talent locked behind the walls.

Chief Justice Warren E. Burger said it all in his 1981 Annual Report to the American Bar Association: "... how much chance do you think there is of changing or rehabilitating a person who is encouraged to keep up years of constant warfare with society?"²⁶

²⁰James R. Mahoney, Project Director, Energy Communications Center, AACJC, Washington, D.C. reports a followup on this study was not attempted due to a cut-back in research funds. This fiscal shortfall also explains why the literature reflects little work in this area after 1976. Current status of listed program unknown.

²¹McCollum, Sylvia G., "New Designs . . ."

²²Ibid.

²³McCabe, Patrick M., and Robert C. Atchley, "A New Approach to the Treatment of Offenders," *Sociological Focus*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (Winter 1968), pp. 41-49.

²⁴Mensel, Frank R., "Preliminary Proposal: College Probations to Rehabilitate Youth Under Criminal Sentences," American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (Washington: 1972).

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Burger, Warren E., Chief Justice, 1981 Annual Report: American Bar Association, reported in: *Monday Morning Highlights*, U.S. Bureau of Prisons, (Washington: 2/16/81).

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